

Minutes from RNA Meeting on September 13, 2017

Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building

Room 159 (EOC) at 5:30 PM

Committee Members in Attendance

Nicole L. Harris, Vice-Chair

Ellie Rigby, Secretary

Barbara Evans

Byron L. Hamlar

Kate Lewis

David Parr, Jr.

Dwight O. Steele, Jr.

Committee Members Absent

Antwyne Calloway

Cindy C. Pasternak

Johnny Williams, Chair

Guests

John Garland – Roanoke City Councilman

Christina Hatch, Citizen

Shawn Hunter - The Peacemakers, Inc.

Richard Chubb - The Peacemakers, Inc.

Mignon Chubb-Hale - The Peacemakers, Inc.

Mr. Robert Gravely - The Peacemakers, Inc.

Durant Bonds - The Peacemakers, Inc.

Bob Cowell - Roanoke City Manager

Freeda Cathcart, President – Grandin Court Neighborhood Association

Welcome to Members and Guests

Vice-Chair Harris called the meeting to order at 5:42 and welcomed guests.

Reading and Approval of Minutes

Copies of the August 9, 2017 RNA meeting minutes were distributed for review Ms. Evans made a motion to accept the August 2017 RNA Meeting Minutes and Ms. Lewis seconded the motion. Hearing no further discussion, the August 2017 meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Guest Presentations

- **Freeda Cathcart – Grandin Court Neighborhood Association**

Ms. Cathcart attended to express her neighborhood's concern over the sale by the city of the Fishburn Park historic caretaker's house. She recommended City Council members take into account and attend ethics a training modual that is part of the Virginia State Code. Ms. Cathcart noted Lora Katz is on the Planning Commission and is offering to purchase the property for \$10. She stated this is a conflict of interest and raises ethical issues and the appearance of impropriety noting there needs to be an opportunity for public hearings. Contrary to what was expressed at the City Council meeting by Councilman Bill Bepitch and Councilman Ray Ferris, she noted the neighborhood association has been involved with the roof repair and applied for a grant to paint the exterior.

Ms. Cathcart stated it is not the neighborhood's responsibility to take care of the City's property. As the Grandin Court Neighborhood Association is not a 501C3, Ms. Cathcart noted she had reached out to the Roanoke Valley

Preservation Foundation (RVPF) for a Memorandum of Understanding so that the association could apply for grant funds to which the RVPF agreed. She noted the association had collected over 600 signatures for the city not to sell the land as the petitioners do not want the historic property to become a private residence. Ms. Cathcart advised that the neighborhood association would prefer that the City lease it as a commercial space noting they want the city to engage with the community. Ms. Cathcart advised that the Roanoke Fire Department had reached out to the association for input on the changes being considered for the fire station located in the Grandin Village and that this should serve as a model for how City Council can take community input. Ms. Cathcart also noted that Assistant City Manager Brian Townsend told City Council that the only responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was for operations to which she advised is not in line with their mission statement.

Vice-Chair Harris asked for a point of clarification regarding the President's Council voting against the sale of the property. Ms. Cathcart advised the Grandin Court Neighborhood Association and Wasena Neighborhood Forum, Inc. unanimously voted against the sale of the Fishburn Park historic caretaker's house. She advised there is a public meeting scheduled for Monday evening, September 18, 2017 about the sale.

- **Shawn Hunter – The Peacemakers, Inc.(with Richard Chubb, Mignon Chubb Hale, Mr. Robert Gravely, Durant Bonds)**

Mr. Hunter noted there are currently 25 members of The Peacemakers, Inc. and he introduced those accompanying him at the meeting. He advised that their Mission is to stop the violence in the city. Mr. Hunter stated they have a community patrol to target high crime areas utilizing two (2) vans. He noted they believe that their presence itself helps to prevent crime as they are trained in conflict resolution, first aid, and CPR. Mr. Hunter stated he is certified by the Department of Justice to teach classes and that their headquarters is located in the old firehouse on 24th Street NW and that they are a 501c3 organization. Mr. Hunter stated one of their goals is to raise money to give young people a stipend to help patrol high crime areas. He noted there has been an uptick in violent crime in the Northwest area of Roanoke and that most of it is black on black crime. Mr. Hunter advised the organization believes that the answer is within the community and that the volunteer men and women making up The Peacemakers on the street are properly trained. He noted The Peacemakers are working with the city as they have a relationship with the Police Department and are trying to prevent young people from getting caught up in the Judicial System. He noted he was in jail for 21 years for an offence committed when he was 16. The Peacemakers do not look for any self-aggrandizement as they only want the star city to shine. They are partnering with Garland Properties to help people find jobs and affordable housing. Mr. Hunter noted they try to find abandoned or dilapidated properties so that they can revitalize the properties and rent them at affordable rates to members of the communities who are housed in shelters thus trying to break the cycle of people who turn to crime. They are also working with Feeding America to make certain people do not go hungry.

