



WAMM QUARTERLY MEETING September 17, 2018

MINUTES

Lane Llewellyn, Vice-President and Acting President, called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

1. Introduction of Officers

Lane Llewellyn introduced the officers present at the meeting, including herself as Vice-President and Acting President, Diane Baker, Second Vice-President, and Maria Morandi, Secretary/Treasurer. She also introduced the current and past presidents of the Cherryhurst Park Civic Association, who attended the meeting.

2. Special Presentation

Lane Llewellyn announced that Alle L'Eveille is transferring her role of WAMM Gazette editor to Tadzia GrandPre at the end of September. In recognition of Alle's many contributions to WAMM, the Board had a surprise for her. Lane Llewellyn called on Maria Morandi to do the honors. Maria asked Alle to come forward and presented her with a gift card and twinflower arrangements. Maria emphasized Alle's work in editing and publishing the monthly newsletter, as well as in designing WAMM's logo and street signs. Alle thanked WAMM for the present and clarified that she is passing on her role as WAMM Gazette editor but she will continue maintaining the website. Maria called Tadzia GrandPre to come forward and introduced her as the new WAMM Gazette editor. Alle spoke highly of the skills and talent that Tadzia brings as the WAMM Gazette editor.

3. VIP Guest Speaker – Ellen Cohen, Mayor Pro Tem, and City Council Member

Lane Llewellyn introduced the speaker for the evening, Ms. Ellen Cohen, Mayor Pro Tem and City of Houston Council member. Lane requested that all questions be deferred until the Questions and Answers period following Ms. Cohen's presentation.

Ms. Cohen informed the audience that the Mayor is in Barcelona promoting businesses for Houston, so she is now exercising his duties. She then summarized the topics of her talk including an overview of District C, activities at City Council, and the November elections

District C. Mayor Pro Tem Cohen described the wide geographical boundaries of the District, including areas in Meyerland, West University, the Museum District, Montrose, the Heights and some areas north of Loop 610. The District has approximately 250,000 residents. As a group, they vote in higher numbers than those residing in other districts. There is also a large amount of new residential development and construction.

City Council. The Council's areas of responsibility include areas such public safety and infrastructure. It consists of 11 district-level seats, and 5 seats at large. Members can be elected for up to two, 4-year terms. Ms. Cohen explained that her current and last eligible term expires in approximately 18 months, at which time she could only run for positions such as Mayor (she clarified that this is not in her plans).

The Council meets twice a week, on Tuesdays at 1:30pm and on Wednesdays at 9:00am at City Hall. Meetings held on Tuesdays have a Public Session starting at 2:00pm for citizens to speak to the Council. Meetings on Wednesdays are reserved for City business. All Council meetings are open to the public, and the agenda is available publicly. Committees that meet at other times during the week do much of the Council's work. Committee meetings are also opened to the public. Ms. Cohen chairs the Council's Quality of Life Committee.

District C receives approximately 2500 calls from residents each month. Ms. Cohen explained that residents should report any problems by first calling 311 and getting a tracking number. If the issue is not addressed within a week, they should then call her office describing the problem and providing the tracking number. Her office will then follow up on the reported issue. Her office receives approximately 3,000 calls from residents per month.

The current City budget started on July 1, and is approximately 4.9 billion dollars. This budget was achieved with no cuts and without tax increases. Savings were accomplished mainly through attrition of unfilled and newly vacant positions. The budget includes funding for pensions, five new police cadet classes, and three new firefighter cadet classes. The District was impacted severely by Hurricane Harvey-related flooding. If properties had been built to current standards for construction in flood plains, approximately 84% of the properties that were damaged or lost would have been ok. The budget is under pressure because of the cap on revenues derived from property taxes that was voted over 10 years ago. This cap limits growth of revenue from this source to no more that 4.5% per year, based on population growth and inflation rate. The estimated revenue loss for the City due to the cap was 220 million dollars between 2014 and 2017. The loss would have represented an additional \$300 in property taxes per residence.

District C's Service Fund has been reduced from \$1,000,000/year to \$ 750,000/year. Approximately 80% of this fund was spent on the Neighborhood Traffic Management Program (essentially the cost of placing road bumps). The Fund also contributes to other expenses such as paying police overtime, the Spay-Neuter Program (this is important, for example, because incidents with wild dog packs have been reported within the District boundaries), parks and lighting, and painting of murals on electric boxes.

