

St. Johns Neighborhood Association
General Meeting Minutes
7 pm, Monday, December 14, 2015 | George Middle School
Minutes by Denis C. Theriault, secretary

Board members present: Shamus Lynsky, Emilie Saks-Webb, Denis Theriault, Scott Bricker, Rachel Hill, Travis Parker, Josh Leslie, Crystal Warner, Melissa Bartoszewski

About 40 other community members were present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm by Shamus, the night's presiding officer. It's noted that this meeting is unusual in that it's not at the St. Johns Community Center. Instead, it's at George Middle School, which is north/west of Fessenden.

Emilie motions to approve the minutes from November as written, seconded by Rachel. The minutes are approved.

PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU VISIT

Babs asks the attending officer whether patrol officers who hear about complaints at meetings or from the community actually direct them to the traffic division, where they'll have the most impact. He says he does.

She asks about Columbia Way racing. He says they know about speeding up on Marine Drive. The street racing starts there and trickles down to places like Smith.

A woman asks about an upcoming police body camera presentation at PCC-Cascade: Will they have body cameras to demonstrate? The officer says that conversation goes all way up in the chief's level.

Shamus notes the recent flooding and the explosive truck fire across the river, which closed the St. Johns Bridge. He says emergency preparedness is on folks' minds and that there's talk of having a neighborhood meeting on the subject. Who would we talk to in the bureau about that?

A woman asks about car prowls. She lives on Charleston. Are there any other suggestions to help prevent prowls?

"If you've got a garage, put it in there." Also try not to leave things in your car. He cites his discussions with actual car prowl perps: If they see stuff worth stealing, they'll go after it. Ninety-nine percent of all such crimes are opportunistic. Perps also told him, for what it's worth, they may not risk smashing tinted windows.

Joe Adamski asks about a very widely assumed drug house on Jersey between Burr and Buchanan. Emilie says "you can smell it just walking down the street." Is it just

marijuana? No. "There are several things going on." The house is next to the Montessori House. The officer says he wasn't aware of that particular house.

Joe ask if the bureau's Neighborhood Response Team program still exists? The officer says staffing has dropped low enough that those officers are being pulled onto patrol shifts. That means they're only working half of the time they usually spent proactively taking those kinds of calls and making things happen.

THE TREASURY

Crystal provides the financial report:

Art Fund Balance: \$828.04

Checks for \$19.49

General Fund Balance: \$5423.43

\$565.00 was paid for yearly rental at SJ Comm. Center
\$180.00 for Webhosting
\$30.00 for Communications
\$100.00 transferred to Art Fund
\$72.00 for statements at Albina Bank from 2012-2015 for Annual Reports
\$100.00 Secretary of State for Incorporation renewal
\$26.00 for FedEx
\$86.62 Peninsula Station for past due invoices
\$30.00 for Peninsula Station for mailbox rental (3 months)
\$40.00 for Email Communication Service

2012-15 annual reports were not filed, fees will range from \$250-300.00; we've also switched banks from Albina to US Bank

Most of SJNA's budget is spent on communications — i.e. its online newsletter. Money is also spent on equipment for volunteer events, sponsorships or help seeding fundraisers.

SAFETY AND LIVABILITY TEAM

The team, also known as the SALT team, meets at 7 pm the first Tuesday of the month at the St. Johns Main Street office, 8250 N Lombard, right across Charleston from Signal Station Pizza. Agendas are posted on NextDoor and Facebook.

It's an open forum for sharing concerns on any issues that affect safety and livability — including public safety, traffic, property crime, environmental issues, and gentrification.

Scott, the new SALT chair, says the panel is developing its 2016 focus areas and strategy. One issue remains working with Trimet on potential service changes in the neighborhood, the reason tonight's meeting is at George; Trimet presented on some of those options. Other SALT issues include pedestrian safety, including a look at

crosswalks and speed limits, alongside air quality and truck traffic. The superfund site, which is timely for 2016, remains on the list of concerns. Ben, a longtime member and the former board liaison, has been working on that issue. There may be more, such as emergency preparedness.

Scott asks folks to attend meetings with arms full of ideas, noting the process is volunteer driven. He passes out fliers with the meeting info.

LAND USE REPORT

The land use committee meets every second Thursday of the month at the Main Street office.

The committee works like this: When new development is proposed in St. Johns, SJNA is notified. We have a chance to respond to those notices if we think a proposal is against the interests of the neighborhood. But our response is limited: SJNA has little recourse if an undesirable or dubious project is allowed by zoning rules and city code. Our leverage comes once a developer seeks a concession or exception, also known as a "variance."

