

Minutes
Summit Neighborhood Association
Board of Directors Meeting
June 17, 2019

Attendance: Zachary Barnes, Anneliese Greenier, Ethan Gyles, Christopher Lowe, Torin Mathieu, Britt Page, Read Porter, Laura Ramsey, Tom Schmeling, Sharon Lee Waldman

Guests: Rui David from the Hope Street Farmer's Market Association; Monica Anderson, Miriam/Lifespan Community Liaison, and John Stahback from VHB; members Beth Chaplin, Grant Dulgarian, Douglas Itkin, Barbara Slater, Margie Smith, Paul Smith, Dean Weinberg, and a number of others who attended the end of the meeting to hear from Councilor LaFortune

Additions to agenda: Rui David from the Hope Street Farmer's Market Association

May minutes: Approved

Rui David, Hope Street Farmer's Market Association

- This is the 29th year of the farmer's market at Lippitt Park
- Saturdays 9am-1pm, May 4-October 26
- Wednesdays 3-6pm, June 26-Sept 11 (only for 12 weeks, because Wednesdays are much slower)

Monica Anderson, Miriam/Lifespan Community Liaison:

- Memorial Hospital closed 18 months ago and has affected Miriam Hospital; number of patients has raised dramatically, creating staff pressure and stress. The ER is especially busy, seeing patients with a much higher level for social need; Miriam will see patients regardless of whether they can pay, and the majority of patients are not paying the full price of their care. There has been an uptick in complaints about parking.
- Previous parking and transportation plans are available if anyone wants to see them.
- John Stahback of VHB, who conducted the parking and transportation study, reported that:
 - 1272 off-street parking spots are available to employees, 179 for visitors. There is enough parking to accommodate the needs of the hospital, but Miriam needs to better direct visitors to available parking (improvement in signage recommended); need to better direct employees to the parking lot leased down by the Ocean State Job Lot (could expand app; need a direct shuttle from lot to hospital).
 - There are a variety of intersections with/without stop signs; providing more stop signs and enforcement of no-parking at intersections is recommended; all intersections operating at an acceptable level of use (i.e., no excessive delays getting through the intersections).
 - There is some utilization of on-street parking on Summit and some side streets.
 - The valet service is free but not everyone knows that. Miriam needs improved communication that it is free to use so that the service will be used more which will ease some parking concerns.
- Monica wants to hire an employee to work on enforcement of the employee parking policy. Every employee has an assigned parking lot, employees parking on street will get a Miriam

parking ticket (non-employees can disregard any mistakenly-issued tickets), employees who get two tickets have to see Monica and then are fired for the third ticket (which is unusual).

- Anneliese pointed out that there used to be many more parking issues before Monica started enforcing the employee parking policy
- There was a recent noise complaint from a neighbor, which prompted a message to all employees that they should be careful to lower their noise levels when entering the parking lot.
- Question posed about whether employees are using the Jump Bikes (bikeshare program) – Monica responded that the bikeshare program is very popular throughout Providence (we are 3rd out of about 66 cities) but she does not have a way of knowing how many Miriam employees are using them. There were 300 memberships given out to Miriam employees.
- Ethan asked a question about how to handle the increased demand at the hospital. Monica responded that there are no plans for new infrastructure (Lifespan is currently behind budget, no money to build, unclear where anything would be built because it would be really hard to build consensus on where infrastructure would go).
- Event this Friday from 12pm-1pm, Community Health Needs Assessment, lunch provided, aim is to discuss what our health concerns are in Rhode Island (not for neighborhood relations), will share some community health data. They have been hearing a lot of concerns about the effects of poverty on health (e.g., lack of access to transportation and healthy food); this will be the last meeting of this kind for about 3 years.

Treasurer's Report: \$500 in memberships this month; spent \$175 on the Hope Street Block Party booth (table fee of \$75 plus art supplies)

Program & Committee Reports:

Community Garden Committee: Read reported that some of the blueberry bushes planted at the community work day last month are actually cranberry bushes (surprise!).

Membership Committee/Bylaws: Tom reported that we have about 105 members now. A number of memberships are scheduled to expire in July.

New Business:

- a. New neighbor welcome packet – Providence Pilates Center has offered to contribute.
- b. Pamphlet refresh – Ethan asked for volunteers to contact him about helping to update the SNA pamphlets.
- c. Speaker series for the neighborhood – Greg G., Gayle G., and Paul S. have expressed interest in leading events in a speaker series. Ethan asked if someone would step forward to be the facilitator of this series. No one present volunteered, so Ethan said we could recruit an SNA member beyond the board to organize the speaker series.

