**Southeast Urbana Neighborhood Association Annual Meeting**

**Wednesday, May 24, 2017 7 – 9 PM**

**St. Matthew Lutheran Church**

**MINUTES**

**Attendance** 102 signed in

Theresa Michelson called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

**SUNA BUSINESS MEETING**

Theresa noted the large attendance despite the change in how the meeting was publicized this year. Curb signs were placed throughout the neighborhood instead of the past practice of mailing postcards and distributing flyers door to door. A show of hands confirmed that the curb signs were effective.

Kathy Wallig recounted SUNA’s activities in the past year

~ participation as community representative in C-U Fresh Start Call -in

~ participation in working with Community Development on the zoning overlay

project

~ participation in working with city of Urbana in planning the 2016 Regional

Neighborhood Network Conference

~ participation in the Peace Walk and neighborhood clean up at Silver/Vawter

~ Colorado Ave. clean up in Oct. 2016 and May 2017

~ attending hearings, including travel to Springfield, for the Appellate Court

case re city of Urbana vs Platinum LLC

~ meeting with other neighborhood groups’ coordinators to discuss shared

concerns, leading to the reconvening of the Mayor’s Safety Task Force

SUNA ‘s Financial Report was presented and accepted.

Theresa presented the slate of volunteers for Coordinators and Steering Committee

Members:

NW Quadrant: Tim Montague

SW Quadrant: Graeme Gilmore, Eileen Kohen, Pauline Mak, Nancy Uchtmann

NE Quadrant: Marilyn Michal, Theresa Michelson, Neil Parthun, Mary Kay Pleck

SE Quadrant: Jill Peckham, Kathy Wallig

The slate was accepted by voice vote. Theresa called for additional volunteers to join the Steering Committee.

The business meeting ended at 7:20 PM.

Kathy introduced the panel of elected and appointed officials who would give reports, and explained the procedure. Questions from SUNA residents were sent to the Coordinators. Priority was given to questions directly focused on SUNA over those with citywide concerns. The questions were passed on in advance to the panelists.

**Elected and Appointed City Officials**

Tim Bartlett, **Exec. Director of Urbana Parks**

Paul Poulosky, **Urbana School District #116 Representative**

Jared Miller, **Alderman Ward 7**

Sylvia Morgan, **Chief, Urbana Police Dept.**

(with Deputy Chief Bryant Seraphin, Lt. Richard Surles, Lt. Joel Sanders)

Bill Gray, **Director of Public Works**

Libby Tyler, **Community Development Director**

(with Lorrie Pearson, Planning Division Manager)

Diane Marlin, **Mayor of Urbana**

(with Mike Monson, Chief of Staff)

**QUESTIONS SUBMITTED IN ADVANCE**

**TIM BARTLETT**

**Question**: The property tax rate for the City of Urbana and the Urbana Park District are similar – the city 1.3550 and the park district 1.2106. City taxes cover salary and pension payments for police, firefighters, library staff and all city hall and public works personnel, capital outlays for vehicles, operations and maintenance of city property, the library, and all other municipal functions and services. The number of park district employees can’t come near to the total number of city employees. What do the park district taxes cover?

**Answer*:*** *Property taxes compose nearly 70% of the District’s total revenue. Other revenue sources include fees, sales, facility rental charges, donations, grants, and investment interest. Revenues are used to cover expenditures for employee salaries and benefits, equipment, supplies, contractual services, insurance, and utilities. The District operates 23 parks and natural areas on over 650 acres, seven facilities, as well as year round special events and athletics, aquatics, environmental, fitness/wellness, and other community programs.*

*The District has* ***50*** *full-time staff, and employed* ***375*** *part-time and seasonal employees in 2016. For comparison, the city of Urbana has* ***250*** *full-time and* ***50*** *part-time and seasonal employees.*

Tim’s handout showed a pie chart comparing the sources of revenue for the city and the park district. The information is summarized below.

