



## WAMM CIVIC ASSOCIATION QUARTERLY MEETING

DECEMBER 10, 2019

ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY – BASILIAN ROOM

### MINUTES

Lane Llewellyn, First Vice-President and Acting President, called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm.

#### 1. Introduction of Officers

Lane introduced herself as current First Vice-President and Acting President of WAMM. She introduced Maria Morandi, Treasurer/Secretary. Diane Baker, Second-Vice-President could not attend the meeting.

#### 3. Order of business

##### 3.1 Status of toppers and Lovett Triangle cleanup

Lane informed the attendees that the guest speaker was on her way and would arrive shortly. While waiting for the speaker to arrive, Lane indicated that arrangements for installation of toppers had been made for the following Thursday, December 12, for a total cost of \$ 150.00. Lane and Maria will supervise the installation. Lane reminded those in attendance that WAMM is keeping the Constable Patrol Yard Signs, and to send requests for replacing worn out signs to Maria Morandi. Maria will deliver a CP sign to our new neighbors, Aaron Carpenter and Mary Alice Martin. Lane also reminded everyone that Jamie Roark's and other volunteers' effort to maintain the Lovett Triangle free of trash has been a success. Some of the people that gather in the area are also helping. The guest speaker arrived.

#### 2. Introduction of Guest Speaker

Lane introduced the guest speaker, Ms. Rhonda Sauter, who is Division Manager for the Mayor's Citizens Assistance Office. Ms. Sauter explained that the Office is part of the Department of Neighborhoods. The Department, originally set up by former Mayor Annise Parker, has four divisions: Inspections and Public Service, Mayor's Anti-Gang Office, Mayor's Citizens Assistance Office, and the Office of New Americans and Immigrant Communities. The Assistance Office connects residents to city services and helps resolve citizen's concerns in coordination with other COH departments. They are



the first go-to link in the chain between neighborhood issues and COH services. The Assistance Office attends all Super Neighborhood meetings routinely, as well as other community meetings by invitation. The Division just lost three staffers, but it has recently received approval for two new hires.

After some comments from the attendees about the poor conditions of most local roads, Ms Sauter indicated that the genesis of capital improvement projects has changed during the current administration. Originally, neighborhoods chose which capital improvements would move forward, but after Hurricane Harvey hit the Houston area, all projects are directed at improving drainage, with the COH and Harris County working together. Lane reminded the attendees that the improvement and resurfacing of Yupon St. was one of the capital improvement projects directed at improving drainage.

The Division is also involved with the Complete Communities program, which aims to empower 10 under-resourced neighborhoods in Houston. Office staffers also assist other city efforts whenever needed, such as flood relief. The Office collaborated with FEMA in post-Harvey recovery efforts, trying to distribute needed supplies in flooded areas. They received a federal grant to provide blue tarps to cover roofs in owner-occupied homes as well as the many single and multi-family rental units in flood-affected areas.

Ms. Sauter explained that the Department of Neighborhoods will work and assist with many projects and will try to connect citizens to the right services provided by the COH. Inspections and Public Service is the biggest division within the Department. Its role is to reduce blight in neighborhoods by enforcing code compliance and informing residential property owners about violations (for example, accumulation of junk, unkempt lots, vacant buildings, etc.). The Assistance Office contacts the owner to help address the situation before neighborhood protection teams take action following a notice of violation and a lien is placed on the property.

Another role of Ms. Sauter's Division is to follow up when no action is taken after repeated calls from a citizen to the 311 line. Ms. Sauter explained that the 311 line serves as a data collection system. 311 turns in calls to the departments that are supposed to act on specific calls. There is an electronic record of the timeline for all calls, the departments that receive service requests from 311, and the actions taken by these departments. Thus, 311 is a system that provides accountability in the delivery of city services.

There was a discussion about the persistent delays in collection of bagged, compostable yard waste. Maria Morandi indicated she has called 311 every time she places a bag by the curb because no pick up is done on the scheduled collection day. Because collections have been rescheduled for Wednesdays, the compostable bags can be left by the curb for a week or more and they start to decay. Other meeting attendees indicated they are experiencing a similar problem. Ms. Sauter said to contact



her if these problems persist. She said that both her office and 311 are complaint-driven systems. It is important to file a report because nothing will happen if people do not complain. Ms. Sauter indicated that Mayor Turner follows attentively the statistics of COH responses to citizens' complaints to the 311 line.

