

Minutes from the meeting of June 10, 2015 – Super Neighborhood 17

I. Call to Order at 7:05 p.m.

II. Speakers:

- A. Lisa Kasianowitz and Richard McNamara, with Houston Parks Board (“HPB”) – Ms. Kasianowitz advised the SN 17 group that the HPB is a non-profit organization that committed to improving parks within Houston’s city limits and advocating for greenspaces; thirteen thousand acres of new park lands have been added. She discussed the Bayou Greenways 2020 project (the “project”), which is a plan to improve greenspaces along the existing bayous in Houston. The project is aimed at encouraging activities, connecting with nature, and using the bayou paths as another form of transportation. The HPB is funded through bonds and private donations. HPB must raise \$120 million through donations; so far they have raised \$90 million. The scope of the project is 1500 acres of greenspace and 80 new miles of continuous, accessible, off-street hike and bike trails. By the completion of the project, 60% of the Houston’s population will live within 1½ mile of the trails. The annual benefit to the City is estimated to be \$90 million.

Mr. McNamara spoke about the logistics of the project. It is being broken down into smaller projects and encompasses neighborhood connections, trailheads, gateways and overlooks. There will be seating, trash receptacles, and signage. All of the nine bayous within the City’s limits will have green trails. Once it is done, the green trails will be connected all the way to Mason Park (near the ship channel). This month they are beginning the analysis and planning for the project, which is projected to last 3 months and will be complete by September. Following that, the design phase begins, which is anticipated to last to spring of 2017; then bidding and construction contracts (to last until summer of 2017) and following that, construction, which is anticipated to last about twelve months to the summer of 2018.

For more information, Ms. Kasianowitz can be contacted at lisa@houstonparksboard.org or 713-942-8500, ext. 14. Mr. McNamara can be contacted at Richard@houstonparksboard.org, or at 713-942-8500, ext. 15.

(Councilmember Pennington presented District G news and announcements at this time. See section III.)

- B. Trudi Smith, with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (“BBP”) spoke about the activities of the Partnership. It is a non-profit organization committed to revitalizing and transforming Buffalo Bayou (“BB”). BB is the “mother” of all bayous, extending 52 miles, 10 of which are within the City’s limits. BBP was established in 1986 by then mayor, Kathy Whitmire. One example of the projects completed by BBP is the Sesquicentennial Park, in the Wortham Theatre area. One feature of that park is the “red button” located on Preston. When the button is pushed a huge bubble escapes from Buffalo Bayou,

surprising those along the Bayou. Another completed project is the Sabine Promenade, which was completed in 2006. The blue lights along the Sabine Promenade change color according to the phases of the moon; as it gets closer to a full moon, the lights change to white. There is a BB Guide mobile application that allows users to see completed projects and obtain information on BB Park and downtown bayou areas. One of the downtown projects that will be opening in August 2015 is the Sunset Coffee Building, located at Allen's Landing (near the Spaghetti Warehouse). There visitors will be able to rent kayaks and canoes on the first floor, a coffee and sandwich shop is located on the second floor, and a rooftop pavilion on the third floor.

The BBP also conducts ongoing trash cleaning projects, providing lots of volunteer opportunities.

The BB Park consists of 160 acres. It begins at Shepherd and extends 2.3 miles. Gateway to the Park is located at Sabine. The Waterworks is there, which consist of a performance space, food truck concessions, bike rentals, a sky lawn, which is above an underground reservoir resembling the Cistern in Europe, and a 2-story treehouse. A grand opening for the Park is scheduled for September 27, 2015 (but it is opening in August 2015). There is a dog park at Montrose and Allen Parkway. At the west end of the Park there is another visitor center, with food, canoe and kayak rentals. BBP has added additional pedestrian bridges, asphalt foot trails, and shaded pavilions.

Some of the events at the Park are pontoon tours and a Kids Day (scheduled for 10/17/2015). More parking is being added along Allen Parkway (angled parking being added by the City) and parking is available in "Lot H" (behind Fonde Recreation Center, before Houston Avenue); though the sign says jury parking only, it is available to all after 6:00 pm on weekdays and on weekends.

For more information, go to buffalobayou.org.

III. Announcements: District G, F, & City:

A. District G Representative, Oliver Pennington –

Councilmember Pennington's office is providing \$25,000 out of the District Service Budget to Houston Police Department to help address the vagrant/panhandler issues. Councilmember Nguyen's office is also providing \$25,000 to address the issue, for a total of \$50,000. Councilmember Pennington has also requested \$30,000 for SN 17 S.N.A.P. projects, including panel replacements (11 selected as worst), and Parks will clean up the Dairy Ashford esplanade. Councilmember Pennington has allocated \$3200 for extra mulch.

