

GPA Meeting Minutes

Meeting #: G-01 Date: 10/20/24 Time: 4:00 pm

Location: Rm. 209, Eastman School of Music

Type of Meeting: General Scheduled

Participants: (see attached)

Speaker & Discussion: Mayor Malik Evans (with John Brach, Special Assistant to the Mayor)

Members had submitted questions to Mayor Evans a week prior to the meeting for him to address (see attached). Mayor Evans stated that our biggest problem in Rochester right now is domestic violence. Nine people have been killed in the past year due to domestic violence. Violence reduction was one of his goals in taking office. Quality of Life issues are also important. Illegal dirt bikes have been a problem. We do not chase dirt bikes because the drivers are speeding but they don't wear helmets and a chase would be too dangerous. We use drones to track them. The bikes are illegal and the city and Rochester Police Department have taken approximately 200 off the road this year. Car thefts of Hyundai and Kia cars escalated due to a Tik Tok challenge that demonstrated to kids how to hot wire these cars and steal them. However, car thefts are down due to the JEDS (Juvenile Enhanced Diversion Stabilization) program run in conjunction with Monroe County. In addition, the City of Rochester sued the Hyundai and Kia corporations based on the fact that the cars were not made with anti-theft devices. Gun crimes are the lowest they've been over a five-year period. The problem is that despite these crimes being down they have the overall effect of making people feel unsafe. The mayor explained that he has no tolerance for graffiti and litter and his office has focused on that as well. We have a partnership with "Walking for Rochester", which is an anti-litter campaign focused out of the neighborhood service centers. He explained that the New York State Department of Transportation is responsible for cleaning the graffiti on the Inner Loop as well as encampments located there. They are not doing a good job. Mayor Evans feels that city environments in general are associated with blight, graffiti, and drugs and he doesn't agree with this. There is a new initiative in the city, NIA (Neighbors In Action), which is a new community engagement initiative that will empower residents to come together and take purposeful action toward strengthening and improving neighborhoods. The acronym 'NIA' in Swahili means "purpose" and that's where the acronym comes from. It will increase the number of neighborhood associations and it will provide seed money and resources to improve neighborhoods. The goal is to have neighborhoods working in conjunction with city hall.

He mentioned Robert Putnam's book, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community", which examines the decline of social capital in the US since 1950.

The mayor announced that there are currently 11,000 people living downtown and that he wants to have 15,000 living downtown by 2026 or early 2027. With this growth other services will come--- groceries, pharmacy, etc. Mayor Evans is working to have old commercial buildings be re-developed as condos and/or co-ops; mixed market rate and affordable housing. There is more development coming downtown with one billion dollars being invested in the 14605 and 14611 zip code areas (no source

identified), building homes and not just apartments. The plan is for 70 new homes. He told us that when the city builds a new home, they provide grants and incentives to improve other homes in that same city block. The plan is to take care of the residences in the entire block so that a new home doesn't exist side-by-side with blighted homes or property.

The relationship between the city government and the County government is strong and allows for increased collaboration on programs that benefit both the city and the county. The county provides all of the social services. Charles Shumer, Majority Leader of the US Senate, has announced an award of 23 million dollars from the federal government to provide infrastructure related to traffic safety. The mayor's office has established a committee, the Vision Zero Program which has the goal of reducing traffic fatalities to zero with a 3-prong program: Improved Design (which reduces speed); Education (which includes stop run cameras for school buses) and Enforcement. The federal money will also address biking and walking safety. He stressed that the city is making huge environmental efforts including the installation of electric charging stations.

The mayor stressed that young people are very important to Rochester's future. We have a record number of youth between the ages of 14-20 currently working. We have a job training program for 12-13-year-olds.

He's excited about the Aqueduct Project which will transform our waterways and the High Falls State Park of which there are only 2-3 CITY state parks in NYS. The vendor for this project has just been selected. We are one of the only cities in the country that has waterfalls, a Great Lake, a river and a canal.

Mayor Evans mentioned the Inner Loop North as a major project which will transform 28 acres. In comparison the Inner Loop East project was comprised of 8 acres.

The city now has a housing attorney who will go after absentee landlords who don't maintain their properties and provide sub-standard living environments.

The other challenge facing both the city and the county is the opiate issue, which is played out on our streets. Overdoses in Rochester cause far more deaths than any other circumstance. He called the number 'scary'. For the hard-core street homeless drug users downtown, there are three factors to be dealt with: the mental health component, the unhoused component, and the substance abuse component. We currently have enough beds for every unhoused person in the city but persuading candidates to access the services is the more difficult problem, since using a shelter requires following rules, especially no drug use. We need permanent housing for street dwellers. The mayor feels we have the resources but we need to find ways to persuade people to use these resources.