November Elections. There are two propositions in the upcoming November ballot that have important implications for the City's budget. Proposition A requests the reinstatement of the street and drainage repair fees lockbox approved in 2010 as part of the ReBuild Houston Program. If approved, this proposition would impede diversion of these monies for other purposes by future City administrations. Proposition B requests salary parity for firefighting personnel with police pay for the same rank and seniority. If approved, Proposition B will result in an additional three hundred million dollars in costs that can only absorbed if cuts are made in

other services. Meetings are being held in every district to discuss this issue. Jay Burman, WAMM's liaison with HPD and firefighters emphasized the seriousness of this issue.

Question and Answers Session. Lane Llewellyn thanked Ms. Cohen and opened the Questions and Answers session.

Question (Lane Llewellyn). Issues of local infrastructure are a priority concern for residents of WAMM. What is the current position of WAMM in the list of plans for street, water, and sewer rebuilding, beyond just overlay?

Response (Ms. Cohen) and discussion. There is no list, as far as Ms. Cohen knew. She asked that specific questions be submitted in writing to her office so she can seek answers from Public Works. The City does not do sidewalks (except in front of public buildings such as schools). Lane Llewellyn indicated that WAMM invite somebody from Public Works to be a speaker at a future meeting, but that in the meantime there have been a priority list of areas for street renovations (CIP meeting) where WAMM was listed. Jerry Baiamonte and others indicated that WAMM will be forwarding questions. Lane Llewellyn requested that questions be sent to the info@wammcivic.org email address, and that they will be compiled to be submitted. Ms. Cohen said that as far as she knows, Public Works will not do major street renovation (beyond overlay) unless the problem involves water and/or sewer lines.

Question (Ed Staton). What is the timeline for completion of work on the Verizon communication towers for 5G networks?

Response (Ms. Cohen) and follow up. She did not know.

Question (Joe Mustachia). There are increasing local traffic problems because local charities are renting their parking lots for after hours use to restaurants, nightclubs, and bars. What can be done about it?

Response (Ms. Cohen) and follow up. It is legal for organizations to rent their parking areas, so nothing can be done about it. Mr. Mustachia followed up by raising the question of placing street bumps, even if residents pay for them, instead of having to wait for long periods for the City to do it. Ms. Cohen indicated that there is a process that has to be followed for getting street bumps, and that there is a waiting list. If neighborhood residents wish to pay for the placement of street bumps, then they would be moved to the top of the waiting list. A comment was made that this could also result in pushing traffic to other local streets where there are no bumps. Lane Llewellyn explained that WAMM is on the waiting list for street bumps (the wait is about five years).

Question (Alle L'Eveille). Does the City consider the impact on local traffic and parking when issuing permits for a new business or for expansion of an existing one?

Response (Ms. Cohen) and follow up. It is difficult to answer this question without more specifics. There are regulations, but the main problem is that there is no zoning. Sometimes there is opposition to a new development, such as in the case of the proposed Ashby high rise, but

residents in this quadrant of the city voted against zoning in larger proportions than in other areas. A follow up question was raised about whether business applying for permits to expand property onto their parking area need to provide additional parking to compensate for the lost parking spaces. Ms. Cohen responded that she could not say but businesses would still have to provide parking according to City requirements.

Question. Does the City take into consideration the impact of heavy construction equipment on local streets beyond the immediate area of the new development when issuing building permits?

Response (Ms. Cohen) and discussion. Probably not. However, other districts would like to have the level of new development experienced in District C.

Question. Construction workers park along local streets and make it difficult to have access to delivery, maintenance and repair companies to local homes. Why are construction companies not required to provide parking for their employees? What can be done about the increasing loss of “neighborhood feel” in the Montrose area?

Response (Ms. Cohen) and discussion. The City cannot deny building permits based on the two issues raised. However, it is possible to have some arrangement with developers to bring construction workers from an outside parking area to building sites. This was the case for a negotiated plan with the developer of the Ashby high rise. This would be another good question to send to her office, which will respond.

Lane Llewellyn concluded the Questions and Answers session and reminded everybody to submit all questions for Ms. Cohen’s office through info@wammcivic.org. She thanked Mayor Pro Tem Cohen for coming to talk to WAMM residents. Ms. Cohen thanked the association for the opportunity.