**City of Urbana** **Urbana Park District**

(Property Taxes $$6,582,457) (Property Taxes: $6,326,747)

Revenue Sources Revenue Sources

Property Taxes (20%) Property Taxes (98%)

Utility & Sewer Taxes (22%) Corporate Replacement Tax ( 2%)

City of Urbana Urbana Park District

Sales, Use Taxes (33%)

State Income Tax (13%)

State, Local Motor Fuel Tax (6%)

Hotel/Food/Beverage Tax (5%)

Tax Revenue: ~ $32,000,000 Tax Revenue: ~ $6,457,000

Total Revenue: ~$54,000,000 Total Revenue: ~ $8,871,000

More information can be found online at [www.urbanaparks.org/about-us/financials/](http://www.urbanaparks.org/about-us/financials/)

In his final remarks, Tim announced upcoming summer biking events and a free “Yoga in the Park” program at Meadowbrook Park. He encouraged volunteering to serve on the Urbana Park District Advisory Committee.

**PAUL POULOSKY**

**Question #1:** Will you give a brief description of the renovation that will be taking place at Yankee Ridge, including the time line?

**Answer*:*** *Work at Yankee Ridge will begin in earnest once school lets out at the end of the week. The work will add a new roof, kitchen, gymnasium, multi-purpose room and dedicated fine arts classrooms. Having a separate multi-purpose room from a gym would allow for indoor recess during inclement weather. It also brings Yankee Ridge up to the level that Leal, King, and Williams have been raised to.*

*The work will also include a new off street bus drop off area and parking to the north of the school, and a new off street parent drop off area to the west of the school, with an expanded parking lot for staff. A small shelter will be erected on the car drop off area so students and staff can wait protected in bad weather.*

*The fine arts classrooms and gym will be added on the northwest corner of the existing building. The steps that go into the current gym will be replaced with a ramp. This will allow for the removal of the wheelchair lift in the middle of the building. Six new classrooms will be added to the northeast corner of the building. They will be larger than the current classrooms and will house grades 3,4, and 5.*

*The bulk of the work will take place during the summer of 2017 and 2018. Some work will be done during the 2017-2018 school year without disruption of classes.*

**Question #2:** Is there still a goal to establish a French immersion program at Yankee Ridge?

**Answer:** *The district has a sufficient number of native French speakers from Africa to start a dual language program in French similar to the dual language program in Spanish at Leal and at Williams. The original plan was to start the program this fall, but the district has been unable to find enough qualified instructors. The plan is now to aggressively recruit staff and begin in the fall of 2018. The Board has not voted on where to place the program. Many factors will go into that decision including what school most* *of the French native speakers currently attend, if there is enough space to house the program, and staff input.*

**Question #3:** What is the Urbana School District doing about the low ratings that appear on real estate websites (the quality of schools directly impacts new families moving into neighborhoods?

**Answer:** *Most major realtors have a contract with GreatSchools.com, a non-profit organization that compiles school ratings based on a single standardized test score. It claims to provide a non-biased and transparent method of school comparison. However, the primary funders of GreatSchools.com are also funders of private, for-profit charter schools.*

*GreatSchools.com states that the scores in Illinois are based on the PSAE for grades 3-8. However, the PSAE was an 11th Grade Test that was given from 2003-2013. It also claims to base its Illinois rankings on student growth reported by the Illinois State Board of Education. Yet, ISBE has not reported such data because the PARCC test is still in its infancy and the data does not exist to provide a student growth measure yet.*

*Thus, the data that GreatSchools is using for its rankings is not valid for the rankings they supply. The Illinois School Report Card (http://www.illinoisreportcard.com) is a more accurate reflection of any school in Illinois than Great Schools.com.*

Paul added these highlights of the school year:

**~**  Urbana High School was named by the National Education Policy Center as one of the top 20 high schools in the entire country in providing opportunity to a broad array of students.

**~** Yankee Ridge has a new principal, Brian Anderson. He attended Yankee Ridge, was a principal in Colorado and at Rantoul, lives in the neighborhood, and has a kindergartner at the school.

**~** There are now full-time PE teachers at all the elementary schools.

**~** A district study of long term facilities needs concluded that high priority should be given to complete its promise to bring Wiley and Thomas Paine up to the level the other district elementary schools have. Another high priority need is replacing the space used by Central Office and Urbana Adult Education with a building more up to the task.

