

ODWNA Neighborhood Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, November 16, 2016

Place: Winchell Elementary Library

Board Members:

Present: Peter Kushner, President; Chris Shook, Vice President; Diana Morton-Thompson, Treasurer; Sandy Bolstad, Secretary; Barb Ross, Paul Scott, Katherine Shook



- I. Call to Order: Peter Kushner, 7:00 pm
 - BTR2 is moving forward. The development received a \$2.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration
 - Last pick up for leaves is coming up after Thanksgiving
 - EPA came up with a remedy for the Allied Paper Site, includes consolidation and cap, a link with details is on our website.
 - Historic Preservation Committee is seeking a Commissioner to begin in 2017. Details are on the City's website
 - Foundation for Excellence proposal: the City created a Memo of Understanding regarding the donation of \$70 million over the next 3 years. \$30 million of this will be for aspirational projects determined by Imagine Kalamazoo.
 - Upcoming speakers: KIA - January and Boatyard Brewery – February
- II. Treasurer's Report: Balance of ~\$2000. If you have ideas on things you want us to see using that money for, let us know.
 - Oakwood Neighborhood is having a food donation concert on December 17 at 6 pm, called Bell, Book and Conto. Admission cost is 2+ non-perishable food items. They are also doing Tai Chi lessons in the winter.
 - Diana also reported that Imagine Kalamazoo and the ODWNA is hosting an open house Workshop in the Winchell Elementary cafeteria at on Dec. 7 from 5:30 – 8:30 to solicit our input for the 2025 Master Plan. 3 other neighborhoods also invited, please come and bring your ideas on what Kalamazoo should do to improve – especially in relation to our neighborhood.
- III. Neighborhood Business: It was brought up about blight issues in the neighborhood again and suggested that the board take the responsibility of reporting neighbors with blight issues (not taking trash can back from curb, run-down trailers in driveways, un-mowed lawns, etc.) to the City. The board respectfully declined. We are volunteers, and do not have the time, money or resources to police/enforce/report possible ordinance violations. We are not an HOA. We have provided City links and phone numbers on our website so one can easily find the right place to report issues; anonymously if desired. The more often something is reported, the more likely the City will send someone to investigate and see if something can be done about the issue.

Notes from our Speaker:

Guest Speaker: John Hilgart

Topic: Photo History – Michigan Asylum for the Insane on Oakland Drive

- John gave a fascinating presentation that was well-attended and included many photos. These notes are a rather random collection of the bits and pieces of information I recorded from his presentation. I found a website that I think is his that includes some of the pictures he shared with us:
www.kalamazoostatehospital.posthave.com
- Construction of the Michigan Asylum for the Insane began in 1854. The Asylum opened in 1859, and the first planned construction was completed in 1869. One of the original buildings was 700 feet long.
- Some of the original plans were built according to the Kirkbride Plan; Kirkbride was a Superintendent who wrote a book. The plan had architectural plans, which included the Superintendent living on the top floor of the Administration Building, and visiting every patient every day to see how they were doing. Fresh air was considered of the utmost importance, so every room had a window to promote cross breezes throughout each building.
- The names have changed over the years, reflecting less state involvement and more local. One of the continuous struggles has always been underfunding. The current facility is very much scaled down from what used to exist.
- Other experts in the room include Mark Hoffman who has presented to us previously regarding Colony Farm, and Steven Schrier who works there and has for years, and whose father was a Superintendent there for years (so he pretty much grew up there). Previous to the 1950's, if you worked at the Asylum, you were required to live there as well.
- Across the street from what is now the main facility, where the police station is and north, in the 1930's there used to be a baseball field and a farm that was operated by the residents.

- Oakland Drive used to be called Asylum Drive.
- Benjamin was one of the first streets in our neighborhood, which is why it meanders like it does.
- A railroad ran right through the Asylum.
- A picture from 1910 showed that the Asylum was still on the outskirts of town, but was essentially its own city. It was a beautiful place with 2 cupolas, a smokestack and the water tower. Interior pictures from this period and before were equally impressive, showing 13 foot ceilings, large windows in every room, nice furniture, lighting and rugs. There were cars in the basement that ran on tracks all through the building basements to move coal to the heaters and to move food to the dumbwaiters that took it up to the patients. In 1892, a greenhouse existed, also beautiful. The water tower was built in 1895-1896 in response to fire safety concerns. During the Burdick Hotel Fire of 1909, they managed to connect it to the city water supply to help put out that fire. There was also a chapel, but it was torn down in 1838-1839 so that they could build buildings surrounding the water tower. Later, they generated their own steam, and then electricity.
- In the 1890's, the expansion included the cottage plans, where the residents stayed in cottages that were more like homes, some of which were around Asylum Lake. These buildings were cheaper and faster to build, and housed about 40 to 60 people per building.
- Clyde and Elsie Siggins worked at the Asylum in early years, and had a hobby of taking photographs; many of the early photographs that exist are thanks to them.
- Part of the original "Architectural Cure" involved removing the afflicted from the site of their current misery. Give them asylum that included fresh air, shelter, food, recreational activities, as well as occupational therapy, which was a budgetary necessity so the hospital could be more self-sustaining. They were very successful at this, at one point a public butcher shop operated by the residents existed. They also sold vegetables, and were outproducing the commercial farms. They also had an ice house, and originally the ice came from Asylum Lake. Green space was also a big focus.
- An interesting question revolves around the definition of "who is insane?" In the beginning, those whose families could not care for them were considered insane.
- In 1914, there was a picture that showed autos and trolley cars on Asylum Drive.
- In the 1910-1920's era, it was determined that windows were not enough, that people were still spending too much time indoors, and they started building lots of porches off of the rooms (both patient rooms and social rooms). Over the years, buildings were often being built and torn down – so many, it is difficult to know if we even have record of them all.
- In 1938 – 1948, the Administration Building and Quadrangle were built with WPA funding. This was more of a hospital facility.
- In 1939, the TB Hospital was built. In the 1960's, the TB Hospital was re-purposed as a children's hospital.
- In the 1940's, new buildings were built to house laundry and kitchen facilities.
- During and after the wars, funding became more difficult, and the "Kalamazoo State Hospital" began a period of decline.
- By 1953, there were 3,500 patients.
- Overpopulation was always an issue, as was funding. But with the state of decline after the wars, accompanied by the advent of pharmaceuticals and the move for deinstitutionalization, the State Hospital started to empty.
- In the 1950's, the state was sued over the farming by an agricultural company. They lost this battle and all farming had to be stopped. Before that, Colony Farms had been outproducing the commercial farms.
- In the 1960's, Dr. Schrier admitted a TV employee to record her thoughts as a patient. Once she was no longer a patient, she came back with Dr. Schrier's permission and brought a TV Crew and they did an expose showing the horrific conditions that had come to be due to underfunding and overcrowding.
- In the 1980's under Reagan, defunding was fairly well complete.
- In 1987, 2 buildings were torn down: Edwards and Fletcher.
- Noble Lodge was the last building torn down – it had been built to house staff.
- There are still tunnels – they were mostly used for utilities, such as steam pipes, water pipes, etc. They went all the way to Stadium Drive. Fraternities used to try to go in them at Stadium Drive and see if they could get all the way to the Main Campus of the hospital.
- Today there are about 160 patients. Most of those are self-admitted, some are court patients, and there are patients that are from the East side of the state where there is an overflow from the court system.

IV. **Adjournment:** 8:30 pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Sandy Bolstad, ODWNA Secretary