The blighted buildings at the corner of Main St. and N. Clinton Ave. were a major priority of Mayor Evans. There were many complaints from neighbors. They were a terrible blight. The building had three owners. The city has been able to negotiate with the owners and then with a developer, and a brand-new structure will be on that site.

The downtown Innovation Program, the incubator space, in the Sibley Building is running out of space and needs to expand. The former Tent City building at the corner of Lyell and Dewey Avenues will be converted to housing.

A Question-and-Answer session followed the mayor's talk.

- A. The first question was about excessive motor vehicle noise with the suggestion that noise cameras be installed. Mayor Evans agreed that this is a priority since people are altering vehicles to create louder noises and that the problem is more acute downtown. Dealing with this issue will take initiative from the mayor's office since it will involve amendments to the City code to add a clearer and more enforceable motor vehicle noise ordinance. Fines should be raised so they are a real deterrent. Noise cameras might also be utilized. The mayor stated that this is a real priority and will be part of the Vision Zero initiative. The mayor was given the suggestion that fines need to be increased significantly so that they truly function as a deterrent. And they need to be enforced.
- B. Another question was about traffic mediation. Driving fast is a major issue as is the running of red lights and stop signs. The section of Scio St. and Main St. seems particularly bad. The worst street in the county is Lake Ave. (35 mph zone) where the median speed is clocked at 72 mph! Part of Lake Ave. is owned by NYS and part is owned by the city.
- C. The mayor was asked about the state money recently granted to the city for traffic safety since there isn't any indication that the money can be used for traffic cameras. His response was that these cameras are very important and they are effective. However, the use of red-light cameras (the mayor wants people to use the term "traffic cameras") requires legislation, both local and NYS. They need to be evenly distributed throughout the city. Traffic violence is off the charts. The traffic unit of RPD is not large enough to enforce the rules. We are down about 100 officers. We need a non-human element as a means of enforcement. Mayor Evans isn't interested in tax revenue; he wants people's behavior to change.
- D. A member recently noticed a PAC-TAC team on E. Main St. and asked if PAC-TAC was coming back. The mayor said it never really went away. PAC-TAC is Police and Citizens Together Against Crime and is a program where volunteers (usually students from MCC's Criminal Justice Program) walk Corn Hill and downtown areas, interacting with citizens and local businesses to prevent crime. If they notice criminal activity while on patrol, they can call the police to action using a radio connected directly to the police department and summon the police to investigate. It also helps with visibility as people are walking and being together. It was on the decline but we're trying to encourage it. Feed back was given to the mayor to suggest that the PAC-TAC team introduce themselves to citizens as they walk neighborhoods.
- E. The Inner Loop North project was the topic of questions and comments. With the fill-in, it is expected that fast, noisy traffic will be rerouted onto local streets, especially University Avenue. The mayor was asked what his thoughts are in light of what he's been talking about. Mayor Evans believes firmly that the Inner Loop should never have happened from a racial equity standpoint and he counseled that it is important to have community input on the design such that the impact of increased traffic, pollution, and traffic noise on University Ave. is reduced. He stressed that now is the time to be involved (the design phase) to have input on the project's overall design.

- F. Regarding the issue of homelessness, a member pointed out that Peace Village isn't moving forward, encampment 'villages' are being closed down and could there be a temporary location that provides services to homeless individuals? The response was that social workers and clinicians need to work overtime to work with these individuals one-on-one consistently so that within multiple attempts the individual can be persuaded to accept services and eventually be placed in a shelter. We have the bed capacity. The challenge is how our community-based organizations can move people from the street to shelters. It's making the connection between getting off the street and getting services. He assured the group that Peace Village is in fact moving along but again that the issue is encouraging people to actually access the services.
- F. A related concern was raised regarding the Inner Loop North project. The time is now to influence the project's outcomes and we have neighbors giving input on the project now, but there are so many different parties that have influence. If those people could hear your efforts, such as Vision Zero, your focus on pedestrian safety, traffic cameras, bike lanes, traffic calming, street safety, owner-occupied homes, etc., it would influence the decisions being made now. We are advocating for low buildings. We don't want to replace a moat with a wall. The member suggested to the mayor that his message needs to be delivered strongly to the parties making decisions about the project. Mayor Evans stated that the YMCA is very important.
- F. Concerning the dilapidated structures of the old Cadillac Hotel and the Richmond building, there will be a huge state investment in the Cadillac to refurbish it; the Richmond building is in process and he pointed out that a third building, the former Radisson Hotel is also in process.

The mayor was thanked for his presentation and presented with a set of picture notecards.