**JARED MILLER**

**Question:** Diane Marlin earned a reputation as a fearless opponent of irresponsible uncooperative landlords, not only in the SUNA area but in other parts of the city. We understand that you will be your own person as Ward 7’s alderman and will have your own areas of interest. What are some of those interests? How will you give your attention to the continuing problem of bad landlords?

**Answer**: *Jared said he intends to continue Diane’s practice of sending out e-newsletters to Ward 7 constituents. He will also continue to monitor economic development along Philo Road, meet with business owners, landlords, and apartment managers. He will be vigilant over such matters as rental occupancy, safety, and property maintenance. A goal will be to meet with residents and find out what their concerns are.*

**SYLVIA MORGAN**

**Question #1**: What is the Urbana Police doing to deter the use of cell phones/texting/

distracted driving?

**Answer:** *A lot of tickets and warnings have been given out. A step program is in place to catch offenders. Patrol officers in regular clothes are on the look out. When they spot an offender, they call in to alert traffic officers. The program is undergoing refinement, but the problem is persistent*.

**Question #2:** What are the biggest challenges facing the Urbana Police Department and what can be done without a budget increase?

**Answer:** *A big challenge is dealing with offenders who have mental health issues. The department handles multiple incidents in a day. They are time consuming situations and few services are available to assist the department in managing mentally ill offenders.*

*Another challenge is the growing problem of having to handle incidents arising from opiod overdose. On a recent Monday there were 4 overdose cases, two of which were revived with Narcan, which the police have been trained to use. Carle and C-U Public Health donate Narcan to UPD.*

*Understaffing is also a challenge. Four officers will graduate in June from the Police Training Institute. Four more will begin training in August. By the end of the year the department will be caught up to full staffing.*

Sylvia announced the June 1 deadline for nominations for the Dave Benton Crime Fighting Award, presented by Crime Stoppers.

**BILL GRAY**

**Question #1:** Re the Windsor Road pavement cracks: is the case closed or still ongoing?

**Answer:** *The case is still active. It is a legal matter. No more information can be provided.*

**Question #2**: There are areas of SUNA that do not have street lighting, which makes walking after dark a challenge. Why is this? What should a group of interested citizens do if they would like the city to install street lighting in their area?

**Answer:** *The City/County did not require the installation of streetlights when the subdivisions were originally platted and the streets were built. If streetlights were included in a new subdivision their cost would be included in the purchase of a lot.*

*For an area that wishes to have streetlights, the City policy is the adjoining/benefitting property owners would be assessed 50% of the project cost. There would need to be a* *60% majority of benefitting property owners approving such a special service area tax. Most citizen requests usually do not overcome this “first” hurdle. It takes 10 years to pay off the cost, and most people are not willing to commit to paying for streetlights*.

(Bill Gray will be happy to meet with interested parties to pursue this further.)

**Question #3:** What is the City of Urbana’s position about the “improvements“ being proposed by the county, etc. for Curtis Road? These ”improvements” will create more sprawl and problems, so why pursue them?

**Answer**: *Currently, the Urbana City Council has not taken a position about the Curtis Road corridor planning efforts. Roadways within 10 mile and one half extra-territoriality jurisdictional area should be planned for. Traffic volumes increase as the region grows and other transportation modes (pedestrians, runners, bicyclists, transit) use the road too. The public’s safety is an important consideration. Local transportation officials need to be concerned with many details surrounding planned improvements to an existing roadway.*

*Libby will address the concern about sprawl.*

**Question #4:** Why does the Director of Public Works/City Engineer keep using concrete for road construction when it is very costly and history proves it does not hold up (such as Windsor Road)?

