

# WAMM CIVIC ASSOCIATION QUARTERLY MEETING

September 9, 2023

Bering Church of Christ

## MINUTES

Lane Llewellyn, President, called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

### 1. Introduction of Officers

Lane Llewellyn introduced the Board members present at the meeting, including: Board members present: Lane Llewellyn, President; Mary Alice Carpenter, First Vice President; Kathy Conti, Second Vice President; Diane Baker, Treasurer; and Maria Morandi, Secretary.

### 2. Introduction of Guest Speakers and other Guests

Lane introduced Abbie Kamin, Houston Council Member for District C, and Aliyah Effote, Special Projects Coordinator for Office of Council Member Abbie Kamin. Council Member Kamin requested to speak briefly at the meeting. Lane indicated that Council Member Kamin would speak first as she had to leave early for other commitments. Lane also explained that WAMM had been working closely with the District C Office to help resolve issues in our neighborhood.

Lane then introduced the invited speakers: Leslie Bourne, Executive Director, Covenant House, Texas, and Rich Conley, Construction Manager, Pin Oak Interests (construction company for Covenant House's new campus). Leslie Bourne will present an update on the plans, activities, construction dates, and the buildings on the new campus. Lane Llewellyn indicated that there have been discussions of joint events between WAMM and Covenant House youth once the new campus is opened. She also asked the audience to save questions, concerns, and advice until the end of the presentation.

Lane also introduced the Rev. Bodie Gilbert, Rev. Bodie Gilbert Associate Pastor, Bering United Church of Christ, who will briefly talk about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Fall Festival and distribute fliers.

### 3. Presentations

#### 3.a Council Member for District C Abbie Kamin.

Council Member Kamin greeted everybody and expressed her opinion that WAMM is a very special civic club in District C, especially for the strong commitment to improve the

neighborhood, which takes time and dedication. She recognized and thanked Leslie Bourne and Rev. Bodie Gilbert for allowing her to speak in advance of their respective presentations.

She made a recapitulation of major area-wide issues the District C had to address in the years since her election as Council Member, including the Covid pandemic, the 2021 deep freeze, and the prolonged drought of 2023. At the local level, the district has a number of initiatives, including:

- The annual rain barrel sale at a cost of \$10, subsidized by the District.
- Partnering with Trees for Houston to plant trees in our neighborhoods.
- Improving the platform for 311 calls, which has gotten good feedback.
- Plans for resurfacing local streets, including Marshall St.
- Request and approval of additional funds for the new building of the Montrose-Freed Library.
- Placement of air monitors at some park (e.g., Avondale Park).
- Agreement with 3 TIRZs for the completion of the W Alabama reconstruction project and its extension to the 59 spur.
- Revive the redevelopment of the lower Westheimer corridor.
- Obtaining parental leave for COH employees (including for adoptions) and pregnancy wellness time-off.

There was a question about the status of infrastructure projects in our area. Council Member Kamin responded that the best source for this information is [engagehouston.org](http://engagehouston.org).

Lane Llewellyn thanked Council Member Kamin for coming to our meeting and giving WAMM members an informative presentation

### 3.b Leslie Bourne, Executive Director, Covenant House, Texas, and Rich Conley, Construction Manager, Pin Oak Interests.

Leslie Bourne explained the mission of Covenant House: to provide housing and support to 18-25 years old youth who are facing homelessness, and giving the tools to become independent and productive adults. Currently, youth are housed in duplexes off the University of Houston main campus, which were originally intended for student housing. Available accommodations are always full, with 40 youth being housed each night. Covenant House is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> year in the WAMM neighborhood.

Ms. Bourne recapped several meetings with Lane Llewellyn and Maria Morandi, through which all participants learned a lot about the issues and concerns of Covenant House and the surrounding Community. Lane agreed, shared some of her experiences, and indicated that she feels the new campus will be an asset to WAMM. It is the only location of Covenant House in Texas. She would like to set up a tour early after the new campus completion.

Leslie Bourne explained that the youth they serve mostly come out of the foster care system. At age 18, these young people have nowhere to go. Covenant House frequently receives human trafficking survivors. Many of the youth are traumatized by bad foster care experiences, and are victims of abuse. She mentioned a case who had been fostered at 31 different homes by the time she was 18 years old. Some of these children have only known violence. The LGBT population is at high risk of experiencing violence. The Covenant House makes it clear that violence is not tolerated in their program.

The project for the new campus has funding of \$47 million, and is short 3.5 million at this time.

Rich Conley, Covenant Project Manager, explained that the new buildings will have 107,000 square feet of space distributed in 4 floors, and will include a health clinic, cafeteria, chapel, learning laboratory, computer stations, indoor gym, and outdoor sports facilities. He praised Leslie for the work Covenant House is doing.

He explained that construction outside the campus perimeter is almost finished. There was an alley that had to be brought back with utilities. It will be fully repaved by the end of September. From then on, work will continue only inside the campus perimeter, including a retention pond. Kathy Conti asked whether construction equipment will block street side parking. Mr. Conley responded that all construction equipment, including heavy trucks, will be stationed inside the perimeter of the campus. There is a construction entrance to the east of the onsite trailer.

