

## ODWNA Neighborhood Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2013

**Place:** Winchell Elementary Library

### **Board Members:**

**Present:** Peter Kushner, President; Chris Shook, Vice President; Diana Morton-Thompson, Treasurer, Sandy Bolstad, Secretary; Becky Mutsaers, Tom Keyser, Barb Ross

**Absent:** Kathy Shook



### I. **Call to Order:** Peter Kushner, 7:05 pm

- Welcome to the first meeting of the school year; introduction of the board, how to contact us.
- Thank you to our Business Sponsors, recognition of our newest business sponsors.
  - New Business sponsors include: Greenleaf Realty, Stadium Motors, True Value Hardware, Dan Wood Co.
  - Advertising open to all neighborhood businesses/non-profits, who either live in the neighborhood or have a business in the neighborhood. Details on our website.
- Saturday, Sept. 21<sup>st</sup> is the Neighborhood Picnic at the church on Winchell from 5:00 – 7:00pm, all are welcome, and it is free. The church throws this each year to foster fellowship within the neighborhood. The school also participates.

### II. **Treasurer's Report**

- Fiscal year starts now, so if you are a dues paying member, it is likely time to pay your dues unless you are already paid for multiple years. If you are unsure if yours are now due, please contact Diana or email the board or contact via the website and we will check and let you know.
- What the dues pay for:
  - Postcards (mailing, printing, postage) to announce neighborhood meeting dates and speakers
  - Signs for events such as the Car Show
  - Ad for the Neighborhood Garage Sale that occurs each year in the spring/summer
  - Email marketing software
  - Website hosting/domain name
- What the dues do not pay for:
  - The service of the board members – we are all volunteers.
  - Use of the Winchell Elementary property (free to us).
  - Speakers (provide their services as a public service).

### III. **Secretary's Report**

- Attendance sheet passed around at every meeting, helps us keep track of how many people attended. Also, a spot to add your email address if you want to receive our monthly eNews and are not already receiving it.
- Meeting minutes from every neighborhood meeting are posted to the website.
- Next meeting:
  - Oct. 16: Archaeological History of Winchell (Ice Age and stuff!) with Dr. David Brose

### IV. **Old Business:**

- None

### V. **New Business:**

- None

### VI. **Public Comments:**

- None

## Notes from our Speaker:

**Guest Speakers:** Barb Miller and Bob Cinabro, City Commissioners

**Topic:** State of the City

- The budget is not doing well. Last year they offered an early retirement incentive, and over 200 people took them up on it. Of course, with that, goes a lot of experience. Despite those cuts, for fiscal year 2014 and 2015, still about \$3.5 million short, and there are no pretty solutions.
  - Solutions being looked at include cuts such as:
    - Closing the swimming pool.
    - Cutting all parks and recreation.
    - Closing police stations.
  - Stated they have one of the best retirement programs in the nation. The city, county and WMU all participate.
  - Retirement healthcare costs are killing them.
  - Feel they are efficient, they used to have 1,000 employees and now they have about 600.
  - There will be a change in non-emergency services due to cost-cutting measures.