Mr. Parr asked how The Peacemakers training program was developed. Mr. Hunter noted he had worked for TAP for three (3) years as an Employment Specialist and had also gone through training with the Department of Justice. He noted the training provided is modeled both on these. He noted he as a former professional boxer he also teaches self-defense and they have partnered with area doctors who train their members in First Aid and CPR. Mr. Hunter noted they are looking for volunteers with computer experience and are also building a Board of Directors for the organization as they want the organization to be a permanent fixture in the community so that they can open chapters in other areas of the state. He concluded by saying community policing can help prevent the violence that is in our cities.

Mr. Parr asked about the abandoned houses and how they renovate them. Mr. Hunter responded they look around the neighborhood and research the properties on the city's GIS to determine who the owners are. He approaches the owners and then finds investors willing to buy the properties and then partners with Garland Properties and other developers to rehab and turn over the properties. He noted he bought the old firehouse located on 24th St NW and invited the RNA to come and look at the building.

Mr. Parr asked how the RNA can be of help to The Peacemakers. Mr. Hunter responded he needs help getting the word out about their organization, help getting others involved with it, help finding volunteers for community clean-up initiatives, and help extending the reach of The Peacemakers into other neighborhoods. He reiterated they canvas the neighborhoods in the two vans and the gasoline is purchased through private donations. He said their one year anniversary will be on September 24th, 2017

Mr. Garland noted he started helping The Peacemakers a year ago as he grew up on the 11th Street corridor in Northwest. He stated his company Garland Properties now owns property on the corner of 11th Street and Moorman Avenue NW that is being renovated to be used as a combination of commercial and residential purposes. He suggested the RNA could share information for The Peacemakers through the RNA Facebook page. He noted there is a mural dedication on 11th Street from 3:30 to 7:00 on Sunday, September 17th, 2017 as they secured a local female artist to paint a mural about family and community on the side of his company's building. He noted there will also be free food and music. Mr. Garland advised The Peacemakers have meetings every Tuesday evening from 7-8:00pm for the basic training and they canvas city neighborhoods every Sunday evening. He noted they are trying to stop the loss of life as opposed to dealing with drug offences. Mr. Hunter advised The Peacemakers would be having their one-year anniversary celebration on November 17th, 2017 from 6-9pm. at the Holiday Inn on Ordway Drive NW in Roanoke noting the keynote speaker would be Dr. Willie Wilson from Washington DC.

Mr. Gravely noted one house, one community, one block at a time is from where you get an evolution of change for only then will the whole community follow. Mr. Chubb said that one thing that he likes to do is to reach back and help a neighbor or business by talking to people on their level as opposed to from a pulpit. He stated that the Housing Act of 1949 hit Roanoke in 1955 and that he was hoping The Peacemakers can reach black citizens and help them see what happened in Roanoke by design noting we need to let people know more about our local history for without knowing where we are from we can not know where we are going. Ms. Chubb-Hale noted she had been hired by Roanoke Parks and Recreation three years ago to put together a Roanoke Black History Tour. She noted the next tour is scheduled for on October 24th, 2017 from 9:30am to 1:00 or 1:30pm and to call 540-853-1027 to register. She noted tour participants will be meeting at the Gainsboro Library.

Ms. Evans suggest to Mr. Hunter that Firepower Tech will teach The Peacemakers how to use pepper spray at no cost and gave Mr. Hunter the contact information for that company.

