

West End Civic Association

Meeting Minutes

Feb 25, 2020 at Hartford Seminary

Opening

The regular meeting of the West End Civic Association was called to order at 6:05 pm on **Feb 25, 2020 at Hartford Seminary.**

Present (Board Members)

Suzann Beckett, Lindsay Ewing, Michelle Ewing, David Klein, Nealie Newberger, Lakisher Hurst, Kyle Bergquist, Matt Marks

Public Comments (Section)

Edward Haganbach - new chief of police? 2 BLIGHT buildings: one White House , 2nd is a bar on Sisson - work has ceased due to expiration of permits according to Hartford News. Concerns about cleaning up the block; 3rd issue - building a new stage at Elizabeth Park - can WECA advertise when the concerts are?

Mary Griffen from Hartford Next/Hartford 2000 - coalition of all NRZs in Hartford to bring everyone together "Greater Together" - hand out provided. Meeting tomorrow. A tool kit of letter that everyone can use as templates for groups to use. There is a neighborhood training institute for community economic involvement, leadership training, and understanding how to use your NRZ.

Lindsay Ewing, subject to work schedule will represent WECA in HartfordNext

Cindy XXXX the planning and zoning representative - Hartford 400 for conservation and development (POCD) 2035 is the 400th anniversary of Hartford: Green, Play, Live, Move, Grow400 as a focus. Can be found online.

Kyle asked about the LAND BANK and blight team - blight team is ramping up efforts

Pete Stevens and Michael Werle - WH Children's Museum: Letter of intent with Univ of Hartford to acquire 4.5 acres of property down the road - due diligence phase; making the political rounds with M. Ritter. And counselman Gale to ensure a Mayoral support and Mr Bronin has stipulated support. Looking for approval in March or early April. Have a planning grant with the state for ~\$940K to help with planning and due diligent-central to be determine din the next 3-4 weeks. The grant requires some fundraising to the tune of 20% and the WHCM is ~ half way there. There is a Gala at the Delmar Hotel on the 21st of March as a benefit.

Questions:

Suzann Beckett - will the whale come?...Yes, if it is physically coming. The planetarium - is it coming?...Yes so they need theater space and a planetarium space. Will the preschool continue?...yes - the intention is to maintain it. Capacity at 40. May grow if the market will support

Timeframe fro applying for the grate is quickly approaching - once submitted how long for a response...30-45 day.

What is the timeline on the fruition of this project....depends on fundraising and state assistance...hoping for 2.5-3years to completion.

Community member : Has anyone applied for federal grants?...no.

Dr Werle stipulated this will be a state of the art building along the line of energy savings - perhaps a neutral building perhaps the building will pay into the energy as well.

David- 4.5 acres of what?...Main area to develop is the existing Auerbach building (to be demolished and replaced) - with an entrance off of Whitney and not Asylum, with shared parking and such with CHS.

Tony Goodwin - what is plan, building by building for renovation?...the Auerbach building is the only one intended for demolition. Everything else would be repurposed. The 3 main mansions won't be part of the project.

Kyle Bergquist asked about landscaping - there are some important things there ...they have not addressed that at this time.

Does any zoning need to be changed...not that we are aware of.

Final thoughts: The museum started in 1921 right up the street - so it is coming home. Looking for support from the WEND.

GRACE from Mayor's office - Energy Challenge

Grace said there is a way to get your own rain barrel and a free tree. Energize CT Home energy solutions - please review the brochure - there are some low cost options available. She can answer questions about all the programs.

Question: is there a better way to let people know? Lindsay -
We can add the digital version to the WECA website.

Question: event at city hall giving away trees - how did that go?
The Eco Expo on Oct 2 2019 with 20 organizations - it was a good turn out. Trees and Rain Barrels are on a wait list status. Hartfordclimate.org/retaintherain

Madilyn: for Love your Block - Did some work in Frog Hollow lately; Accepting mini-grant proposals for projects in a gateway or location to the neighborhood and we need a list of volunteers...loveyourblock@hartford.gov App period till April 3rd. End of April announcements by the end of April for simpleton by the end of JUNE.

\$1000 is the payout and they ask for a budget for 15 grants....

JANICE CASTLE - oversight for Energy challenge and Love your Block. Looking for widespread participation. Want to focus on vacant lots and gateways.