Mr. Conley indicated that on-site construction will proceed west to east, with a target date for completion in December, 2024, with slab pouring scheduled to commence in mid-October. Lane asked about the time of day when pourings will start. Mr. Conley indicated that it will depend on multiple factors. Lane asked whether there will be a complementary thank you recognition for the disruption caused to neighbors residing close by. For example, Harvey Construction distributed Starbucks gift cards. Leslie Bourne answered positively and she will discuss the idea with the contractor.

Hope Oliver-Doyle asked whether there are volunteer opportunities at Covenant House, and how to volunteer. Ms. Bourne responded that there very few at the temporary location, but there will be more at the new campus, and to contact her for information.

Gretchen Shoup indicated that there had been concerns in the neighborhood regarding sufficient staffing at Covenant House, specially as it relates to supervision of youths gathering outside the campus and engaging in disturbing behavior such as shouting and brawling. Ms. Bourne answered that there will be more staff. There will be a camera installed on top of the Hanover Building.

Kathy Conti asked for the sources of support to build the new campus. Ms. Bourne responded that it is a combination of public and private funds. The COH and Harris County contributed significantly in the initial stages of their fund-raising campaign.

Lane suggested that if people are treated with respect, issues can be resolved 90% of the time. A meeting attendee indicated that immigrant youth can have high rates of mental health issues. A World Health Organization (WHO) study found that 77% of young people in 34 South and Central American countries and territories self-reported at least one mental health concern.

Leslie Bourne explained that there will be up to 136 beds available in the new facilities, built up over time. The role of staff at Covenant House is to help these young people achieve the best they can be, and to provide guidance and assistance so they become independent adults.

Lane indicated that while there is a lot of talk about helping the homeless, very few people offer to take them in their own homes. Covenant House offers them a place right in our WAMM neighborhood. John Dunivin remarked that he wishes to have known about Covenant House 30 years ago.

Leslie Bourne continued explaining that Covenant House has 30 year-long relationship with Baylor College of Medicine, as well as collaboration from Texas Children's Hospital. Baylor medical students do rotations in the clinic providing a range of health care services, including mental health. There is a mobile van that provides dental care. Sometimes problems are easily solved by straight forward interventions, such as a youth with learning difficulties that just had poor vision and needed prescription glasses.

Lane commented that she and Maria Morandi had attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for the start of the new campus construction. After leaving the event, she realized her cell phone was missing and went back to see if it was still there. When she approached a group of Covenant House's youths and asked whether they had seen a cell phone, one of them said that he had found the phone and turned it in the front desk. He then went back into the building, retrieved the phone and gave it her. Leslie said that there will be some rough youth but that they work with them to address their underlying issues.

There was a question about how to ask about or report immediate construction-related issues. Leslie responded to just go to the site and report it Jason Miller, the on-site superintendent, for immediate issues. For longer term issues, got to the blue trailer and report it. She will send Maria Morandi specific contacts to report by phone.

Lane thanked Leslie Bourne for the informative and helpful presentation. She also thanked her for the cookies Leslie brought for meeting attendees.

### 3.c Rev. Bodie Gilbert, Associate Pastor, Bering Church of Christ.

Rev. Gilbert invited everybody to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Fall Festival at Bering Church. Both Mandell Place and WAMM are co-sponsoring the festival. Each association will have a table.

He requested WAMM neighbors to place yard signs announcing the festival. He will bring the signs for distribution at the National Night Out (NNO) celebration. Lane reminded everybody that the NNO celebration will be on October 3, at The Southern Yankee, and to please RSVP to Maria Morandi.

#### **4. Order of Business**

Lane Llewellyn presented briefly on the following WAMM issues:

72-inch waterline replacement - Lane indicated that some progress has been made, but the replacement continues to be a “high drama” situation for our neighbors on Kipling St. Vice president Kathy Conti had suggested that the COH sponsor a book of free car washes for everyone, but there was no comment from the Mayor’s Office.

WAMM Doggie Pot installation - The area between the entrance and exit to the Bering Church parking lot on Hawthorne St. has been inundated with doggie poop for years. Now that we have a bike lane along Hawthorne and so many more activities in the area, the Board decided to sponsor the first Doggie Pot Station at this location, between the two crepe myrtles. Bering Church will empty the receptacle, refill the station with the rolls of doggie poop bags, and maintain the doggie pot. It was installed on Labor Day and it has been a complete success. It is functional and attractive, and makes it easy for dog owners to scoop their pup’s poop and deposit the bag in the container. The Board is open to consider additional requests for “Curtesy of WAMM” doggie pot installations. Contact Maria Morandi if interested.

Volunteers for new committees - Volunteers are needed to form new committees. Please contact Lane Llewellyn.

#### **5. Other Business**

October 3 - WAMM Neighborhood Night Out (NNO) – We will be holding the event at the Southern Yankee again this year. We had a great event on their patio last year and have decided to make a permanent venue for our NNO. Please invite your neighbors and bring your family. It will be a good time to meet representatives from the Fire Department, Sheriffs, Constable, all those that help keep our neighborhood safe. All the details are described in the WAMM Gazette.

#### **6. New Business**

Lane Llewellyn asked if there was any new business. Hearing none, she proceeded to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 pm.