Josh Leslie, the land use chair, talks about the group's FB page and says they are the conduit for development notices.

- **There's a meeting at Proud Ground** to talk about land banking and ways to keep homes affordable forever. Under land banking, an organization retains ownership of the land a home occupies and always makes certain the home is sold at an affordable price. That meeting is set for Jan. 14. 7 to 8:30
- **The city's operating an infill-demolition committee.** The St. Johns Land Use Facebook page will post a survey from the city. It will also be on the St. Johns Neighborhood Association website (www.stjohnspdx.com). Anyone who want to opine on changes in infill policy can fill out the survey.
- **The comprehensive plan** — the overarching planning document for the city over the next 20 years — is in the midst of an update. And that work is nearing its end. There's one more informational session, Jan. 7, 6-9 pm at 3920 N Kerby, to learn details or express concerns about changes. There's an app on the city's website that explains. Rachel says folks can also comment on the app.
- **The Union at St. Johns project** has demolished the old buildings on the site, at Charleston and Lombard. The planning and sustainability commission has recommended the city council approve a street vacation connected to the project sought by the Portland Bureau of Transportation. (That's a very anodyne way of saying the city has asked the developer to pay to get rid of the slip lane on Lombard between Richmond and Charleston and reconfigure the intersection at Richmond

and Lombard. This would mean removing a traffic island some call Ivy Island and creating new public space within the development.) The city council's vote is tentatively set for Feb. 3. The time is unclear.

- **A database of lots for sale has been started.** Affordability advocates tracking the lots will rely on write-ins to and use the site to shape discussions during monthly land-use committee meetings on which properties advocates should hawk.

A VISIT WITH THE PRINCIPAL OF GEORGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

This is Lavert Robertson's first school year at George. He previously led Cesar Chavez, a K-8 school in North Portland, and served on the administration of Franklin High School. He started his career as a first-grade teacher.

He talks about the school's willingness to help make St. Johns a great place. He also says his team wants to make George a better place for all students and a "neighborhood" school — currently many students from St. Johns and throughout George's catchment transfer to other schools.

"My goal is stop that trend," he says, addressing "negative thoughts and rumors" about the school. Parents "don't take advantage of the opportunity to take advantage of the George community and the awesome things we have going on."

He says "lit up" when he was asked to host tonight's meeting. One of his goals is to make the school a community hub.

He says Portland's "middle schools are almost forgotten like middle children," with parents more engaged during elementary school, when school is new to families, and then again in high school, when the stakes go up ahead of college applications and career plans coming to fruition. He wants more George parents and for those parents to be more involved in their kids' lives.

Crystal asks how the community can help foster more positivity. Lavert mentions the school's newly reconstituted PTA, active for the first time since 2006. He thanks the Purkey family, Joe and Laura, for helping restart the PTA.

"Whether you have children here or not, you own homes so you're invested," he said. "Use us. You don't need to have children here to come visit us and volunteer. They want you time and energy, not your money."

And when you hear negativity, he says, "share your experience" about the school.

A woman who said she comes from family of teachers asked to hear how Lavert plans on improving George's academic programs. She saw signs posted about Advanced Placement classes.

“We technically do not have AP,” Lavert says. But George has high-school-level math and Spanish classes that count for credits that can be transferred to high school. he acknowledges a decline in the school’s academics but argued that growth will start with improved lesson planning and instruction.

He contends the school’s current curriculum incorrectly focuses middle-of-the-road kids and keeps teachers from learning about individual students’ habits, personalities and readiness levels.

He suggests, as a former coordinator for Portland Public Schools’ Talented and Gifted (TAG) program, that parents ask their kids’ teachers two questions: What is my child’s level of learning, and what is my child’s rate of learning? Both are asked in the TAG program. “Why wouldn’t every parent ask if they’re so important for TAG kids?”

Shamus says the SJNA board made improving the neighborhood’s relationship with its local schools one of its interests after a board retreat in early 2015. “This is the beginning of relationship we’re going to be having,” he says.

One dividend so far, besides this meeting? The board’s volunteer soiree last year, which is getting new name, will happen at George in February.

KELSEY GREER FROM COLUMBIA SLOUGH WATERSHED COUNCIL

She’s an outreach specialist paid through grant money that Metro funded in connection with closing the old St. Johns landfill. The council is in charge of helping the area’s watershed, including the communities that live within it.

