

**West End Civic Association
Board Meeting Minutes
Connecticut Conference of United Church of Christ
November 12, 2013**

Present: Amy Bergquist, Gail Billet, Dorothy Lovett Buckley, Stephen Cohen, Otis Cox, Rick DuVerger, David Jorgensen, Lucas Karmazinas, David Klein, Jan Klein, Bongsi Magubane, Alan Paluck, Nina Sakun, Gretchen Unfried-English, Sally Weisman and Florence Wolff-Nicholas. Also in attendance: Fi Bookwalter, Lakisher Hurst, Paul Lanouette, Mike McGarry and Noel McGregor.

Gail Billet called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

1. Minutes

Motion 1: David Klein moved to approve the minutes of the October 1, 2013 meeting, with a second from Otis Cox. Passed unanimously.

2. Financial Report

David Klein gave the finance report, noting funds received from the Oxford block party, spending for Constant Contact and that the ArtAround came in under budget.

3. Agenda Items

- Hartford Blooms

Gail introduced Mike McGarry who reported on plans for the Hartford Bloom event, a nine-day garden festival scheduled for Jun 20 – 29, 2014.

- Grace Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Gail introduced Noel McGregor who coordinates the food pantry at the church. Noel gave an overview of the various programs the church administers and specific details regarding the food pantry. He emphasized the need to treat those they serve with dignity and respect and that it is the goal of the church to address and meet the physical and spiritual needs of everyone who comes through their doors. Of utmost importance is the church's delivery of a health message of promoting a vegetarian lifestyle and diet and a balance of spirit, mind and body. He said that the church never likes conflict but feels that the issues raised by the city regarding the pantry brought good between the church, its neighbors and WECA. The church will be distributing turkeys on November 20th and shared that they need ten more. He thanked WECA board members, Gail, Fi Bookwalter and Bongsi Magubane for volunteering at the pantry every week.

Noel answered questions from the board and explained how the pantry has addressed traffic and parking concerns raised by neighbors.

- Nominations

Gail introduced Nina Sakun who is interested in serving as a Southwest Sector Representative Alternate. Nina shared that she is retired, lives on West Boulevard and has been in the same house for 21 years.

Motion 2: David Klein moved to elect Nina Sakun as a Southwest Sector Representative Alternate, with a second by David Jorgenson. Passed unanimously.

- I84 Hartford Project - Public Advisory Committee

Gail discussed the project and the need for WECA representation on the committee. Toni Gold has expressed interest in serving on the committee and is very knowledgeable about the history of the project. Stephen Cohen requested confirmation of what Toni's position will be. Lucas Karmazinas questioned when the meetings will be held and whether they will be public. Gail stated that the meetings are being scheduled and will share any information she receives with the board. There was consensus on the board that Toni has significant expertise on this topic and discussed what her role would be on the committee.

Motion 3: David Klein moved to approve Toni Gold to represent WECA on the I84 Hartford Project Committee and report back to the board periodically on its progress, with a second by David Jorgensen.

Vote: 15 in favor; 0 opposed; 1 abstained (Stephen Cohen).

- University of Connecticut Foundation, 61 Scarborough

The board discussed the UConn Foundation's purchase of the residence at 61 Scarborough for use by the university's president. The board discussed several issues, including whether the property is subject to paying real estate taxes, whether it qualifies for PILOT funding and if the neighbors have expressed concern. Gail stated that the neighbors she has spoken to are relieved that the property has sold because it was on the market for a long time, that the tenant didn't maintain it properly and many feel that there is a certain cache to having a university president in the neighborhood.

- General Meeting

The board discussed having the December general meeting focused entirely on education as we have done in past years. It was decided to invite representatives from Hartford RSCO and CREC to speak at the next general meeting on the topic of Hartford public schools and the Choice program.

4. Sector Reports

Central West: Rick reported that his sector met on October 2nd. The main topic was the food pantry which resulted in a letter sent by email to the board. Rick shared that there was interest in his sector to memorialize the grandchild of long-time neighbors who recently died, such as a bench in the new playscape in Elizabeth Park. Gail said that she would look into this.

