**Southeast Urbana Neighborhood Association Annual Meeting**

**Wednesday, May 27, 2015 7 – 9 PM**

**St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Philo Road**

**Present:** 93 attendees signed in.

Representatives from the Urbana Free Library and iTV3 set up informational

tables.

**SUNA Business Meeting**

At 7:10 pm Kathy Wallig called the meeting to order.

Following welcome remarks, the Financial Report was presented and attention drawn to how membership dues are used.

The slate of volunteers for SUNA Coordinators and Steering Committee 2015-16 was presented and any other nominations invited from the floor. The slate was accepted as follows:

Coordinators: Pauline Mak, Theresa Michelson, Kathy Wallig.

Steering Committee: Graeme Gilmore, Eileen Kohen, Marilyn Michal, Neil Parthun, Jill Peckham, Mary Kay Pleck, Barak Rosenshine, Nancy Uchtmann.

A Steering Committee proposal to amend Article V. B of SUNA’s By-laws was introduced. The amendment reduced the required number of meetings of the Steering Committee from a minimum of 4 times a year to 2 times a year, more often as deemed necessary. The reason for the change was twofold. First, the Committee found it could adequately conduct business by electronic communication and meet only once in the fall, and once in the spring. Second, fewer required meetings would make it easier to encourage more volunteers to serve on the Steering Committee. Kathy made the motion to amend the By-laws as explained. No questions or discussion followed. The motion passed by voice vote of eligible members present.

Theresa Michelson next spoke about an issue the Steering Committee had begun to proactively address, namely neighborhood quality of life. The first step taken was to compile a quick reference list of situations impacting negatively on one’s property and immediate environment along with appropriate city phone numbers to call to report city code violations. This list was made available to all present and will be posted on SUNA’s website. A city pamphlet, “Common Code Compliance Reference”, with more detailed descriptions of those violations was also distributed that evening.

The final item of business was to point out the informational tables set up by Urbana Free Library and iTV3 representatives.

At 7:20 the business meeting ended. Remarks by elected and appointed officials followed.

**Mayor Laurel Prussing** noted the “nice turnout”. She talked about her administration’s

working philosophy of respect for different viewpoints as the basis of communication and cooperation among the various city departments. The Budget was the focus of her remarks. Times were rough, she said, pointing to financial difficulties caused by the Carle tax exemption. But budget priorities and goals continue to be to provide the same high level of services in such areas as METCAD emergency services and infrastructure repairs and upgrades. Budget measures will include increases in taxes for food and beverage, and natural gas deliveries. In addition there will be cuts in some expenditures.

**Ward 7 Alderwoman Diane Marlin** reviewed the city’s long-standing dispute with Platinum Group Properties owner Paul Zerrouki over the deteriorating conditions of his apartment buildings in the area of SUNA bounded by Colorado, Philo, Mumford and Cottage Grove. Since 2009 aggressive measures have been passed to deal with repeated building code violations, incomplete and delayed repairs, and failure to pay fines. Several of his buildings have been condemned. Finally, in 2014 the city filed a lawsuit against Mr. Zerrouki. Several court hearings have already been held, the next one scheduled for June 23, 2015. In the meantime, Marine Bank of Springfield has foreclosed on his 3 properties on Silver Street.

Diane recognized Max Mahalek, graduate student intern in Community Development, for his survey of SUNA residents, particularly those in the neighborhood area impacted by Platinum Group properties and other rental complexes, on issues related to public safety, infra-structure, and zoning.

**Paul Poulosky,** Urbana School Board Subdistrict 6 representative, gave an update on facility improvements. Those at King, Prairie, and Leal were completed. At the High School and Thomas Paine they were ongoing. Yankee Ridge is next on the list for improvements. Upgrades there are due to start in 2016 and will include a new roof, air conditioning, a multipurpose room, a kitchen, and a fine arts room. He reminded us that all these capital improvements, the bids for which have come in under estimates, are funded by the 1% sales tax approved several years ago. No added property taxes were required.

**Sylvia Morgan,** Deputy Chief, Urbana Police Department, stood in for Chief Connolly. She expressed appreciation of the efforts to encourage residents to be proactive in calling city departments to report a known violation. She then introduced other police officials present.

**Lt. Joel Sanders** talked about organizing a Neighborhood Watch Group as another form of neighborhood involvement. He urged residents to take advantage of the Vacation Watch program to keep property and neighbors secure.