- **Heather Lyne – Roanoke City Arts Commission, Virginia Tech**

Ms. Lyne noted she is talking to everyone about public art. She advised between January and April of 2017 she had submitted proposals for public art on the greenway on behalf of the Roanoke Arts Commission. She noted she had recently received her Masters from Virginia Tech and had received a small grant to determine the need for public art along the greenway. She advised she had put together a map of the neighborhoods along the greenway and had developed a survey to inform the Arts Commission about how people feel about the greenway and whether they are satisfied with the public art. She noted the art can be a functional piece such as creative lighting or a bike rack, or it can be more like the traditional pieces found around the city. She noted she is trying to determine which neighborhood is in the most need with the hope if she gets an additional grant then she can make the pop up art project more permanent. She distributed a survey about public art along the greenways in Roanoke for the RNA members to complete and noted there is also a survey monkey version online of the same survey she distributed.

Reports of Special Interest

- **Neighborhood Reports**

Lakewood Neighborhood Watch

Ms. Lewis noted she has not heard back from Lakewood Neighborhood Watch as to their status.

Neighbors in South Roanoke

Ms. Lewis advised Neighbors in South Roanoke have not met yet.

Wildwood Civic League

Vice-Chair Harris noted the Wildwood Civic League did not have an August meeting but they did have a picnic for our first responders. She noted their next meeting is scheduled in November.

Starview heights Neighborhood Watch

Vice-Chair Harris also advised that Starview Heights Neighborhood Watch was having a problem with a single-family home on Mountain Avenue SE. She noted the police explained that they had been able to address some of the issues. She also advised Sheriff Tim Allen spoke about his current candidate run for sheriff. She stated he talked about the recent phone scams taking place and gun safety concerns and provided free gun locks. Vice-Chair Harris also noted he talked about Roanoke's opiate addiction advising 133 overdoses had been reported resulting in 18 fatalities occurring thus far this year.

Airlee Court Neighborhood Watch Association

Vice-Chair Harris advised the Association met on Sept 5, 2017 and reported they have very low crime reports in that area. A representative from Damsel in Defense came to talk about defense weapons, especially for women. There was only one issue with noise at one particular house in the neighborhood reported.

Riverland/Walnut Hill Neighbors

Vice-Chair Harris advised Sheriff candidate Mac Westland attended and talked about his campaign including the importance of focusing on the safety of inmates in jail.

Southeast Action Forum, Inc.

Vice-Chair Harris advised Sheriff candidate Bill Billingsly spoke about his campaign for sheriff. She also noted Heather Lyne and John Garland were in attendance. She advised Andrea Garland from Roanoke's Transportation Division spoke about the new crosswalks planned on Dale Ave SE. A discussion took place regarding a community garden possibility for either Fallon Park or Morningside Park and Vice-Chair Harris also advised the Forum has started a "We Noticed Campaign" where they are recognizing people in the neighborhood who are keeping their homes nice.

Belmont Neighborhood Association

Vice-Chair Harris advised the Belmont Neighborhood Association would not be meeting until October 9th.

Historic Gainsboro Preservation District

Mr. Steele advised the Historic Gainsboro Preservation District had recently held their first meeting since summer vacation noting they had a representative from Roanoke City give a summary report of crime in the neighborhood. He noted that crime was down although there had been some burglaries and shootings. He also advised the group discussed electing officers which took up the rest of the meeting time.

Northwest Neighborhood Improvement Council (NNIC)

Mr. Steele advised NNIC with Ms. Hairston would be meeting at the Burrell Center next week.

Gainsborough SW Community Organization, Inc.

Mr. Steele noted that as prior RNA member Brenda Allen was no longer attending the organization's meetings that he is hoping to get on track with those meetings

Grandin Village Business Association

Mr. Steele noted a scheduling conflict prevented him from attending their meetings on the first Wednesday of each month at the Grandin CoLab. Mr. Parr volunteered to begin attending their meetings in his place.

Fairland Civic Organization

Ms. Rigby stated she was unable to attend their meeting due to a scheduling conflict.

Wasena Neighborhood Forum

Ms. Rigby noted the Forum does not have a meeting scheduled until September.

Melrose-Orange Target Area (MOTA) Meeting

Ms. Rigby noted there were mostly participating organization stakeholders in attendance at the recent meeting as opposed to community members. She noted the Kiwanis Club was there and advised they were planning on building a playground in the area over the next two years. She advised they are looking for sites and developing a survey for neighborhood residents to give feedback noting the playground will target youth ages 6 to 12. Ms. Rigby stated Ms. Liz Ackley from Invest Health presented their survey results about the need for a grocery store in the neighborhood noting the ideal location was determined to be around 24th Street NW and Melrose Avenue NW. She noted Ms. Ackley advised they wanted to be certain they are not treading on the ideas of anyone already planning for a grocery store in the neighborhood. Mr. Keith Holland with the City of Roanoke also announced that the Emerging Leaders in Architecture will be presenting their plans for mixed-use, commercial, and streetscape modifications for the Melrose-Orange Target Area at 6pm on Monday, October 9th.