Vacant lot on Farmington and Girard - give some examples - they did planter boxes with painting on the boxes in FROG HOLLOW and they are removable if the lot is purchased so they can be moved.

Community Meeting (Section)

LT JESUS LOPEZ - Keep an eye on what you fry, don't leave things in the kitchen cooking; if you smoke don't smoke in bed or on the couch in case you fall asleep. WEND 94 calls here, fires 1 here, 1 survey, 11 service call, 7 firearms, 9 undefined

ANDRENE CAMPELL - 311. 42 service requests for WECA; April 28-MAY2 a neighborhood cleanup; Sat March 7 they will be at City hall to answer questions. Lots of waste and recycling violations, as well as snow removal.

OFFICER SHERBO - burglary on Regent St - neighbor called. We're able to respond. New Chief will be visiting shortly. Don't leave garage doors open. The project at 16-30 Girard is awaiting a permitting and should be on its way.

Question - what are we doing about prostitution and drugs on the streets....it is being constantly addressed.

Question - accident at Sisson and West Blvd - was there an accident that knocked down the WEND sign? The sign is down...

Question was there a robbery at the nail salon on Farmington? And Subway late night. YES.

Special Guest – Adam Cloud, Treasurer of Hartford

Financial status of the city - he cannot be Moore proud of where we are today as a city. He believes this is phenomenal time here in Hartford. We have rebounded from one of the most challenging fiscal events in 2017 when we were on the brink of bankruptcy. Basically the state is paying for what the city used to pay for what we owe in bond - so the impact of that is that the state will be responsible for ~45million a year that is not coming out of our budget until our bonds mature. It's a great achievement and it pulled us out bankruptcy. The strings attached is that the state now has oversight of our financials on a regular basis. There is a review board now that reports monthly not the health of the city. He is pleased to say that we are no longer the headline story - our financial performance has inspired confidence that we have pulled together a solid team to do things the right way.

2019 budget 609M\$; the 2020 budget is ~573M\$ with a 36M\$ reduction in expenditures. In the last 2 years the rainy day fund was reduced to ~2M and now its back up to 9M with a 2+M\$ surplus in the budget to add to the rainy day fund. Moody financial service has upgraded us to a BA3 rating (3 steps below investment stage) - so we have jumped 11 notches since the bankruptcy scare. This was long hard process. The rating agency speaks to our strengths rather than our challenges - uniquely strong state support with oversight, a trend of funding the pension funding, tight spending controls, ability to obtain favorable labor contract settlements, high deductible health care plan, no longer PPO.

Challenges: as a city - limited tax base...most are tax exempt. He believes there is a failure of the state to delegate what is needed to the most needed areas (ie Greenwich vs Hartford). PILT payment in lieu of taxes - over the course of 15-20 years the state said they will pay if and when we can - so instead of 70% perhaps we might get 20%..so we have lost ~600M\$ in tax revenue based on this program. This is a critical issue for our Capital city to continue to operate. The \$50M deficit at the time of bankruptcy would have been met by this pay out if the State had been able followed through.

Elizabeth Park is one of the greatest assets of our neighborhood. As treasurer eye manages trusts- like the Hartford Parks Trusts fund - over the year it grew to about 24M\$ we had to start self funding rather than getting bonds. There is now 12M\$ release to improve parks - to be distributed over the year to not decrease the worth of the funds...it

works out to be ~800K\$/year for beautification. Examples: lighting at Bushnell Park, playgrounds, pools, basketball courts.

Asset liability: retirees with a pension and health care benefits (OPEB)...OPEB city liability is 27M vs ~327M\$. The trust is now established and there is an investment that offsets the out of pocket expenses. Long term this is the prudent investing that will offset the liability.

Defined Contributions Plan- MURPH - 1.75B with a 73% funding status we owe 1.4B long term, we pay 115M a yr in benefits per year to retirees. We need a 11% return to cover that which is challenging in a volatile marketplace. The employer also has a contribution. So we bleed ~9.8M/yr. We have a 12.2% return with a benchmark return of 7.25%....at 3, 5, 10 year we have exceed that.