Ms Sauter explained that the Mayor's Anti-Gang Office uses proactive approaches to keep youths out of gangs. It is particularly active in the Sunnyside neighborhood. Lane Llewellyn asked Ms. Sauter if this Office do presentations and suggested that it would be a good idea to give a talk at The Covenant House. Ms. Sauter indicated that it could be arranged.

Ms. Sauer explained that the Office of New Americans and Immigrant Communities partners with non-profit organizations that are in touch with immigrants and refugees, to inform them about services and rights.

Alle L'Eveille mentioned the work of volunteers from WAMM and surrounding areas that are keeping a city-owned lot in the WAMM area free of trash. Ms. Sauter said that the Department of Neighborhoods likes to recognize these types of efforts and to contact her about awarding these volunteers a certificate of recognition.

There was a discussion about panhandling and homeless people in WAMM and surrounding neighborhoods. Ms. Sauter explained that the Department of Neighborhoods has been experiencing more problems because of the influx of panhandlers, M&M and other vendors, and homeless from outside Texas. They are coming in increasing numbers because it is more lucrative for many of them to be in Texas. She requested not to give them money, but instead make a contribution to a food bank. Some of these individuals are organized; they are transported by vans, and get room and board from these organizations.

Lane asked if there is anything that could be done to address this problem. Ms. Sauter explained that it is very difficult. Vendors have the right to sell almost anything. They sued the administration under former Mayor Bill White, and won. The ACLU sued successfully against no-camping ordinances. Her Division is concerned about homeless people squatting in encampments. Her Office actually collects items that they give to homeless people. Lane said that many of the homeless do not want to go to shelters, and that there is a sizable fraction that has mental health issues. Ms. Sauter responded that her office counts homeless people, and that Mayor Turner would like to provide facilities similar to those in San Antonio, which offer medical and social services. However, it would be expensive and would require close collaboration with the community to work effectively.

Lane thanked the guest speaker and remarked that WAMM finally has a very responsive contact in the city.



### **3. Order of Business (continued).**

#### 3.2 Need for officers and more volunteers

Lane Llewellyn indicated that WAMM will form a committee for the nomination of new officers, and that the Association needs more volunteers to help with the electronic newsletter. Maria Morandi gave a brief history of the newsletter and explain that several volunteers are needed to keep it going. Aaron Carpenter and Mary Alice Martin indicated that they would be interested and to contact them after they return from their honeymoon in January.

#### 3.3 2019 membership and application for 503(c) status

Lane informed that WAMM had achieved its highest level of paid memberships since 2014. She indicated that a CPA has looked at WAMM's documents and deed restrictions and said that it would be OK to apply for federal 503(c) status. The Board intends to file for 503(c) status, which will make WAMM eligible to apply for certain COH grants.

### **4.0 New Business**

#### 4.1 Future guest speakers

Lane asked what type of guest speakers the attendees would like to invite. Suggestions included speakers about solid waste and the poor condition of local streets. David Soderberg inquired about placement of speed bumps. Ms. Sauter indicated that the request can be made through 311 but that, currently, the Fire Department has the final say about approvals for their placement. There was a question about whether developers are responsible for providing parking space to their employees during construction, and for street resurfacing because their heavy trucks and construction-related increases in traffic deteriorate the existing roads. Some developers have agreements (these are 360 agreements in exchange for tax abatements) for these types of repairs. Sometimes the damage is made by drivers' actions (such as not making corners) including both construction and delivery truck drivers. Ms. Sauter indicated that she can usually get the contractor's manager name, and to call her if we need to reach a developer.

Other suggestions for guest speaker topics included an update on the new library, the status of fiber optics deployment in the area and the placement of electric meters apparently related to 5G. Bob Lacey indicated that one of the corridors for 5G is along Yoakum Blvd.

Ms. Sauter informed that Comcast is trying to stop paying the franchise fee as part of their Comcast 2020 plan, which will result in increased bills for cable service. She also



reminded everybody that only 20% of the eligible population voted in the last local elections. Lane distributed the parking warning tickets to place in car windshields that Ms. Sauter had brought to the meeting.

Lane Llewellyn adjourned the meeting at 7:55pm.