

Westcott Neighborhood Association

Minutes of the April 14, 2025 Meeting

Board members attending: Sam Gruber (co-president). Galyn Murphy-Stanley, (co-president). Carol Johnson (vice-president), Kevin Montgomery (treasurer), Adam Felleman, Kim McCoy, Marilyn Zaleon

Other attendees: Chrissy Burd, Suzy MacPherson, Meredith Dodd, Paul Harvey, Judy Jerome, Andy Leahy, Doug Spangenberg, Common Councilor Corey William

On Zoom: Virginia Felleman, Sharon Sherman, Jeffrey Tamburo

Co-President Sam Gruber opened the meeting at 6:30, and all the attendees introduced themselves. The minutes from the annual meeting on March 9th were unanimously approved. Treasurer Kevin Montgomery gave a financial report and membership update. We've taken in \$450 in memberships and donations so far this year.

Sam Gruber recapped the annual meeting which was held at Raj Saffron House with Assemblywoman Pam Hunter as our featured guest and speaker. The sense of the board was that the meeting was a success. \$300.00 was spent, \$200 from our general fund and \$100 from an anonymous donation. Additionally, the wine for the event was supplied by Norm Roth of University Hill Realty.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The board then elected officers for 2025-26. Sam Gruber and Galyn Murphy Stanley were re-elected as Co-presidents, Carol Johnson was reelected vice president, and Kevin Montgomery as treasurer. We still need a permanent secretary. Sam noted that he will be stepping down from the board at the end of this year due to term limits so the board should consider a replacement. Sam said that he intends to continue to be active as a member of the organization.

BEAUTIFICATION

Andy Leahy and Adam Felleman reviewed plans for the Earth Day Clean-Up on April 26. Carol Johnson reported there was no news on the repair of the art box at the community garden on Harvard Place. Sam reported that work has resumed on the redesign and refurbishment of the kiosk on Harvard Place, and completion is hoped for by the end of this fiscal year.

EVENTS

Upcoming events were reviewed. The planning for all of these seems to be in progress. Volunteers were solicited to help with the Westcott Remembers biographies and program design. It was announced that no new names would be added to the list of those remembered after May 1st.

Summer poetry readings are planned again at Mom's Diner with the grant we received from TNT. Dates are not fixed but they probably will be the last Sunday of each month as in the past two years. Georgia Popoff and Eva Essi will work out the details.

The Halloween Dog Parade will take place on Saturday, October 26th and Second Line Syracuse has been contracted again to perform. Funding for the event comes from a grant from CNY Arts. Sam mentioned that it is necessary for us to get insurance. At present we do not have coverage for the board in case something goes awry.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Third District Common Councilor Corey Williams was present and presented an update on the current issues before the Common Council primarily relating to budget issues. He reported that the City is facing a \$34 million budget gap, and the Council has hired a CPA to analyze the mayor's proposed budget. The City has been considering a citywide property revaluation, which hasn't been done since the late 1990s, but are cautious about its potential impacts on different neighborhoods. The Council is also reviewing proposals for increased police drone usage, with concerns about privacy and surveillance. There has been an increase in police presence in the Westcott neighborhood, with foot patrols and unmarked cars making regular rounds.

NEW BUSINESS

We had a lengthy discussion about the future of the Westcott Street Business District and particularly about the possibility of having winter holiday decorations later this year with invited guests Suzy MacPherson, Business Corridor Manager of the Department of Neighborhood and Business Development, City of Syracuse & Doug Spangenberg, Proprietor of the Westcott Barbershop and Salon on Westcott.

Suzy and Doug updated the board and membership about their efforts to organize a new Westcott Street Business Association and specifically to engage local business owners and commercial landlords in efforts to procure lighting through a city program but the details for this have to be submitted before the end of this fiscal year. It is hoped that by uniting around a "feel good" activity such as improved lighting for the business district local retailers will be able to create a regular communication network that might evolve into a more formal association. The tree lighting program would be consistent throughout the area, connecting businesses and enhancing the neighborhood's appearance. The lighting would be on a timer and could change colors during the winter months.

In general, it was noted that the health of the Westcott Street business district at this time is pretty good with only one noticeable vacancy - that of the former Dorians. Some of the difficulties in organizing the businesses were highlighted, and past attempts were reviewed. The discussion also touched on the transformation of the street, with a focus on increasing occupancy and the role of local services. WNA suggested the need for further outreach and collaboration with other businesses.

There are still many pressures on local businesses ranging from vandalism, and the ever-present possibility of rising rents and/or property taxes. There was a sense of the board and membership that this was a good time for the community to work with the business district leaders to create a vibrant and connected neighborhood.

Sharon Sherman discussed the ongoing negotiations regarding the Dorian's property, stating that there is no deal on the table yet. She also mentioned her plans to meet with Ted Peterson, the owner of downtown decorations, to discuss potential holiday decorations for the city. Sharon emphasized the need for someone to install and uninstall the banners, even though the poles are city-owned. She also expressed interest in exploring more holiday decoration ideas. It was noted that these separate efforts should be coordinated.

It was expressed that it would be good to have businesspeople join the board and to collaborate more actively on various projects. The Board expressed interest in connecting the street with the residential neighborhood, as is already done with an increasing number of community events. Sam emphasized the importance of having a unified voice for the neighborhood and encouraging businesses collectively or individually to sponsor projects and events.

The meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.

