

St. Johns Neighborhood Association
General Meeting Minutes
Monday, June 8th 7:00 p.m. St. Johns Community Center
Minutes by Denis C. Theriault, Secretary

Board members present: Shamus Lynsky, Emilie Saks-Webb, Denis Theriault (late), Josh Leslie, Ben Poe, Rob Metnick, Adam Robins

About 20 other community members were present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Shamus, the night's presiding officer.

The minutes from May were not presented; the motion was tabled until July.

THE TREASURY

Adam reports \$855.53 in the arts fund and \$5,438.57 in the general fund.

LAND USE UPDATE

- An update was provided on planned development Ivanhoe and Leavitt.
- Concerns were raised about plans to remove a house on N Cecilia and replace it with 20 units. The planned project has ties to the famed and troubled Bridge View Apartments in Cathedral Park at Edison and Trumbull.

The Bridgeview Apartments, managed by Innovative Housing, have been seen as a haven for drugs and petty crime. There's concern that Innovate Housing would struggle, despite assurances to the contrary, to maintain order at a second apartment site.

- Emilie asks Josh, the land use chair, if he's heard anything about development across from the Kruger stand at Lombard and Burr. Josh says he hasn't heard anything about it.
- Josh also says he's heard nothing new about plans to demolish the Baowry and redevelop the site.
- The Steelhammer site in Cathedral Park has a couple of potential buyers. It might be turning into something. It's down between the BES building and Willamette Cove.

Emilie asks about potential impacts on the North Portland Greenway — the long-planned bike path linking Kelley Point Park to the Eastbank Esplanade. It's believed that development on the planned trail must include money to fill in the path.

- Shamus informs the room that the SJNA has signed on with the N/NE Coalition for Housing Affordability after a board vote in May. “We’re going to share resources with them and share efforts to protect affordability,” he said.

Shamus also says SJNA land use committee has been working with Leslie Lum, the North Portland rep for the Bureau of Development Services. She’s been working with SJNA on a package of information or tools for neighbors to better work with developers on affordable housing issues. “If folks are interested in these land use issues, the land use committee is a good spot,” Shamus says.

- Shamus says the national director of America Walks now lives in Cathedral Park and has taken a personal interest in making us more walkable. He’s working with SJNA and Main Street to do a walkability assessment.

It’s announced that SJNA’s August 10 meeting will be a walking meeting. Folks should meet at the St. Johns Community Center. It’ll start with hour-long walk to look at what’s working, and what isn’t, for pedestrians in the neighborhood. And then we’ll come back to brainstorm treatments.

Donna Cohen reminds that us half of the area is across Fessenden and wants notice about the meeting posted there. Shamus notes the city has added walkways to Iris and the park through to Sitton.

Shamus says we’ve talked about finding space in apartments to hold one of our monthly meetings. He asks Donna if there’s meeting space in the apartments near Pier Park. Donna says there’s a homework club there with space that might work.

Donna also mentions our neighbors across Columbia Blvd. “I’d be glad to give you a tour.”

- Should SJNA sign another letter on behalf of Slim’s? Historically we’ve written a couple of letters to the OLCC in support of Slim’s and their efforts to restore their patrons’ drinking privileges along the bar’s Lombard seating area. They’re asking for another letter vouching that they’ve done what’s been asked.

One OLCC officer in particular was paying close attention. He’s since left. Before the letter, we’ll figure out if they’ve, in fact, received permission to have drinks out front again. Slim’s was supposed to have a good neighbor agreement the last time we wrote and that didn’t happen.

Shamus mentions parklets, in which a business claims parking spaces for extra seating, to help address pinch points on the sidewalk and what sometimes manifests as a “running the gantlet” sensation.

It’s decided the letter is up to a board. In a straw poll only a few people raise their hands, indicating little interest one way or the other.

SAFETY AND LIVABILITY TEAM UPDATE

- SALT has done outreach at Roosevelt, following up on a police Taser incident/court case involving a student named Thai Gurule. Students and teachers at Roosevelt, in response, spent several days doing intensive interviews with members of the Portland Police Bureau, public defenders, and others, and they assembled a “Youth and the Law” handbook that’s received national and local interest.
- Barbara gives a Superfund and Willamette Cove update. Dump trucks will start loading up contaminated soil this summer. “They haven’t told us where the end point is yet.” The mitigation will send 20 dump trucks through the neighborhood. The contractor has agreed to use low emissions trucks. Better for diesel fumes.

The federal EPA called together an advisory group in April and gave an update on the superfund cleanup. The schedule seems rushed, all of the sudden, 15 years into this process.

Barbara provides a timeline:

June and August: EPA will release a feasibility study to advisory group members. It’s incredibly important, Barbara says. “We’re going to read it. And talk about it. We’ll want to see some of our concerns reflected in it.”

Sept. 18: EPA will release proposed remedies.

Nov. 18-19: EPA will take live testimony from tribes and other select locals, but the hearing won’t be public.

Spring 2016: A draft of the proposed plan will be released.