**Answer**: *Concrete is used because this material on a life cycle cost basis is less costly to the taxpayers than asphalt. The Windsor Road pavement did not perform due to a material defect that was not known or identified in concrete mix designs in 1990. As a result of identifying the material ”culprit”, alkali-silica reaction is now addressed in today’s concrete mix design. The other known factor that has reduced some concrete pavement life is the use of a porous (soft) aggregate which can cause D-cracking and premature cracking of pavements. Another important factor with using concrete as a road construction material is the relative “lower” cost of it compared to asphalt. This local market economy drives the decision to use concrete. At new subdivision work in Champaign-Savoy-Urbana, private developers at their expense are selecting concrete as the material of choice.*

**Question #5:** Why are some public improvements so extravagant, such as Windsor Road between Philo and High Cross Roads and High Cross Road near Washington Street, when some of this money could be used to fix the many bad roads in Urbana, especially Vine between Main and University?

**Answer:** *When road improvements are planned transportation engineers look at future population growth and forecasts of large traffic volume increases. IDOT dictates those parameters be adhered to in order to receive federal and state funding. In the Windsor Road case in the mid-90s such increases were projected with the Stone Creek subdivision, the new Meijer store, the Pines retail development and adjacent office buildings, and supported by the overall development growth at the South University Research Park and in Savoy and Champaign. Width IDOT’s parameters for receiving federal and state funding met, the section of Windsor Road between Philo and High Cross Roads was constructed with state, federal, county and city funding*.

*High Cross Road was built with 100% State capital program funds (called Illinois Jobs Now). The project was predicated on the development of Menards and the surrounding 300 acres (in 2006) along with other parcels adjacent to High Cross Road. Again IDOT dictated large traffic volumes looking twenty years into the future and the resultant roadway was completed in 2015.*

*Vine Street between Main Street and University Avenue will be resurfaced this fall.*

**LIBBY TYLER**

**Question #1:** Please provide a brief update on attracting businesses to the empty storefronts on Philo Road. What are the leaders in Urbana government doing about all of the empty business properties? We were told last year that many businesses were coming.

**Answer:** *New businesses in the Philo Road area include Planet Fitness, Marco’s Pizza, U-Haul, Piedmont Sausage, Midwest Scuba, Ballet Studio, and the Urbana Food Mart.*

*Upcoming businesses include O’Reilly Auto Parts to be built across from Sunnycrest, and Red Bicycle Ice Cream to open in June at the Pines. Nieman Foods continues to hold the County Market property for future reuse as one of their diverse retail product types. The city doe not have a tax increment financial district along Philo Road, but we are able to offer Enterprise Zone sales and property tax abatements to new and remodeling businesses in this area, as well as referrals to the Small Business Development Center and the County’s economic development low interest rates for qualifying businesses. While there are still some key vacancies to fill, occupancies along Philo Road are improving. Residents can always help by patronizing the many businesses in this area.*

**Question #2:** What is the status of the Pomology Tract? And what is the status of the former Windsor Road Swim Club?

**Answer:** *The Pomology tract, which remains under County administration, continues to be owned by the Lo family and to be used for farming purposes. The family has shown interest in selling or developing approximately 10 acres of the property at the corner of Philo and Windsor Roads as a small commercial subdivision. The owners of the Windsor Swim Club property are interested in selling the property to someone willing to pursue the planned unit development that was approved a few years back.*

**Question #3:** Several SUNA residents have complained about he appearance of the storage facilities at the new U-Haul facility on Philo Road. Are these storage violating any kind of city code? Were there any special use permits or adjustments to our various codes to allow the storage units to be constructed? Also, people are concerned that the storage units are affecting the business at Rick’s Bakery, although we’ve checked with people at the bakery and they have not seen a decline in business. Is there anything the city can do to help Rick’s business be more visible from the street?

**Answer**: *Placement of the storage units in front of the U-Haul on Philo Road was allowable under city zoning ordinance, but the storage use required a conditional use permit from the Urbana Zoning Board of Appeals, including compliance with a number of conditions. The new work includes additional landscaping, re-pavement of the parking*

*lot, fence repair / replacement, and provision of access for emergency vehicles. Re -occupancy of the old Jerry’s IGA’s space with U-Haul will add additional visitor traffic to the site and will help to further enhance business at Rick’s. City staff has offered guidance to Rick’s on improving signage and visibility on a number of occasions. Residents can best support Rick’s by patronizing the business and telling friends what a great bakery it is.*

**Question #4**: We are aware that 2/3 of housing in Urbana is rental. What percentage is owned by absentee landlords? Is there any easy way to determine if a landlord who lives outside of the area is also the actual property manager, if there is an actual property manager? What has been the experience of our various code enforcement personnel regarding absentee landlords?

