

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, January 15, 2025

Place: Third Christian Reformed Church, 2400 Winchell Ave, Kalamazoo, MI

Board Members:

Present: Christopher Shook, President; Stephanie Watkins, Vice President; Rachel Bennett, Treasurer; Christopher Bovid, Secretary; Christine Chadderdon, Barry Olson, Barb Miller; Paul Scott; Diana Morton-Thompson

Excused: Peter Kushner, Past President

In Attendance: Approximately 35 people (includes Board members)



- I. Meeting called to order by Christopher Shook, President; 7:00 PM
 - A. Chris Shook welcomed our attendees
 - B. There is a group of Winchell neighbors that have taken an excerpt from the Neighborhood Plan and formed a "good neighbor award" program.
 - i. Barb Miller, one of the program judges, stated that there are nomination forms in the back of the sanctuary and gave some examples of things neighbors do that might qualify them for a nomination.
 - ii. Nominations will probably be open until February 15.
- II. MINUTES – November 2024 (Christopher Bovid, Secretary)
 - A. Minutes from the November 20, 2024 ODWNA are available to read on the ODWNA website.
 - B. Minutes adopted without objection.
- III. TREASURER'S REPORT - (Rachel Bennett, Treasurer)
 - A. ODWNA Checking Account Balance as of 12/31/2024 was \$3,804.11.
 - B. At the last accounting there are approximately 35 individual (rather than households) members per the new Bylaws adopted by election at May 2024 Annual Meeting.
- IV. BUSINESS ITEMS
 - A. Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 and Miscellaneous ODWNA Projects (Stephanie Watkins, Vice President)
 - I. Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 is the city's 10 year "Master Plan" and the City is setting meetings to establish the goals of the plan and determine outcomes to see that it is something that can be accomplished rather than just a bunch of fun ideas
 - II. The City's book read was on "Happy City" by Charles Montgomery. Now Mr. Montgomery is coming to Kalamazoo to speak on January 31, 2024 and the public is invited. There is also a website for giving feedback on the book.
 - III. The City will be hosting some meetings to discuss the traffic circles in the neighborhood. The City is supposed to be sending out a postcard to everyone regarding the dates. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss how the circles will look like when they are doing. The Board will post the information in the eNews and the ODWNA website and on Facebook when we receive it from the City.
 - B. Grant from Third Christian Reformed Church for ODWNA's Adopt-A-Drain Program. (Stephanie Watkins)
 - I. The ODWNA was awarded a \$1,000 grant from the Third Christian Reformed Church to help fund the association's ongoing Adopt-A-Drain Program. The funds have been received and we thank the church so much for helping to continue this project in our neighborhood!
 - C. Woods Lake Association update (Chris Bovid)
 - I. There is no Woods Lake Winter Golf Classic scheduled by the City Dept. of Parks & Recreation this year (presumably because the ice has been too unpredictable in the past couple of years).
 - II. Mark Kieser, who is working with the WMU Asylum Lake Policy & Management Council and the City of Kalamazoo on a research project to remove road salt from storm water entering Asylum Lake, had contacted the Woods Lake Association and indicated he was going to be attending some meetings regarding grant funding that could possibly expand the road salt removal research work to Woods Lake. He is planning to follow up later this month.
 - A. GUEST SPEAKER – Reid Williams, Now Kalamazoo, Civic & Audience Engagement
Topic: Local Media & Neighborhood Collaboration
 - B. Introduction of Reid Williams by Rachel Bennett, ODWNA Treasurer
 - i. Reporter, editor, photographer
 - ii. 14 awards from AP and CPA
 - iii. Contributed to 5 Pulitzer – honored projects
 - iv. Worked with more than 100 newspapers in US
 - v. Helped start another media company
 - C. Last role with Gannett was leading a software development team, working to determine new ways to present news information
 - D. Thoughts when had daughter (now a 3rd grader at Winchell Elementary)
 - i. In which school should we enroll our child?
 - ii. Which neighborhood should we try to buy a house?
 - iii. How am I supposed to tell the difference between these school board candidates?