Late 2016: Look for a final plan to be proposed, leading to 60- or 90-day formal comment period.

Winter and spring 2017: That comment period ends.

“So how can we get public to weigh in on a feasibility study since it won’t be out for anyone but the advisory group?” Barbara tells SJNA. “We might call on you to help us with outreach. It’s a concern of ours.”

Barbara says the advisory group will work quickly, under a 30-day comment period, to digest the feasibility study and provide a summary for neighbors in hope of quickly getting meaningful comments back to the EPA.

The EPA has explained the short window by blaming industry lobbyists under the name the Lower Willamette Group for slowing the process down. They fought each

of the “chapters,” or subject roadmaps, in the feasibility study. The group spent months challenging pollution level numbers, Barbara says the EPA has said, hoping to keep them from public view.

Barbara says there are four chapters, charting the degree of pollution, what methods might help correct it, and where those methods might be used. She said the study gives “very important baseline human health risk numbers” and that those numbers, which will help set a target level of pollution for the cleanup, have been contentious. The industry group wants that target number to include polluted spots downstream from the Superfund site, which would raise the target overall.

Shamus asks Barbara if advisory group members are barred from coming to meetings and reporting on their dealings with the EPA.

“We have every intention of doing that,” she says, before mentioning that the advisory group has no money for outreach.

Shamus suggests involving SJNA’s city-overseen umbrella group, North Portland Neighborhood Services. Emilie says they can use her email list.

Shamus asks if it makes sense to obtain an environmental attorney. She says, “Everybody else has one in this race.”

He says SJNA raised money for a land use attorney who wrote a letter that helped drive away the Walgreens planned for what’s now the monstrous storage site at Lombard and Richmond.

NEW CRIME PREVENTION COORDINATOR

Angie Russo, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement’s new crime prevention coordinator, introduces herself. She’s a former DA in the Bay Area who found herself frustrated by the missed preventive opportunities in the cases that came her way. She reminds people that coordinators can help deal with problem/nuisance homes, craft GN agreements and make sense of crime upticks.

National Night Out is Tuesday, August 2. But parties are allowed starting the Friday before through the Friday after.

Angie recommends checking out public safety advisory committee meetings in Kenton, suggesting it’s a good chance to meet North Precinct brass in person and raise concerns directly. Those meetings are the fourth Wednesday of the month.

Shamus mentions the neighborhood Facebook page as a notably active forum for discussing crime and suspicious behavior. Angie reminds people that it’s better to describe suspicious and actively troubling behavior when deciding someone needs the cops called on them immediately. When in doubt though, she said to call 911.

Shamus mentions what used to be monthly presentations of crime stats. Emilie says Angela Wagnon, Angie's predecessor, often presented that data or had a neighborhood officer do it. The police were too busy this week to send someone.

It's mentioned that a lot of what's reported on the SJ FB page involves New Columbia and Portsmouth, contributing to a false impression that St. Johns is more crime-ridden than it actually is. "We don't live in Escape from New York. It's actually quite pleasant here."

Shamus says there are plans for a bike serial number registration event, possibly in the plaza outside the Central Hotel.

ROOSEVELT STEM UPDATE

Donna Cohen says the fight to unify Roosevelt's STEM lab, in the name of equity, will continue until the concrete of the remodeled building is poured. She says advocates on this issue have a lawyer who was "impressed" with Portland Public Schools' resistance.

The group has another avenue in mind: Asking why did Roosevelt, serving a lower income and more diverse student population, received \$20 million less in remodeling money than Franklin? The gap has narrowed, Donna says, but it's less than Grant will get, too. PPS answered that enrollment at Roosevelt is lower. "Why is that? Because people don't go, because it doesn't have the offerings. It becomes a vicious cycle."

Emilie asks what percentage of eligible kids in the Roosevelt catchment attend the school. Shamus says it's up to 52 percent, after slowly increasing.

Donna says the hope is push PPS to fit the larger STEM lab by extending the building's footprint. She says they've taken up that expansion offer, but did it instead to grow the school's new auxiliary gymnasium.

Donna reads a draft letter and asks SJNA to sign on in support.

Ben moves that board considers signing Donna's letter, pending a final draft. Adam and Rob. The motion passes unanimously.

The board will vote via email.

General comments/forum/announcements

Adam points out that bike registration volunteers were expected at North Portland Parkways. Adam will track down the volunteers' information for the next meeting

On the coming Friday, from 3 to 6 pm, neighbors led by Babs Adamski are planning a bicycle/pedestrian demonstration on Central, a bikeway frequently plagued by speeding and inattentive driving.

Shamus says he's the new coordinator of the nonprofit pushing the North Portland Greenway. He said volunteers were planning a ride of planned route June 27.

Jazz festival is July 17-19. They'll need volunteers: www.cpjazz.com

Aug. 2 is the date of a Cathedral Park environmental fair. It's traditionally featured a salmon bake by the Grand Ronde tribe.

The meeting is adjourned at 8:20 pm.