To encourage repair of sidewalks, the City is waiving permit costs and will allow residents to get plans approved more rapidly. (The City pays to fix or install sidewalks to schools).

FEMA and the City are responding to flood damages caused by the recent rains. Councilmember Pennington provided several handouts regarding obtaining assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration, FEMA and the City. He noted that not many 311 requests regarding flooding had been received from this area.

There are several Neighborhood Depositories and Recycling Centers that, due to disaster recovery, are now open 7 days a week from 10 am to 7 pm. There are rules and regulations that must be followed and the centers are for Houston residents only. For more information, go to www.houstontx.gov/solidwaste/neighborhood-depositoriessrecycling-centers.

Councilmember Pennington discussed the City's \$3.2 billion budget. There are not much discretionary funds in the budget as much of it is obligated to existing contracts, etc. Policemen will receive a raise because they have signed a contract with the City; negotiations are still ongoing for Fire Department personnel and regular City employees. The budget is a balanced budget.

Bids were taken last month regarding the improvements to Memorial between Eldridge and Kirkwood, and work is supposed to begin in September of 2015.

B. District F Representative, Richard Nguyen –

Councilmember Nguyen stated, regarding the budget, that the tax cap needs to be lifted because the City is losing \$12 million in revenue and that revenue could be used to hire more policemen.

Regarding the vagrant/panhandler issue, Councilmember Nguyen stated he received some negative feedback from his editorial in the Houston Chronicle on that issue. Some of that feedback indicated he was “against the homeless,” however, he said it is a safety issue. Johnnie Lozano noted that Maddie Provost, with HPD has been very helpful regarding the vagrant/panhandler issue and has even joined the SN 17 Homeless Committee.

Johnnie Lozano also asked for help from the Councilmembers regarding traffic accidents involving Eagle's Trace residents as they pull out onto Highway 6.

It was discussed that Royal Oaks wants to join our Super Neighborhood. However, Rhonda Sauter, the City's Neighborhood assistance representative for this area, stated the City will most likely not redraw Super Neighborhood boundaries to accommodate one neighborhood. She also noted that the Westchase Super Neighborhood has already been recognized by the City, its Bylaws are in place, and all that is needed to get that Super Neighborhood back up and running is to locate and organize volunteers.

Councilmember Nguyen stated that the homestead exemption for senior citizens (65 and over) has been doubled to \$160,000, saving those homeowners about \$250/per year in taxes.

If your neighborhood is having a problem with people parking on the grass in their yards, call his office and his staff can assist with prohibiting that activity in the neighborhood.

Johnnie Lozano thanked the Councilmember for his assistance with the vagrants/panhandlers.

IV. Old Business:

A. Minutes:

1. Approved the minutes from April, 2015, and May, 2015.

B. Committee Reports:

1. Beautification: V. Manning noted that storm sewer pipes are failing on both sides (north and south sides) of bayou by the Westside Trail. As a result, the trail has been damaged. The address is 34021/2 S. Briar Knoll Drive. The problem has been ongoing for 1nad ½ years. She stated that if the drainage project could be moved up in time, the problem could be addressed. Mr. Nguyen's chief of staff, Dylan, will look into it. Doug Parrish asked that the contact information for the Public Works person assigned to handle the problem be given to V. Manning, so she could contact him/her rather than continue to pursue it through the councilmembers.

2. S.N.A.P.: No report.

3. Flooding: No report.

4. Security: Johnnie Lozano reported that murders are up in Houston. He also stated that Maddie Provost with HPD has been of great assistance with the vagrants/panhandlers.

5. Webmaster: Doug Parrish stated that the individual who had agreed to be the SN's webmaster has changed his mind, so Tom Mikus has agreed to continue in that role until we find another webmaster. If you or anyone you know can act as the SN's webmaster, please let Doug know.

V. New Business:

1. Rhonda Sauter, with the City's Citizens Assistance, introduced the new inspector for our area. Her name is Karen Davidson. She is with Code Enforcement and covers from the Galleria area to Highway 6, an extensive area. She requested that any citizen needing help start by calling 311; she gets her projects through 311. An attendee noted that 2001 Dairy Ashford was not getting mowed. It is being looked at. Also, there is a tent city and a unit is going out to offer services to the tent city residents. The City is trying to clear it.

Ms. Davidson handles residential issues, not apartment or commercial problems. The only things she handles regarding apartments or commercial properties are graffiti, weeds, or grass. If there is a problem with those buildings, the issue gets assigned to habitability.

V. Manning mentioned an issue that is not getting address; she was seeking a ride-along with Ms. Davidson to see the problem, but Ms. Davidson is not available for personal ride alongs. R. Sauter will get with Myra to see what's going on with the problem

mentioned by V. Manning. Myra is assigned to City-wide area; Ms. Davidson is not replacing Myra.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:47 pm. Next meeting is July 8, 2015.