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes



- iv. Why is there no sidewalk on my street?
- E. While living here, Reid worked for Gannett. He was in his basement on Treehaven working remotely, managing a team of people spread around the country working from their homes.
- F. 2021 in midst of pandemic, discovered a newsletter called NOW Kalamazoo
 - i. Then they started doing reporting on things other than COVID-19.
 - ii. He tweeted a NOW Kalamazoo article and got a message from Ben Lando. They became fast friends, discussed their families, the lack of information about their local communities, etc.
- G. Soon after he got a severance package from Gannett and went to work for NOW Kalamazoo.
- H. Started out as a strategic advisor.
 - i. Worked on:
 - 1. Email Newsletter
 - 2. Community Calendar
 - 3. Original Reporting
- I. Realized needed more than just those products.
 - i. Even if a quality news organization was established, they were not sure that 5 years later it would exist was because there might not be employees to work for it. There is talent pipeline problem where it is difficult to find people who know how to do what Reid and his colleagues do.
 - ii. Most people his age who used to work in journalism, they have either aged out or found other careers.
 - iii. There are fewer and fewer people who are interested and capable in doing the job of journalism.
 - iv. Needed a bigger solution.
- J. "Our vision is of a more aware, cohesive, and participatory citizenry, celebrating our community, and optimistic in its future.
- K. In this more perfect union we're working toward, all of our neighbors are empowered with the information....
- L. Established The Local Journalism Foundation of Kalamazoo County
- M. Also working on other core programs:
 - i. Civic Engagement
 - ii. Diversifying Media
 - iii. Now Kalamazoo
- N. There are people in neighborhoods in this City that are uncomfortable going into City Hall to try to affect the decisions that impact them.
- O. There are many classes of people who can't really afford to go to college for journalism and the trend is that wealthy and white groups have more resources to pay for college programs and afford to take low paying jobs.
- P. The Local news Crisis:
 - i. About to have 2000 newspapers closed.
 - ii. Average government units covered per reporter in 2000: 3.8
 - iii. Average government units covered per reporter in 2020: 10
 - iv. 1000 U.S newspapers that have lost half or more of staff
 - v. 1,200 "pink slime" websites publishing misinformation
 - vi. 5.5% increase in costs to taxpayers on bonds issued by municipal governments after a local newspaper closes (i.e., the municipality's borrowing costs go up)
 - vii. 10% increase in voter turn-out for communities that have local news
 - viii. 66% percentage of Black Americans who say media coverage of Black people is more negative than other racial and ethnic groups.
 - ix. 73% percentage of news photographs depicting Latinos in low-skilled labor.
- Q. Described journalism's role in the local 'ecosystems'
- R. NOW Kalamazoo:
 - i. 8000+ newsletter subscribers (year over year budget growth)
 - ii. 800+ donors
 - iii. Core team: 6
 - iv. Working this year on initiatives with collaborators
 - v. Expanded government coverage – League of Women Voters, Public Media Network
 - vi. More "civic ice-breakers" – High School government classes
 - vii. Housing & Homelessness project – Kalamazoo Housing Advocates, Gryphon Place
 - viii. Justice system reporting – Kalamazoo Defender, Campaign for Criminal Justice Transparency
 - ix. Visual storytelling community – Arts Community
 - x. FOIA training, audit – Mackinac Center
 - xi. Neighborhood Knows – Eastside and Northside neighborhood associations
 - 1. NOW Kalamazoo has gotten two grants in the last year that will go toward working with the Eastside and Northside neighborhood associations toward developing their own newsletters.
 - 2. Will be used as a pilot.
 - 3. Might be of interest to the ODWNA
 - xii. Is about scaling "in," not "up"
 - 1. Aware
 - 2. Cohesive