Separate from this speaker series, Chris offered to organize something about education for parents with school-aged children and suggested that we could collaborate with other neighborhood associations. Sherry mentioned that she attended a roundtable discussion when her kids were younger to hear other parents' perspectives on the Providence school system. Read asked if there is any information that could be put on the website for reference. A guest mentioned there have been similar events at Rochambeau library and so the Friends of Rochambeau might be helpful for collaboration, as well as library at Fox Point. Chris pointed out

that there is no aggregation of events/information about education so maybe we should be a hub of info. Ethan suggested that folks interested in education issues should get together to figure out what we want to do. Dean suggested getting PTO presidents on a panel in addition to some experienced parents. Dean said there used to be an education subcommittee of SNA, which could be re-instituted. A guest mentioned that the Kidoinfo website is a good source for promoting events in Providence.

Ongoing Business:

- a. The Avenue Concept public art planning update: Britt reported that Yarrow did not believe that the bubbler was a good target for a public art project. Britt sent all requested info about SNA and the neighborhood to the Avenue Concept, and we are waiting to see what they say next.
The Hope Street Block Party was a big success in getting neighbors excited about art. People did lots of painting and it was arranged into a quilt. About 30 attendees filled out a survey regarding interest in public art; everyone wants to see more public art, and over 2/3rds of respondents said they would like to help contribute to a public art project in the neighborhood.
Torin asked if we can solicit grants from neighborhood businesses (e.g., CVS) to see if they would put a mural on their building. Britt suggested that we wait another month to see what the Avenue Concept says about the information we sent them, and then we can start approaching businesses.
- b. Dean reported that the “Keep Summit Beautiful” signs will go up on July 9, and he will move out of state if it doesn’t happen.
- c. Drinking fountain project – Ethan and Britt talked to Parks Dept manager handling the project and made sure they knew where the fountain should be placed. RFP will go out in June, June/July construction still possible.
- d. Read reported on the Great Streets initiative – the city has a website where you can make comments on a map about where you want to see improvements; encourages everyone to put that feedback out there.

Discussion of New Residential Property Tax Proposal

City Councilor Nirva LaFortune attended the meeting to discuss the proposed changes to Providence property taxes. Councilman Seth Yurdin and State Rep Rebecca Kislak also attended. Nirva reported that the council has not yet received any formal documentation of a proposal; it hasn’t even been discussed in the Finance Committee. All information is based on a press release that listed some rates but did not include a full proposal. A lot of misinformation has been floating around.

Mayor Elorza has proposed a 15.35 per 1000 rate for owner-occupied and 24.56 for non-owner-occupied, both of which are a decrease to the current rate; commercial rates would remain the same. The Council leadership has proposed a new tax model that would be 24.56 per 1000, with a homestead exemption of 40% for the first 350,000, and any amount assessed above 350,000 would get a 28% reduction for the homestead exemption.

Councilor LaFortune expressed concern that the Council leadership is pushing an entirely new tax structure two weeks before the end of the fiscal year, without any vetting, public hearings, or even a full rationale for why these rates were chosen. Some may think that this is a progressive tax structure, but the problem is that some people have lived in their houses a long time and their income cannot keep up with the rise in property values. Councilor LaFortune wants to force a public hearing in order to do due diligence and have proper vetting because we need a transparent approach to making such an

important policy. The city needs more revenue but this is not the way to do it. One fear is that raising taxes will drive people out of the community, which will eventually lower home values. There is also concern about a lawsuit liability because it is not clear whether this proposed tax structure is legal.

There has to be enabling legislation from the state to move these ideas forward, and a state representative is supposedly drafting that now. Representative Kislak said that the state budget will be voted on Friday, which signals that the session will be closing very soon. The enabling legislation could be proposed as early as Wednesday and should come before the Municipal Government Committee that Kislak is on. It is unusual to have a proposal that the committee votes on that the city has yet to discuss and vet. It is also possible that the proposal will go before a different committee instead. Representative Kislak said that one complication for Providence's budget is that there is a 4% cap on the total levy for the whole city; the cap comes from the state and does not account for any growth.

The City Council Finance Committee is meeting Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of this week, and the chairman has said that the public can come and voice their concerns. Because it's not a public hearing, the chairman does not necessarily have to allow anyone to speak, but with enough attendance they may allow some comments from the public.

A recommendation was made from a guest (who is a former member of the Raimondo administration) to write letters to the editor at the ProJo about concerns about the lack of transparency, as this is a good way to communicate to folks at the state house, especially those from outside of Providence.

Councilman Yurdin said that some rate must be passed by the council; we will not continue with the current rates, which are higher than the proposed rates from the mayor or council leadership.

Ethan will post Nirva's email newsletter with information about this issue on the SNA website – summitneighbors.org.

Next meeting is July 15.