Southeast: Otis shared that the kiosk has been installed in the community garden and requests that anything posted there should be printed in large font so that people can read it. He stated that the garden has been cleaned and the sidewalks have been repaired. He stated that the city is looking into the neighborhood's request for a speed bump.

Central East: Gretchen Unfried-English reported that there is concern regarding a rooming house for sale and the board discussed the zoning issues involved and whether the use as a rooming house is grandfathered in.

5. Committee Reports

- Education

Bongi reported that the education committee held its first meeting to gather information to share with the West End residents. Beth Parker has asked that WECA sponsor the film, "Race to the Top" and Bongi is looking into it. She stated that a big challenge will be to help parents who want their children to go to neighborhood schools to do so.

- Architectural History and Resources

Lucas reported that over 40 people attended the tax-credit workshop at the Connecticut Historical Society in October. He shared that 30 plaques have been issued for homes in the new historic district and the committee wants to reach out to more homeowners on Whitney Street. Jan Klein reported that the committee wants to offer the same recognition for owners on Sisson and to provide a discount to purchase the plaques.

- DineAround the West End

Fi and Jan reported that the committee received an overwhelming response for dinner hosts for the DineAround on February 1, 2014 and coordination is underway with hosts. The opening reception will be held in the Reading Room in Starr Hall at the University of Connecticut Law School.

- Public Safety

David Jorgensen reported that bike thefts are down and that two suspects were arrested. He stated that an identity theft ring was uncovered and encouraged everyone to be careful with what they dispose of in their garbage. There has been an increase in crime on Girard Avenue which has been linked to recently released parolees who are housed in apartments on the street through a city-wide program.

6. Other Business

David Klein raised the issue of whether we are printing enough newsletters and if we are reaching all residents. Rick stated that he had 40 newsletters left over and that he couldn't get into the apartment buildings on Evergreen. He has asked sector reps for numbers in their sectors and to seek feedback. The board discussed ways to get the renters more involved and identifying "block captains" for each building to assist with the newsletter distribution.

Alan Paluck asked if there has been success in identifying a community organizer for the Southeast Sector. Gail reported that we are having a difficult time filling the position and have recently received new names from neighbors in the area. She is hopeful that we will be able to find someone.

Gail distributed information notebooks to board members to begin planning for 2014 with the goal of reflecting on what we want to accomplish in the coming year. She remarked on concerns raised by neighbors following the food pantry situation and that we, as a board, need to change how we operate and move away from "business as usual". Many on the board have

experienced very negative reactions from WECA members and the community and we need to review our processes and fine-tune our decision making.

We will be reviewing the WECA mission statement, what it means to be on the board and evaluate whether we are following what we have been elected to do. Gail requested that the committee chairs and sector representatives specifically identify 3 goals they want to accomplish in 2014 and share these with the board for discussion at the December 3rd meeting. In addition, each chair and representative needs to identify what they need to do their work and what, if anything, they need from the board. She stated that this will be an objective process to re-energize and re-think what we do as a board. As part of this process, Steve stated that he wants clarification of board process that was raised at the last meeting, but not addressed. He stated that inter-personal interactions need to be addressed.

Steve reported that the officers met to discuss the food pantry issue and the way it has affected our status in the neighborhood, noting that many neighbors were appalled by the board's action. He stated the need to re-introduce WECA to the neighborhood and let them know where we as a board stand. The following statement was distributed to the board for discussion:

WECA and its Board support the idea of food pantries as a vital social service. In addition, after clarifying the zoning and licensing issues concerning the Grace Seventh-Day Adventist Church, WECA and its Board also support the existence of the Church's food pantry and appreciate the service it provides to our neighborhood and those in need.

Steve explained that the statement was written by the officers to be presented to the board to approve for publication to WECA. The board discussed whether the wording was sufficient to address the concerns raised by the sectors while others questioned whether any statement is needed. Rick responded that a statement is very helpful and that the board needs to do better in communicating. Alan responded that neighbors in his sector need and deserve a response. Steve stated that a response has been missing and that the WECA membership will be hurt if the board does nothing. Jan stated that something needs to be said because the WECA membership is waiting.

The board discussed the wording of the statement and how it should be shared with the community.

Motion 2: Stephen Cohen moved to approve the statement as written to be shared with the WECA membership, with a second by Sally Weisman. Passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.