Miller Court Neighborhood Alliance

Ms. Evans advised the Alliance did not meet.

Grandin Court Neighborhood Association

Ms. Evans advised she had missed the recent meeting however she did reach out to President Freeda Cathcart to advise her of the issues noted with the banner across from Fishburn Park, more specifically how someone had painted "stop Lora Katz" on the banner. She noted when Ms. Cathcart advised the banner was purchased privately but she recommended that the Association take the banner down especially as the logo for the Grandin Court Neighborhood Association and website are on it. Ms. Evans also noted the sign is also misleading because it says "Don't Develop Fishburn Park". She noted the city also has a sign ordinance to which Mr. Clement advised he would touch base with the city's Permit Center and/or Code Enforcement.

Raleigh Court Neighborhood Association

Ms. Evans advised the Association would be meeting next week.

Norwich Neighborhood Alliance

Ms. Evans noted the Alliance met on Monday, September 12th and had about 18 people in attendance. She noted the community raised several problems including a known drug house and another one that is suspicious. They also have a problem with people speeding on Roanoke Avenue SW and advised there are not enough street lights along the street as it is very dark. Ms. Evans also noted she would be reporting a downed tree on Roanoke Avenue SW once she determines whether it is located on public or private property.

Ms. Evans also noted Alliance members had questions about the Walker Foundry and the greenway issue as well as Black Dog Salvage's alleged satellite location. She noted they raised concerns with Black Dog Salvage dumping boulders in the parking lot at this location and the runoff this may cause. Ms. Evans noted she planned to become more involved in that neighborhood. She also advised the Alliance had concerns about a business located on Bridge Street SW that is also being operated as a night club. She noted they hoped someday it may be turned into a laundromat or possibly, when the greenway is completed, there might be an opportunity for a mixed-use business that is greenway friendly.

Greater Grandview Area Neighborhood Watch Association

Mr. Parr noted the Association recently held a neighborhood cleanup and participated in a neighborhood community walk with a focus of being out there and being seen. He advised the association is working on neighbors knowing that the association exists and the resources that they can offer. Mr. Parr also advised they recently completed a newsletter and the association is a dedicated and active organization.

Mr. Hamlar advised he would be interested in attending the Wildwood Civic League and Airlee Court Neighborhood Watch Association meetings in the future.

Reports of Officers – Standing Committees

- **Report from Garland Neighborhood Blight Committee**

Vice-Chair Harris advised she and Ms. Pasternak have been working closely on the committee with Steven Niamke, president of the Melrose-Rugby Neighborhood Forum, Inc. She noted on Saturday, October 14th the committee plans to partner with the Forum to walk the neighborhood to get feedback on a survey. She advised they need a total of 100 volunteers and they also have some people from Virginia Tech participating. The next step is to work out the details for that day, such as how and when to do volunteer training. Vice-Chair Harris advised there will be groups of 4 or 5 people each from the various stakeholder groups involved on the committee. She extended an invitation to other RNA members to be a part of the Committee to which Ms. Evans and Ms. Rigby responded they would like to be involved.

- **Report from the Welcome Roanoke Mailing Committee**

Ms. Rigby advised she had received a quote of \$1600 to print a color insert containing RNA-related information to be placed in either the City of Roanoke Treasurers Office or the Western Virginia Water Authority future mailings. The RNA decided it will be best to pursue a direct mailing to be added in with the Treasurer's Office Personal Property Tax bills. Mr. Clement advised he may be willing to partner on a mailing since it is not in the RNA's current budget this year to do so. He also advised he would send the RNA information regarding what the Office of Neighborhood Services includes in the Welcome Roanoke packet to new home buyers.