- In process of searching for a new City Manager.
  - There is a community reception on Sept. 26 so the community can meet the 4 candidates:
    - Rebecca Fleury, Middleville Village Manager
    - Jerome Kisscorni, Kalamazoo assistant city manager and economic development director
    - Jim Ritsema, Battle Creek assistant city manager
    - George Penn, vice president and strategic partner at PDA Consulting Group Inc. of Cerritos, Calif. and executive director of Nuevo South Community Development Corp.
  - For more information regarding City Manager click on the following while connected to the Internet: [http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2013/09/kalamazoo\\_city\\_manager\\_search\\_13.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2013/09/kalamazoo_city_manager_search_13.html)
- Question and Answers not addressed in above information:
  - Q: What percentage of churches, non-profits, WMU, etc. are exempt from taxes?
    - It used to be that 40% of city was exempt, now it is 50%
    - Much of this is driven by law and cannot be prevented
    - They don't want to try to increase business taxes because they don't want additional businesses to leave the city
    - WMU does partially reimburse them for Fire Services, but would not take their archives at the Archive Center so city must still incur a \$45,000 cost for that every year.
  - Q: As with anything, there are only 2 ways to increase the bottom line, you either cut expenses or increase revenue. Is anything being done to increase the tax base? Also, another related question asked, how can we increase revenue shares back from the state?
    - Economic development and jobs will bring revenue, as they bring more taxpayers. City has the desire to lead here, but private enterprises such as SW MI First are more in a financial and staffing expertise position to drive business development in the area.
    - The municipal financing model in Michigan is broken. There are no tools to improve things. Plante Moran analyzed and presented to the city. Kalamazoo City has the highest taxes in the county. We charge less on water and sewer, but are higher on taxes. We need a more cooperative effort county-wide. County cooperation is the way to go to control costs for services, etc., but every city, community and school has its own chiefs that don't want to lose control. All of the other entities basically formed a pact against the city so that everyone could maintain their own state of control.
  - Q: Who takes the ball of coordinating county wide effort?
    - There isn't a clear answer to that but Bob stated he is seeing more progress and "coming together" on this type of effort than he has ever seen in the past, especially between Kalamazoo and Portage.
  - Q: Does the city have a defined contribution plan or a 401K for retirement and health care?
    - Both are still defined, but the contribution rates are lower.
  - Q: Is there still a tax abatement for businesses and if so, is it effective?
    - It is difficult to judge that, but they believe it to be at least somewhat effective and for the current time, it is being continued.
  - Q: Are there plans for other assessments?
    - Other assessments are being discussed, but no matter what the assessment is, there will be at least one audience who objects. It's hard to find an acceptable assessment. A few examples were given, but not collected for these notes.
  - Q: Has the city considered a donation fund? We know there is money in Kalamazoo for certain causes; we have seen evidence of that with the Kalamazoo Promise. Given that, would it be possible, for instance, to have a donation fund where, as an example, churches (since they don't pay taxes), or individuals or businesses could, if they chose to, they could make a donation?
    - This would be difficult to set up and has not been attempted within the city.
  - Q: Is there any plan for property tax reduction?
    - This is being looked at but would require an increase in assessments or taxes elsewhere to offset the losses.
  - Q: How does the city solicit input from citizens?
    - (I did not gather an answer on this.)
  - Citizen comment: Express of dissatisfaction with interaction between the public and the city commission. In both 2007 and 2010, this citizen left an issue in writing with all of the city commissioners regarding PCB's, He does not believe PCBs are toxic, and has even taken this to the federal government, but never gets a response. Believes the PCBs should be removed. He has attended city meetings many times. Citizens are given 4 minutes to speak, and then no one answers. When he left statements in writing, no one replied. He feels as if citizens are stonewalled.
    - It is the city's policy not to reply to public comments, but to just listen for the 4 minutes and take matters "under consideration". That is the forum, the protocol, the way it is constructed to work so that everyone can be heard.
  - Q: How do we get a response from the city? An acknowledgement? We don't want to call the commissioners on every little issue, but when we call the city (service departments, or whatever branch), we just want a response.
    - (No response gathered)
  - Citizen comment: All of the parking lots created on Stadium Drive over the years have interfered with water drainage and it is now an issue.
    - (No response gathered)
  - Citizen comment: Dissatisfaction with the fact that neither the city nor Schell Developers have resolved the problem with water drainage in the Fair Oaks Drive neighborhood that backs up to Stadium Drive. There is water in a river going both directions behind her house. There are bugs that she never witnessed in her life previously.

- She has been experiencing illnesses for 11 years. Implied that illnesses are either related to or compounded by the stress of the situation in her back yard. Has not had any luck getting satisfactory action/results.
- Bob replied that this was an engineering issue and he needs to gather these issues and take them to the right people. He cannot guarantee a result but he can try to get communication going.
  - Citizen comment: Also lives on Fair Oaks Drive and whenever it rains, the water in her backyard rises by 3 feet. It is just a matter of time until the water is in her house, as the problem is getting worse, not better.
    - (Same response – needs to gather information/issues and get communication going)
  - Citizen comment: The storm drains seem to be in obvious need of repair. There is a situation on another street where there are 3 storm drains, and the water rushes both directions and flows right by 2 of them and all the water goes into one. These are 1950 storm drains, and the storms are not 1950 storms. We now have bigger rains, bigger storms, and the drains don't seem able to handle it.
    - (No response)
  - Citizen comment: Took the cap off the drain, took a post hole digger and cleaned out the drain himself. Several of us asked if he was available for hire.
    - (No response – necessary or provided ☺ )
  - Citizen comment: This has a lot to do with priorities. No one wants to invest in infrastructure, but people will pay \$400 per month in cell phone charges for their family to all have cell phones.
    - (No response – necessary or provided )
  - Citizen comment: Retired Dentist, please don't give up on the fluoride in the water, treated patients for years, those with fluoride in water had few cavities, those without had lots of cavities.

VII. **Adjournment:** 8:15 pm

Respectfully Submitted,  
Sandy Bolstad, ODWNA Secretary