She wants to tell us about certain programs or ask if anyone has ideas to help them help us in the neighborhood. They focus on restoration work in parks or in other parts of the neighborhood.

This year, they’re annual regatta event, planned for a Sunday in August, will start in St. Johns. The launch site will be at Smith and Bybee Lakes. It was last there in 2012. It will conflict with the second-annual Willamette River Revival down in Cathedral Park.

Kelsey also says the group is interested in helping with outreach to people who can’t make neighborhood meetings or lack access to the internet.

A PRESENTATION ON POTENTIAL TRIMET IMPROVEMENTS

We hear from Trimet outreach specialist Kate Lyman. This visit is an update of a presentation in March where bus service improvements, under the North Central Service Enhancement Plan, first came up.

She's asking who rides the main lines bus lines through the neighborhood: the 4, 44, 16 and 75. Most of us raise our hands.

Kate explains this is a long term plan for bus improvements — and that it doesn't include how to make MAX work better.

She's discussing the second draft of a set of improvements that have been under way since last fall. The first set came out in June but went back for revisions after neighbors who'd been clamoring for improvements and connections downtown didn't like the changes proposed for lines such as the 16. The second draft, which reset some of those original changes, emerged in October. More changes are still possible.

She highlights outreach specific to St. Johns before detailing the changes.

Trimet issued a survey in fall 2014 and advertised via direct mail in several languages to reach people who don't ride the bus or don't go online. They earned 331 replies from the 97203 zip code, which she calls a "pretty great" response.

A survey released last summer alongside the initial results, aimed at current bus riders to let them know how their commutes might change, received 147 replies. Results from a survey that closed in December were still being tallied. Lyman and colleagues have also attended SJNA and committee meetings and other forums.

"What did we hear from St. Johns?"

Transit is critical to the quality of life here and people really, really, really want buses running as often as possible — and as fast as possible to downtown and Northwest Portland.

Improved service will maintain the neighborhood's quality of life in the face of rapid development. It lets more people live here by mitigating the negative effects of development, such as congestion and the fight to find parking.

Then she goes over the handout.

- **Line 16 is important.** Trimet suggests more frequency and the addition of Sunday service, to applause.

- **Increased Line 15 frequency in the Northwest Industrial District.** Now, it doesn't come often and you have to wait at the connection point with the 16. "We'll make that transfer a lot better, while still retaining the swiftness of the 16 as it gets into downtown."

Scott says the 16 has an issue with bike racks, which only hold two bicycles, often being full. So he always goes to the earliest stop on the 16 instead of the last stop to make sure the rack on the bus has room for his bike. Some transit agencies, he notes, have room for three bikes. “Do you have those for longer haul routes like the 16?” Kate says that’s a great question. Trimet’s bike plan is concurrent with its local service improvement plans. “We hear that question quite a lot.”

If it happened, she says, it would be on all buses because buses shift from line to line over the course of a day.

The short length of blocks in downtown Portland have traditionally posed a challenge when this question has come up. The large size of the three-bike rack makes turning difficult. If not, “it would have happened by now.”

A woman asks about the 16’s run down Front and calls out the lack of lights at the stops on that part of the route. Kate says this plan doesn’t handle that kind of improvement or problem.

Babs asks if anyone raised notion of turning some runs of the 75 into express or limited runs between the Interstate transit center and St. Johns.

“People definitely bring that up quite a bit.” But Lombard is congested enough, Kate says, that presumed time savings may not pan out. It may also confuse riders who see a bus go by. Express runs have been phased out throughout the system because of rider complaints.

Clay Thompson, another Trimet outreach worker in the crowd, acknowledges that some people like express runs. But another issue is that they were often lightly used. They make fewer stops and, as such, don’t pick up many riders who rely on regular service. Buses, he says, need heavy ridership to pay for themselves.

Someone asks if Trimet is considering a process similar to what the streetcar system is working through on eliminating closely bunched stops? “Most lines have situations where stops are closer than we would ideally like. That slows down the bus,” Kate says. There’s some sense that Trimet might thin stops and make buses faster, at the same time as they do service improvements. They’ll have to think of people who lack mobility, though. Those riders might struggle if their nearest stop is suddenly farther away.

“If you support removing stops on a line, let [Trimet] know,” Kate suggests. “They’ll lean on that feedback when doing the work.”

I ask when the new bus schedules will come out.

Kate admits that all of this is actually part of a long-term plan.