Treasurer's Report:

Rick McGrath gave the following report: As of April 30, 2024, our balance was eleven thousand two hundred seventy-six dollars (\$11,276.00). Of that, two thousand two hundred eighty-six dollars (\$2,286.00) was in the Art Fund and one thousand two hundred sixty dollars (\$1,260.00) was in the Legal Fund which was designated by neighbors specifically for legal expenses incurred to fight the Planned Parenthood protesters' noise. Fiscal year 2023-24 we had 58 individual members and 6 businesses and the current fiscal year, 2024-25, we have a total of 68 individuals and 4 business members. We took in this year two thousand one hundred twenty dollars (\$2,120). The current Art Fund is two thousand four hundred six dollars (\$2,406). The Legal Fund remained at one thousand two hundred sixty dollars (\$1,260.00). The September picnic, which was a social event for new members of the Association, brought in revenue of seven hundred ninety dollars (\$790.00) and had expenses of nine hundred eighty dollars (\$980.00), with the Association underwriting the one hundred ninety-dollar (\$190.00) difference. The current balance in the treasury is twelve thousand two hundred five dollars (\$12,205.00) of which thirty-seven hundred dollars (\$3,700.00) is committed (Art and Legal) and eight thousand five hundred and forty dollars (\$8,540.00) is uncommitted.

Committee Reports:

Beautification: (John Paris) Fall cleanup of planters will happen before Thanksgiving. John suggests that people who participated in planting in the spring can clean out the planters that they worked on. John would like people interested in helping with fall clean up to let him know. Sally Millick commented that she is very willing to help with storing bulbs for canna lilies over the summer.

Development: No report

Historical: (Sally Millick) No report

Membership: (Roz Goldman) We currently have 72 members which includes individuals and businesses. The summer membership drive was very successful with thanks to Dennis Kuo and Tom Fink for their assistance in distributing membership materials.

Public Safety & Code Compliance: (Steve Smith) Steve has been pursuing code compliance and zoning issues in the neighborhood particularly for three properties: 146 University Ave. (former Blessed Thistle Bakery); 20 Windsor St. (former Downstairs Cabaret Theater); and 57 Gibbs St (formerly office space). On University, #146 has had new electrical, doors, and new windows and since work is being done on the building, albeit slowly, it satisfies code compliance. Downstairs Cabaret Theater has open spaces where there used to be windows. Code compliance has told Steve that this is “the new normal”, that it takes several times longer for reconstruction of a building than it did four years ago due to a limited work force and the difficulty of getting building materials. The former window spaces which are now open and exposed to the elements are of concern. GPA has asked the SW Neighborhood Service Center to board up the windows to prevent further damage to the property and to keep people and animals out but so far, nothing’s been done.

Dan Rivera is our code compliance officer and there is a city property website, “Building Blocks” where you can get this information.

Our other concern is with mis-use of properties. There is a barber shop operating at 57 University Avenue which is currently zoned for office use. Focus Pregnancy Center, at 135 University Avenue, is also zoned for office use. The barber shop does not meet the criteria for zoning as an office, but the pregnancy center does. A violation has been posted for the barber shop, giving them 10 days to respond; it’s been 25 days and it appears there has been no response. Procedure is that if there is no response within the time frame they are fined. If they continue to not respond they get fined a larger amount. The pregnancy center is legal as an office, however several of the signs they have posted are in violation. They have also been cited as in violation and have been told to remove all signs except their office hours but no change is evident and no fine has been incurred.

Sandy Mayer pointed out that the attorney general of NYS has filed suit against all Focus Pregnancy Centers in the state for putting out misinformation. Steve was asked if we know what other businesses are located at 57 University Ave., but we have no way of knowing. Suzanne Mayer commented that there is evidence that the NE Neighborhood Center is much more responsive to its residents than SW and that there is a change in administration in the service centers’ administration. There is a survey we can take

that will indicate what residents want to see happen within the service centers, including the possibility of a downtown service center. The SWNSC has a huge geographic area to cover as well as center city. Steve Smith reported that he attended the SWSC's monthly meeting and many of the participants expressed concern over the lack of services being provided by the service centers. Apparently, there are no common procedures among the 4 service centers. Members are encouraged to take the survey.

Bob DiPaola told members that we are a small neighborhood and that we are going to be vigilant about what's happening here. He feels that there are nibbles on the edges of things breaking down and then bites and then deterioration. We won't let that happen.

Pam DiPaola reported on attending the Police Chief's PCIC meeting (Police Citizen Interaction Committee) where a presentation of the G.I.V.E. (Gun Involved Violence Elimination) program was given. This piggy backs on what the mayor was saying about the decrease in crime and gun violence in Rochester. The program is complex and the data is eye-opening. Pam will prepare a paper on the program and send it to members so they can become more familiar with the program. The statistics are undeniable. This has become a model program in the country. There are a number of initiatives and innovative ideas that Police Chief David Smith has introduced that have resulted in great outcomes in the city. These need to be publicized.