**Lt. Bob Fitzgerald** provided crime statistics citywide and for the SUNA area. He indicated that a call to alert the police when and where an incident is occurring helps to build a case against an offender.

**Lt. Bryant Seraphin** gave information on making a call to Crimestoppers. He clarified

that a person can remain anonymous calling in a tip, but at a later time might have to go public as a witness. He reported success in making arrests for 3 recent bank robberies on Philo Road. He also noted that there was close cooperation between Urbana and Champaign police.

**Libby Tyler**, Community Development Director, updated the status of specific properties:

~ the project to build townhouses/apartments on the former Windsor Swim Club site is

still seeking finances.

~ proposals were out to develop the Pomology tract for commercial uses.

~ improvements to Castillian Court on Philo Road were underway.

~ at Southgate the site formerly occupied by Rulers is to be reoccupied soon.

~the Villas at Clark-Lindsey were near completion.

In other news, the increase in new buildings and in remodeling existing ones is expanding the tax base. Upcoming city events were mentioned.

Libby introduced Max Mahalek. She said recommendations based on his findings will contribute to planning changes in the SUNA area covered by his research. A summary of some of his major findings was provided in a handout. Full results of the study are available from Max at [mrmahalek@urbanaillinois.us](mailto:mrmahalek@urbanaillinois.us).

**Bill Gray,** Public Works Director, described ongoing and future road projects:

~ Delay in resuming Windsor Road, Philo to Race, reconstruction was caused by sewer collapse at Philo and Windsor. The project, including the installation of traffic signals at Race and Windsor, should be completed by Labor Day 2015.

~ Work on High Cross Road was also delayed by utility work, weather, and sub-pavement reconstruction. This project is now underway.

~ Concrete patching on Florida, east of Philo Road, will be done in the fall. Extending Florida to High Cross Road depends on Menard’s intentions.

~ iTV3 has begun to wire some areas for high speed internet expansion.

**Tim Bartlett,** Executive Director, Urbana Park District, said that, at the State level, the District’s tax advisory body was alerting legislators in Springfield to Park needs. At the local level, Crystal Lake Park is due for rehabilitation work; upgrades at Larson Park were completed. Mention was made of the District’s trail master plan, and its collaboration with Champaign County Forest Preserves on developing the Kickapoo Trail.

Following the remarks from officials, Kathy thanked Pastor Bob Rasmus of St. Matthew Lutheran Church for allowing SUNA to use the Fellowship Hall for the meeting.

**Questions and Comments**

Q. Where are Platinum Group properties located?

Diane listed apartment buildings on Silver St., Philo Road, Fletcher Dr., Colorado

Ave., and Florida Ave.

Comment: An audience member thanked the Mayor and city officials for all their efforts.

Q. What can the city do to help iTV3 speed up its work?

A company representative said the city has been very helpful, but residents have been

reluctant to talk to iTV people who come knocking at their door. Neighbors talking

to neighbors would help the process.

Q. Mayor Prussing was asked to comment on a News-Gazette report regarding the audit

on fiscal year 2014 financial reports.

She said that a new outside auditor was looking into the problems. Solutions

are already underway and new accounting software will replace the old software

system which was part of the problem.

Q. What caused flooding at Anderson and Vine during last year’s heavy rains?

Bill Gray explained that drainage from Anderson to Florida was blocked. During

heavy rains crews do go out to clear debris. Ideally, if residents were to adopt a drain

and keep it clean of debris, this could alleviate the problem. In cases of backyard

flooding, call Public Works.

Q. Zillow gives Urbana schools a rating of 2, 3 and 4 out of 10. Isn’t this a deterrent to

anyone looking into coming to Urbana?

Paul Poulosky said he was not familiar with the Zillow rating and would bring this

information to the School Board.

Several comments followed on this question.

An audience member said: 4 out of 5 have negative perceptions of Urbana –

high taxes, lack of businesses, high fees for rental housing violations – and won’t

consider locating in Urbana.

Libby responded that housing sale is up. Some tax rate increases were due to

the Carle tax exemption. Rental registration policy helps to create a healthy

housing stock.

Mayor Prussing indicated that new businesses started up even during the

recession and the Enterprise Zone was extended to include new construction

of single family homes.

Comment: Billboards are distracting.

Mayor Prussing said the city follows guidelines laid out in federal billboard

legislation. However, her goal is to reduce the number of billboards in the city.

No further questions or comments followed. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Pauline Mak