- **Report from 2018 RNA Budget Committee**

Ms. Lewis advised a proposed budget was presented to the City Council as part of the RNA's State of the Neighborhoods presentation noting the RNA asked for additional money for Council's consideration. She advised the purpose of the budget increase was to try and increase RNA recognition by Roanoke citizens noting the RNA could pursue a logo and additional promotional materials. Vice-Chair Harris noted the RNA still needs to vote on the RNA budget for the current fiscal year.

Unfinished Business

- **Update Regarding Annual RNA State of the Neighborhoods Report – Harris**

Vice-Chair Harris advised she had presented the report to City Council during their September 5th 2pm meeting. She stated the feedback received from City Council was good noting they would like to hear from the RNA more regularly and suggested the RNA identify more opportunities to present to City Council when big topics need to be covered.

New Business

- **Creation of New Survey Regarding Disposal of Properties in Public Parks**

Vice-Chair Ms. Harris advised she does not have a survey started yet noting the RNA should be looking for community suggestions as to how blighted public properties should be disposed of.

- **RNA Participation on Youth Services Citizen Board**

Ms. Rigby advised she had spoken with City Councilwoman Price about involving the RNA with the city's Youth Services Citizen Board. She noted the Board meets on the fourth Monday of each month at 5:00pm at the Gainsboro Library. Mr. Steele offered to attend those meetings on behalf of the RNA.

Open Forum/Announcements

- **Proposed RM-1 Zoning Amendment**

Ms. Lewis advised she had created an online poll for neighborhood presidents regarding the proposed RM-1 zoning amendment. She also advised the Presidents' Council had met and discussed it at a meeting several months ago and

upon taking a vote the majority were not in favor of the amendment. Ms. Lewis also advised Roanoke Planning Building and Development Director Chris Chittum had attended several RNA meetings to discuss the proposal as well. Vice-Chair Harris recommended the RNA get concrete feedback before taking a position as she understood City Council would be considering the issue at their November meeting. The RNA agreed that getting more concrete feedback would be useful for reporting to City Council.

- **2017 Neighborhood Award Nominations**

Mr. Clement advised the deadline for award nominations for this year's 2017 Neighborhood Awards Celebration is October 20th. He suggested the RNA will need to create a 2017 Neighborhood Award Nominations Review Committee to review the nominations and determine the winners of each award category noting past committees had been comprised of 2-4 RNA members and sometimes a City Council member. Ms. Lewis put forth a motion to create a 2017 Neighborhood Award Nominations Review Committee to review the 2017 neighborhood award nominations received and decide the winners of each award category. Mr. Hamlar seconded the motion. Hearing no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Parr and Ms. Evans volunteered to serve on the committee with Mr. Clement providing city staff support. The 2017 awards will be presented at the 5th Annual City Neighborhoods' 'Harvesting of the Fruits' Potluck Dinner and Awards Celebration on November 10th at 6pm. Ms. Evans stated she would assist in helping to set-up the tables for the event and would volunteer to oversee the kitchen as she enjoyed it last year.

- **FY2018-2019 Neighborhood Development Grant Program**

Mr. Clement reminded the RNA to begin thinking about what changes they would like to see incorporated in the upcoming FY 2018-19 Neighborhood Development Grant Program as the program would be rolled out on Thursday November 9, 2017 as part of the city's FY2018-19 HUD Community Resources CDBG public meeting. Mr. Parr put forth a motion to create a RNA Neighborhood Development Grant Application Review Committee to review the FY2018-2019 Neighborhood Development Grant applications received and decide which projects to fund and determine how much funding each project would receive. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hamlar. Hearing no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Parr, Ms. Lewis, and Mr. Hamlar volunteered to serve on the committee with Mr. Clement to provide city staff support. Mr. Clement advised the applications would be due by mid-January 2018, reviewed by the committee shortly thereafter, with a final recommendation made to the RNA for their approval during their February 2018 meeting.

Closed Session

Per a communication received from Chair Williams requesting that RNA convene in a Closed Meeting to discuss two (2) vacancies appointed by RNA, pursuant to Section 2.2-3711(A)(1), Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, Vice-Chair Harris requested that the RNA convene in a Closed Meeting to discuss vacancies appointed by the RNA. The RNA unanimously agreed and hearing no further discussion, the meeting was recessed for the closed session. All guests excused themselves.

Meeting Reconvened

Following the closed session, Vice-Chair Harris reconvened the meeting.

Adjournment

Vice-Chair Harris adjourned the meeting at 7:37pm.