Encouraging news: Nassau Reid Insurance Company - roundtable of insurtech - innovative businesses that create efficiencies for insurance companies. There are 30+ young budding businesses that are living in Hartford CT at 20 church St. that are surrounding by private equity firm that come from as far away as Israel. A new ecosystem is being created with new innovative business and the investors to create incubator space for them to grow. Our city needs this - small business seeded here in our own backyard. We have a Class A vacancy below 15% - we have not seen that in 15 years - its a good time to be in Hartford!

In combination with the investment of capital with nascent and established business - there is a federal program called Opportunity Zones introduced by T. Scott (Carolina) using capital gains to defer the tax implication of those gains by investing in an asset within the zones. Hartford has 10 zones. People can invest in Hartford and have a reduction of taxes on gains.

Mr Cloud believes his role is to be the custodian of assets and manager of asset, responsible for banking relationship, payment of debts and maintain trusts. He wants his office to be a resource for economic development. He believes it will be better if we focus our efforts.

Questions – helping the neighborhood...loans are not our business. Can support tax abatement and facilitate loans through local funding institutions.

If the mayor wants business here he will need to work to bring them here....yes the mayors office works hard to continually attract talent, but this is outside my realm of responsibility to comment on.

Any investments in fossil fuels...we try to avoid “sin investments”...will need to get back to you on that - no direct investments...

3 steps below investor level - timeframe for achieving overcoming this....we need to be focused on growth so the property tax collection can go up post tax reval. We also have a lot of tax appeals - and the city usually loses on tax appeals. Factors that can lead to an upgrade: modest tax based growth, improvement in rainy day fund; what can lead to a downgrade: decline in state support, trigger events, material tax base decline.

How long before annual take out from employee investment fund so the city doesn't have to borrow from the general fund....I don't have an easy answer for that. This is a long term liability.

Positive growth: Park and Main street - mixed housing there has been approved. Bushnell Theater - vacant lots are now considered for an Arts gateway and residential; Apt opportunities and non baseball parcel on north main street - structured as a revenue bond transactions but now be able to build out those assets to pay out the bonds on the baseball debt.

Citywide effort NOX - volunteers allocated around the city for clean up around the city. April 30; May1-2,202: noxhartford.orgMay be a festival to tie things up.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:03PM by S. Beckett

Board Meeting (Section)

Approved last meeting minutes from Jan. (Board)

Financial Review for January (Klein) – Current. Reviewed and approved.

Membership report - up from last year, small mailing upcoming in early March

Public Safety (Marks)- made connections with Sherbo; we have funded renting cars for them doing under cover work; Smoke alarm program through Lt Lopez; touch a truck event? Possibilities will be investigated.

Planning and Zoning – (Kyle) - Sisson ave development project; St Francis is talking about a new 24” pipe to dump water into the river; Neighbor complaint generating a lot of complaints; historic preservation commission has been quiet; zoning appeals has been quiet; Hartford 400 meetings upcoming in March. Medical society has no interest or proposals for the site.

Grant goals – Submitted by: Mike McGerry, Ken Lierman, Porchfest, Mary Pellitiere, Farmer’s Market {BECKETT to ask to come for March meeting to present the budget}.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF WECA: We need to communicate better what we provide to the community; sustainability.

We need to update and gather new membership - how do let people know? Community mailings? Public postings? Social Media? New post card mailing. Signs for all of our event.

Revisited...2020 goals - retaining our members and gaining new members. Diversity. Sustainability.

Possible golf tourney (MARKS): Fundraiser to provide scholarships to needy WEND students. Need sponsorship, options for courses. Prized: Raffle, hole in 1 prizes, longest drive, etc. Independent essay judged by scholarship committee blindly to appoint scholarships. WECA fundraiser. Board approves of idea by vote.

Community Picnic at Elizabeth Park

Around the World Holiday Party?

Cocktail Event at UCONN Law - tabled.

Grant process - \$6K for west end and NOT 1K for citywide this year - advertise in enews in spring - form a grant committee (about 6 people) and go back to the board in the May timeframe. Say that the maximum grant is \$1K; need to come up with criteria for approval; we need to advertise for any recipient;

Add \$500 for public safety office to budget.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 9:13 by Suzann Beckett. The next general meeting will be at 6pm on Tuesday February 25th, at Hartford Seminary.

Minutes submitted by: Nealie C Newberger

Approved by: The Board Feb 25, 2020