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes



3. Participatory
 4. Celebrating
 5. Optimistic
- S. How you can support NowKalamazoo:
- i. Subscribe: nowkalamazoo.org/signup
 - ii. Refer subscribers
 - iii. Invite us to present to your group
 - iv. Make a personal contribution
 - v. Become a corporate sponsor
 - vi. Underwrite a coverage area
 - vii. Recommend us to grant makers
- T. Questions / Answers:
- i. Q: When the Kalamazoo Gazette left, they would have an article with details about the events going on. Subsequently, a critic would write a review of the programs. NowKalamazoo lists events but is more information/coverage about events something NowKalamazoo might be able to expand into doing?
A: Yes! Just last fall NowKalamazoo hired a new editor to explore arts and culture. They have also discussed a weekly email about it and have discussed maybe doing a print version.
 - ii. Q: Question regarding a rooster
A: To be clear, per City Ordinance, the chicken shown is not a rooster. They have lots of entertaining pictures of chickens in places you would not expect.
 - iii. Q: It is difficult to not think that this is an origin story of media generally. How does Reid think NowKalamazoo is going about it in such a way that it won't fall the same way print media has in the past.
A: It is a complex discussion. Some people say Google killed print newspapers but that is not entirely true. If it were an easy fix there would be news organizations springing up everywhere. The challenge is not just that there needs to be a new business model but there needs to be further thinking about what the product is. The model they are developing is a membership business model for delivering information and services. "We're going to do things that don't scale... that a bigger company would never do because while it could work today for \$10,000 people it wouldn't work to have larger numbers. We need to dispossess ourselves of a lot of the mindsets and beliefs that brought the industry to where it is.
 - iv. Q: In that process do you sense you are innovating process or technology that could enable other communities to replicate it at lower cost or more efficiency?
A: That is NowKalamazoo's hope. There is a lot of horizon scanning going on. There are many (600+) new other local nonprofit news organizations that have sprung up.
 - v. Q: As we are all going to be suffering from the effects of misinformation and disinformation, is there anything he sees that organizations like his can combat that information throughout the country?
A: If you go on social media, you can't avoid seeing something that is not true. Misinformation/disinformation is a real problem. Peter Parker's Uncle Ben said with great power comes great responsibility. They collaborate with a professor at WMU that specializes in misinformation and disinformation. They do engagement and plan on being in high schools and college classrooms to support teaching of media literacy.
 - vi. Q: Two things people didn't like about the Gazette was that (1) there was too much being done (recipes, national politics, etc.) and (2) opinion. Sticking with just basic information will serve the community better.
A: Reid fully agrees with the attendee.
 - vii. Q: The attendee misses letters to the editor and discourse to the neighbors.
A: Reid would love to talk more with the attendee about that. NOWKalamazoo did consider how much interest they thought there would be in those things. Reid has seen what amounts to a renaissance of social engagement since the pandemic. There is a hunger for connection and discourse like that. He would love to hear from other people what types of discourse and interaction would serve them best. There are other things people can go to scratch that itch. They have debated turning comments on. There are pros and cons to it (trolls that show up, whether to have people talking online or in other venues in person).
- V. OLD/NEW BUSINESS
- A. Comment from attendee: The roundabouts in our neighborhood are the only ones in town that have stop signs and the attendee has noticed that many people do not stop at them anyway.
 - B. Comment from attendee: Back in 2020 the attendee put in a lot of volunteer time and put together a report on the deer population in the City. The quantity of deer in his backyard has increased since then. He doesn't think you can co-exist with what has become a predator to us. His plants are being destroyed including trees that are having their bark eaten off of them. The City just sent out a questionnaire about being a good citizen. He believes the Association should take the issue back to the City again and that the City should be a good citizen by taking care of the deer problem. If you go to Kleinstuck, wooded areas by the synagogue, the places around the neighborhood, everything from the ground up to six feet high is eaten. If we don't take some action we are going to be starving them to death with the lack of our action. He made phone calls to the City of Kalamazoo and talked with the 'sustainability' staff person who has given them the same answers. There are a number of

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes

fences that have gone up that are 6-8' high and the neighborhood doesn't feel like a welcoming place to him anymore. It is time for the City to take action and not be afraid of those who have been loud voiced over the years to protect the deer. He understands that even the Nature Center has culled the deer. If they can do it at the Nature Center they can do it in the City of Kalamazoo.

- C. Paul Scott discussed the 30-40 deer that died around Asylum Lake due to disease from the midge flies there. He noted that this neighborhood has been working on the deer problem for 5 years or more. He encourages everyone to contact the City and raise their concerns.
 - D. Another attendee noted that every deer that is born dies. There are many ways that happens, some which are more humane than others. Also more is happening to the natural habitat in this City and others where we are losing lots of other species due to deer eliminating plants from the forest floor to six feet up. They have noticed the bird count decreasing. The deer are having the same ill effect as invasive species.
 - E. An attendee notes that the deer issue would make an excellent local news story!
- VI. Christopher Shook adjourned the meeting at 8:08 PM.



Respectfully Submitted,
Christopher Bovid, ODWNA Secretary