

Minutes of General Membership Meeting of West End Citizens Association
October 14, 2021

Attendance

- **WECA Officers:** Brian Shipley, President; Noreen Bryan, Vice President; Tracy DiGioia, Vice President, Outreach; Jen Timmick, Treasurer; Jane Pontius, Corresponding Secretary; Margaret Magner, Recording Secretary
- **WECA Block Captains:** Justus Getty, Kristin Gilchrist, Maggie Hadley, Francesca Kim, Alice Liu, Anne Marill, Kate Ostell, Melissa Scales, Carol Starr, Rev. Jane Wood
- **Other Attendees:** Karen Anselmo, Emily Bailey, Lt. Jon Berry, Seth Biderman, Susan Byrne, Jacqui Crocetta, Patrice Davis, Karen Gamble, Jeff Hudgens, Aileen Klein, Sonya Lawrence, Carolyn Levine, David Levy, Bridget Donnell Newton, Dan Nyquist, Melissa Opryszko, Jim Ostell, Patricia Quiroz, Tracy Saltarelli, Doris Schraft, Yulia Semchenko, Audra Snider, Jeremy Snider, Donna Sprague, Mike Stein, Laura Voelker, Ulf Wallin, Susan Yaffe-Oziel

Call to Order

President Brian Shipley called the Zoom meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Welcoming Remarks

President Shipley welcomed everyone to the meeting and summarized the meeting topics.

Business Items

• **Treasurer's Report**

Jen Timmick reported WECA began the month of September with \$2,539.97 in its business account. \$300 was collected in newsletter advertisement fees. \$1,007 was spent to print the Fall newsletter. The closing balance for the month was \$1,832.97.

• **Approval of Minutes from May, 2021 and September, 2021 meetings**

The draft minutes were distributed to the Executive Board in advance of this meeting. Reverend Wood made the motion to approve both sets of minutes. Jen Timmick seconded. The minutes were approved with a vote of 10 yays, no nays, no abstentions.

• **Report from the City**

Hjarman Cordero could not attend tonight. He provided information, highlights of which were read. His written update is embedded here:



David Levy further clarified at the meeting that, in addition to the Board openings listed in the attached report, the Historic District Commission (HDC) also has 2 openings in its five-person Board. Residents interested in serving are encouraged to contact Mr. Levy (email provided below).

• **Report from the Rockville Police Department**

Lt. Berry provided the update. The number of calls for service to the West End area has remained

fairly constant but the events occurring have been more significant recently.

There have been a number of thefts from auto as well as auto thefts. These were all unlocked vehicles. Please lock your cars and leave outdoor lights on at night and report any suspicious activity right away to the Rockville Police. Due to the increase in this activity, Rockville Police will have an extra detail of two officers dedicated to working in the West End in the late night hours for the foreseeable future.

On Tuesday evening there was a bank robbery at the bank in the Woodley Gardens Shopping Center. The Police and the FBI are investigating. It is believed the suspects left the community quickly and there was no ongoing threat to the neighborhood.

There are several Coffee-With-A-Cop and Prescription Drug Drop-Off events coming up. There will also soon be a box in the Police station for 24/7 no-questions-asked drop-off of unused prescription drugs.

For quick information updates on coming events and as things happen, please sign up for Alert Rockville and follow the Rockville Police on Twitter. You can contact Lt. Berry at jberry@rockvillemd.gov or 240-315-8954.

Items of Interest in the Neighborhood

- **Vitality of Town Center**

David Levy, Assistant Director, Planning and Development Services for the City of Rockville, joined as a guest speaker on this topic.

- Town Center includes the Town Square area but also the wider surrounding neighborhood of 5,000 people living mostly in multi-family buildings.
- In the Fall of 2018 there was a renewed focus on Town Center driven by the closure of Dawson's and several restaurants. Over 400 people attended the Mayor and Council's October 2018 Town Hall in VisArts. Many great ideas emerged and Mayor and Council directed a set of actions including
 - Funding REDI's Small Business Impact Fund, which has supported Dawson's, Cottage Monet and others who apply.
 - Bringing in outside consultants from the Urban Land Institute. Their July 2019 report can be accessed [here](#). Some key recommendations were:
 - More office employment and residents needed to support street-level commerce in Town Center
 - Improving connections to nearby locations such as Montgomery College, and improved signage and branding
 - Improve the environment for pedestrians and bicyclists
 - More and better-linked open spaces
- Mayor and Council response has included:
 - "Road diets" are coming, to make E. Middle Lane and N. Washington Street more welcoming and safe for pedestrians and bicyclists