Lane Llewellyn indicated that somebody from Planning and Development will be invited to speak at a future WAMM meeting. She expressed reservations about the likelihoods that anything would happen on the issues discussed. At most, developers will do road and street repair in front of the new developments in the neighborhood.

4. Other Business

- Constable Patrol. Lane Llewellyn reported that the Constable Patrol is on hold. WAMM needs a committee of volunteers in order to move this effort forward. Based on prior membership counts, the yearly fee per residence would have to be \$700-\$600 to cover the \$80,000 per year cost. Cherryhurst, Mandell, and Winlow Place have renewed their Constable Patrol. Hyde Park does not seem interested in having one. WAMM CP members should contact Maria Morandi if they need to replace their CP signs.
- Doggie Pots – Poop Stands. Installation of poop stands has been delayed. Placement of WAMM street signs is a priority for the neighborhood at this time. In lieu of the poop stands, Lane Llewellyn advice the attendees to place poop pick-up alert signs (the signs were

distributed) warning dog walkers that they are liable for fines of up to \$500 if they are observed failing to pick up after their pets.

- WAMM street and quarterly meeting signs. Alle L'Eveille has been doing the artwork for the WAMM signs to be placed on top of street signs in the neighborhood. Diane Baker is working on the application to the City for installing the signs. Alle has also done the artwork for new signs to announce the quarterly meeting.

5. New Business

- Local charities contracting their parking lots after hours to bars and nightclubs. Lane Llewellyn discussed the issue in more detail. Cars speed through residential streets endangering pedestrians and pets. Crime has increased since the cars of bar and nightclub patrons have been parked in the local streets. Joe Mustachia expressed that the main problem are the drivers of valet companies. Local business contract with valet companies to park the patrons' cars, but the valet drivers are not screened, tested, or licensed by the City of Houston. The charities have no control over the valet companies. Ed Stanton indicated that new dining and entertainment venues will continue to open in the area, so a potential solution would be to bring pressure on the businesspersons that hire valet parking service companies.
- Additional Residential Parking Permits. Lane Llewellyn solicited to anybody interested in getting parking permits to give their name and the street/block number. Two additional residents requested to be placed on the list for additional parking permits and provided the information.
- HPD. Jay Burman presented on the issue of pay parity between HPD and firefighters, remarking that police officers are on the job essentially 24/7. Parity will not work. Harris County has the highest rate of conviction for DWI of all counties in the country. HPD is starting to go after nightclubs with progressive penalties that can lead to removal of their liquor license. Police officers caught driving under the influence are immediately dismissed from the force. Jay brought a number of informative HPD brochures for the attendees.

6. Other Announcements

- New Headmaster of the Annunciation Orthodox School. Lane Llewellyn introduced Mr. Sam Fragomani, the new Headmaster of the School, expressing WAMM's interest in working more closely with the School in the future.
- Greek Festival. Lane Llewellyn introduced Mr. Jeff Rushing, co-chair of the 2018 Greek Festival. Mr. Rushing is also a member of the Parish Council. He announced that there will be a formal opening of the Orthodox Cathedral on September 30, although some further renovation work will continue over the next 2 years.

The Festival will take place October 4-7. Parking issues will start in about two weeks.

Police will shut off the east side of Yupon St. There were questions about how to avoid this closure. Jay Burman volunteered to help with this issue.

Questions were raised about local access along Mt Vernon. While only the west side is assigned for parking, vendors station their trucks along the east side, making driving difficult. Mr. Rushing responded that this year they have extended their street closure permit for additional weeks in order to accommodate vendor truck parking and alleviate this problem. On a less positive note, the Festival has lost their parking at Lamar. Festival organizers are promoting shared rides and will set up a ride share fence. Organizers tried to get a discount from Uber for shared rides but the company was not responsive to this request. The Greek Festival pays for the police patrol at the Festival. Lane Llewellyn reminded everybody to call 311 if there problems with parked vehicle during the festival. There was a question about when Kipling St. will be open since its closure has been extended several times. After some discussion, Mr. Rushing indicated that he will bring the subject at the upcoming Parish Council meeting.

Jeff distributed complementary tickets for the Greek Festival.

The meeting adjourned at 7:59pm.