Open Discussion: James Tabbi presented the background on a draft petition to the Traffic Safety Board on traffic calming for the historic neighborhood which has GPA Executive Committee approval. He is seeking the support of membership. The goal is to increase pedestrian, bicycle and car safety on Grove Place Streets through safety enhancement. The enhancements are: 1) On Gibbs St., place raised crosswalks at the corners of Selden and Grove Streets to slow traffic to enhance pedestrian safety; 2) On Windsor & Grove Streets, install speed humps to decrease vehicular speeds including a raised crosswalk at Windsor/Selden corner with traditional speed humps at two locations on Windsor and three on Grove St.; and 3) on Selden St., place a stop sign at each end of the street with painted crosswalks. Feedback from members included: 1) having painted sidewalks on Selden St. changes the visual aesthetic, but approve the stop signs; 2) speed humps are a pain; 3) concern about snow plows with speed humps; 4) a goal of the Vision Zero program is to change people's attitudes and increase their respect when driving such that safety is increased; 5) what's the petition process. James thinks the best way is to get a petition with resident's signatures. Suzanne Mayer cautioned by explaining how residents on Scio St. applied for crosswalks on that street and their application was denied and that they were then restricted from reapplying for two years. She suggested that our petition state priorities for improvements, i.e., 'in year one we want....', 'in year two we want....', etc. to increase the likelihood of success in getting what we're asking for. James stated that if residents on Windsor St. do not want speed humps to please tell him and he'll remove them from the petition. A member asked if James had knowledge of the process that a petition would go through and asked if reasons had been given when denials have been issued. James did not know. A suggestion was made that perhaps University Ave could have a landscaped median installed as a result of the Inner Loop fill-in but one University Ave neighbor stated that it was difficult enough now to back out of their driveway and that a median would narrow the street further. Another suggestion was to present the transportation safety office with our issues and see what they recommend as they have had experience with these situations and would therefore be able to recommend solutions that they would support. A long-residing member of Grove Place stated that an

attempt was made in the past to have speed humps installed on Windsor St. but that it was unsuccessful, the reason given that there wasn't enough traffic on Windsor St. to justify the speed humps. James will redraft the petition taking the above comments into account. Some members signed before leaving the meeting.

Announcements:

- 1) The city brochure on leaf pick up and waste management has been mailed out to residents. In the past center city was omitted from the leaf pick up schedule but we've taken care of that and our leaf pickup is now scheduled for Nov. 11-15.
- 2) The Neighbors In Action (NIA) initiative is about to take off and they are looking for volunteers from neighborhoods. Anyone interested should contact Bob or Pam DiPaola.
- 3) We need someone for the social reception following the November meeting. Julie and Steve Smith volunteered.
- 4) We are expecting David Riley, Principal Transportation Specialist, to be our speaker at our November General Meeting, with a Q& A session. We'll be soliciting questions from membership for his presentation.
- 5) Bob DiPaola announced that regarding David Riley and the Inner Loop North, the Executive Committee was asked to support a letter from the city requesting an increase in funding for the ILN Project. The Committee couldn't reach consensus as there were some concerns raised. David is going to meet with Executive Committee to address the concerns so we can either support or not support the city's request for increased funding.
- 6) Scott Frame, Suzanne Mayer, and Dennis Kuo have done a great job as our representatives on the Inner Loop's Citizen Advisory Committee.
- 7) Suzanne Mayer announced that there will be a very important public meeting on November 7th at World of Inquiry School regarding land use for the ILN fill-in. There may be a focus group meeting prior to the Nov. 7 meeting and if so, Hinge Neighbors will notify us. Hinge Neighbors will be sending out a notice of the Nov. 7th meeting and Scott Frame will be sending a notice to GPA members.
- 8) GPA will be making a donation to the Eastman School of Music for the meeting space and technology they are allowing us to use.
- 9) Tom Fink congratulated the Executive Committee on the meeting space at the Eastman School and suggested that members in attendance talk to their neighbors and encourage them to come to meetings.
- 10) Brenda Porter announced that there is going to be a Variety Show at the Holiday gathering and asked anyone interested in participating to be in touch with her at Brendalporter@gmail.com.

Action Items/Decisions:

<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Status</u>
G01-01 Information on GIVE Program	PD	10/30/24	Open
G01-02 Follow up on code violations	SS	ongoing	In Process
G01-03 Revise petition for traffic calming	JT	11/17/24	In Process

Next Meeting: Sunday, November 17, 2024, 4 pm, room 209, Eastman School of Music
Speaker is David Riley, Principal Transportation Specialist, City of Rochester
Topic: Inner Loop North Project

Adjournment Time: 5:45 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Pam DiPaola
Secretary