- Improving safety for crossing Beall Avenue and E. Middle Lane – upgraded crosswalks and lowered speed limits
 - Increased funding for events
 - WMATA study of Rockville Metro Station
 - Improving signage
- COVID-19 negatively impacted retail and restaurants nationwide and also impacted Town Center. In response the City made street parking spaces free for 15 minute pickup/dropoff, closed Gibbs Street and part of E. Washington Street to traffic to increase outdoor dining space, successfully lobbied Federal Realty to allow 2 hours free parking in garages now (same as Park and Rose). Gibbs Street traffic closure and 2 hours free garage parking are now confirmed as long-term changes.
- Opportunities for community participation in Town Center vitality:
 - Participate in invitations for community input (e.g. street closures public hearing, WMATA Rockville Station study)
 - Testify at budget public hearings
 - Shop and eat in Town Center
 - Participate in festivals and special events. Sponsor them.
 - Send ideas to dlevy@rockvillemd.gov, City Manager and/or Mayor & Council
- Mr. Levy answered questions from the meeting participants:
 - Q. Is better signage planned so those on 355 are aware of Town Center?
A. Yes, this is very much in the Mayor & Council’s plan. REDI is developing new branding for City commercial areas, and signage is planned to feature the new branding.
 - Q. What are Crown and Rio doing right that Rockville Town Center is not?
A. That is what REDI has asked businesses, and the City has asked the Urban Land Institute. The scale of Crown and Rio is much larger than Rockville Town Square, which allows them to get and keep large anchor businesses such as Target and Kohl’s. And Rio is also feeling some pain: they just did expensive reno of one area that is not doing well.
 - Q. Has the City identified particular businesses that would fit well in Town Center, and could it offer grants to such businesses?
A. The City set up the Business Impact Fund for this purpose. The City itself has not considered it has the expertise to be involved in selecting tenants of the private spaces in Town Center. The City does not choose which retailers go in.
 - Q. Pike and Rose seems to have better-curated businesses than Town Center.
A. Interesting, since Pike and Rose and Town Center are both managed by Federal Realty. There is broad occupancy generally in Town Center right now, although occupancy in Town Square remains a challenge. The City can have an impact on external design issues, such as making it easier and safer for pedestrians to get to Town Square.

- Q. The City and residents have been doing a lot to support Town Center but it does not seem that Federal Realty has been directly involved. How can we increase interaction between residents and Federal Realty to seek solutions? Mr. Levy committed to speaking with Federal Realty to let us know who is the right party there to reach out and have contact with.
- Q. How can the opening of new businesses be more publicized to residents? Several new businesses have opened recently, but you only know this if you walk the Square.
A. Federal Realty maintains a website RockvilleTownSquare.com, which has these updates. You can also sign up to receive announcements from the site.
- Q. How can local vendors organize a Christmas Market in Town Square ?
A. The City's Special Events Director Colleen McQuiddy is great to work with in this regard. Please contact David Levy (email above) and he will coordinate with Colleen.
- Two additional questions will be sent to Mr. Levy for follow-up answers:
Q. Developing the block north of Beall Ave. is dependent on having Maryland Avenue completed. Please give a status of the completion of Maryland Avenue.
- Q. The cars pulled over for pickup on E. Middle Lane can be troublesome. Did the plan include adding some clear parking spaces for dropoff/pickup for those restaurants?

- **Design Guidelines**

Margaret Magner gave the update.

Design Guidelines are a project cited in the newly approved PA4 Neighborhood Plan. The City's Planning and Development Services have assigned Staff members, and a third party consultant is being hired. WECA has officially created its Design Guidelines committee to be the voice of residents driving this process. Thank you to residents who volunteered to serve on the committee. Co-chairs Margaret Magner and Noreen Bryan are assembling the full committee now.

- **FY23 Capital Improvements**

President Shipley gave the update.

A call for suggestions was made to the community and ideas were submitted by residents. Those that met the City's Capital Improvement eligibility requirements were submitted to WECA's Executive Board for vote. The Board approved the following, which were submitted to the City:

- A dog park near Town Center
- Pickleball courts at Welsh Park (on former Skateboard Park)
- Improving the public alleyway running behind W. Montgomery between Nelson and Forest
- A crosswalk across Forest Avenue at Harrison Street

- **Meeting with other local Civic Associations**

President Shipley gave the update.

He met recently with the leaders of the Twinbrook, East Rockville and Lincoln Park Civic Associations. It was a positive discussion of common goals and challenges. There was agreement to continue occasional meetings, and to support each other on projects of common interest going forward.

- **22 West Jefferson Street Development**

President Shipley gave the update.

This property is currently owned by Christ Episcopal Church. It is being sold to developer SGS, who is seeking to develop residential condos in the large red brick building used as Christ Episcopal School and to add townhouses to the property. The developer recently did a presentation to the community laying out ideas and designs for the site which were well-received. There was positive feedback that residential development was planned, not offices or a tall parking garage.

Next step: A courtesy review by the Rockville Historic District Commission (HDC). The materials showing what is planned for the site are posted in the agenda of the October HDC meeting on the City's website.

Open Forum

- The Rose Hill Falls area along Great Falls Road near Julius West Junior High School is experiencing heavy traffic and parking problems. President Shipley is engaging with residents and HOA leaders in discussions about what is happening and the effect on the neighborhood. WECA is glad to help with seeking support from the City on this issue.
- Reverend Wood gave an update from the Martins Lane and Bickford Avenue area. Several residents are in attendance at this meeting. Martins Lane is a thoroughfare for traffic, especially with schools back in session. Traffic has also increased there. The police are doing well at monitoring speeding.
- Maggie Hadley mentioned potential plans for development at 109 Forest Avenue. One plan involves building 3 houses on the current site. She mentioned there is neighborhood concern that such development would cause water runoff to surrounding properties, and that there is neighborhood interest in historically designating the existing house.
- The WECA website has been upgraded! Please visit westendrockvillemd.org.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be the November Executive Board Meeting on November 11 (Veterans' Day) by Zoom.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.