Sometime between January and March, Trimet will issue a draft proposal that covers 2016. That draft proposal will include just *some* of the ideas presented and shared as part of the North Central plan. Those particular ideas would then take effect in September.

That process would play out again in 2017 and beyond. So that means it could take several years for all of the ideas advertised under the plan to take effect. And that whatever's first in line won't happen until this fall at the earliest.

We return to discussing the ideas:

- **Frequency, as listed in the plan**, has two definitions, and the specifics have yet to be pinned down. One some lines could be more buses at a certain time of the day... or it could mean adding more buses more frequently throughout the day.
- **Lines 4 and 75 are prioritized for extended service.** That change would add late night/early morning hours for people who work late and early — or who want a safe way home after last call.
- **The Line 11, which serves Rivergate**, would be extended down Columbia Boulevard to the Parkrose Transit Center, adding another east-west connector. Its hours, concentrated during rush periods, would be extended.

Babs asks about the Line 4's enduring reputation as the 4-Ever — with St. Johns, as the terminus of a line that starts all the way in Gresham, particularly plagued by delays that pile up over the course of so many difficult miles.

"You can have a schedule that says a bus is coming 15 minutes, but the reality doesn't reflect that," she says, remembering some mention in March that planners had considered cleaving the 4 into two parts, at downtown. "Buses are stacked up, some are arrivals only, then there are big gaps," she says.

Kate apologizes for the challenges involved in the 4 and said it takes a long time to decide on such a major route realignment. "We're considering that decision very carefully," Kate says. But it adds another driver, because it creates another line, "so there's a cost."

A man asks if Trimet is hearing the same thing in Gresham about stacked-up buses: Maybe we can join with Greshamites to press our case? Donna Cohen asks about adding more frequent service to the 16 during the afternoons. Kate says mid-day rides often see fewer riders.

UPDATES

- **Brook, our liaison from the Port of Portland**, will be moving to another role on the Port's business and labor outreach team. She's been our contact person for

almost eight years. A new person will take over as the contact next month. His name is Jason. He's been at the Port for a few years and does theater in his off time. He also lives in Roseway, he says, "so my apologies for not living here."

- **The St. Johns Tree Tree Team has reformed.** Its first meeting was the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. They outlined their goals and found that out of 3,000 spaces identified for street trees in St. Johns, just 48 percent are occupied. Which affords a "really awesome opportunity" for tree planting. The first big kickoff workshop is set for Jan. 16 from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. The urban forestry office will send someone out to teach about effective pruning and planting. The group also needs help with its planting day, on Feb. 20. The deadline to get trees from Friends of Trees for that day is coming in January. Go to FriendsofTrees.org. It's just \$35 a tree.

- **An answer to the Bachelors: the Spinsters.** Babs says it's been 100 years since women tried to form a counterpart the the St. Johns Bachelors Club. So she's starting the St. Johns Spinsters. Interested Spinsters at least 21 years old should come to Marie's between 4 and 8 pm next Tuesday, she says. There's not a specific agenda. There are some ladies who want to do some crafting. Some want to drink with new neighbors. They'll talk about getting more formal. Many want a clubhouse like the Bachelors. One's ability to attend Spinsters meetings is not predicated on one's gender, Babs says. "If some fellows crash, so be it."

- **John Teply, a leading proponent of the Save Ivy Island cause,** asks to see a copy of the letter of support the SJNA board sent to the Planning and Sustainability Commission. And he asks to have updates on any affordable-housing discussions the board has with the Farid Bolouri, the developer of The Union project.

He says 500 people have signed a petition asking the city council not to vacate the Ivy Island traffic island.

"The 500 people in the petition — they are your neighbors and this is a neighborhood association," John said. "And just because they aren't here, they shouldn't be marginalized nor should their views be made unimportant."

He also says he has an "action packet" for fellow activists with post cards and city council contact info, and details on how to use Instagram and Twitter. There are "all kinds of really good things in there if you'd like to save Ivy Island. We also have T-shirts. They are 12 dollars."

The board agrees to supply Teply with a copy of the letter. Shamus says tells John he can give his petition to the city instead of the board.

"At this point, everyone is free to contact the city," Shamus says. "We've already listened to our neighbors and taken our position."

- **Crystal reminds holiday shoppers to hit downtown St. Johns** and spend money with their local shopkeepers and mingle with their neighbors. “That really builds community,” she says.

The meeting adjourns at 8:33 pm.