**Answer*:*** *We do not have compiled statistics on how many of our rental units are owned by local residents versus those that come from out of the area. However, our observations are that apartment units outside of the campus area, such as in Southeast Urbana, tend to be owned by individuals who live in the region. Some of the larger student oriented apartment complexes near campus are owned by out of area owners, and there are a number of single family rentals that are owned by individuals throughout the state and elsewhere. Urbana requires all rental units to be registered with the city on an annual basis. To be registered, all apartments must have an owner residing within 60 miles, or to designate a local agent who resides within Champaign County or an adjoining county. In either case, the owner or agent must be available to be contacted on a 24 hour a day basis. Our inspection staff often prefers to deal with an experienced property management company as they are usually well equipped to respond quickly to complaints and maintenance issues.*

**Question #5:** It seems that the City of Urbana encourages suburban sprawl. Why? Why not pursue more infill and in-town development?

**Answer:** *A review of our 2005 Comprehensive Plan will show that the City is actually very conservative when it comes to growth. We have identified limited growth areas, primarily in east Urbana along High Cross Road, which is designated for residential and commercial growth, and in North Urbana, north of the interstate along the realigned Lincoln Avenue and Olympian Drive, which is designed for industrial and office development. A key policy of the plan is to promote compact, contiguous growth. Most of Urbana’s planning efforts are geared towards neighborhood preservation, especially our older neighborhoods, and revitalization of the downtown area. We use zoning overlay districts, our Downtown Plan, and TIF districts to achieve these goals, Our success downtown is seen in the many revitalized businesses along Main Street.*

**Question #5:** How many economic development specialists are employed by the city? By what standards are they evaluated to determine if they are truly successful at the mission of their positions, to bring income generating revenues into the city?

**Answer:** *The City employs two Economic Development Specialists, who work under the direction of the Economic Development Manager. These professionals’ duties include administration of our business assistance grants, redevelopment agreements and enterprise zone, ongoing assistance to all of Urbana’s businesses and development related professionals; facilitation of business and development events ; preparation of studies and reports regarding economic activity and impacts; and coordination with partner agencies such as the Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Board of Realtors, and Urbana Business Association. Funding for these positions come from the tax increment revenues and enterprise zone administration fees, rather than from City general funds.*

At the end of her report, Libby made a few announcements. The Silver/Vawter Overlay Plan Hearing will be on June 8 at 7:30 pm in the Urbana City Council Chambers. Public input will be heard. The Farmers Market has started up. A Preservation Walking Tour will take place on May 27, 10:00-11:30 AM. The Downtown Urbana Food Truck Rally series will run the last Tuesday of every month from April to October, 11 AM to 2 PM, outside the Civic Center.

**DIANE MARLIN**

Diane made brief remarks noting her early association with SUNA as one of its founders.

**Question #1**: Could you briefly describe the highlights of the proposed budget?

**Answer**: Diane said the proposed Fiscal 2018 Budget titled ‘A Foundation for the Future’ “faces reality”. It can be found on the City’s website at [www.urbanaillinois.us/node/6536](http://www.urbanaillinois.us/node/6536) .

The following aspects were highlighted:

*~ The city faces fiscal challenges caused by structural deficits in day to day operating expenses. Long- term strategies are needed to bring about a balanced and finally sustainable budget. Past short- term strategies such as short changing funding of police pension, inadequate investment in infrastructure, and borrowing from “ rainy day” funds have to be reversed. Added to the deficit is the fall out from the state budget crisis which could mean a loss of millions of funds from state and federal cuts. The 2018 budget has proposals to increase revenue and build back a healthy reserve.*

*~ Proposals include a 0.5 percent increase in the city’s food and beverage tax, and a recommendation to offer staff a voluntary separation plan, which, if approved, would result in substantial savings.*

*~ The budget also includes several investments in Urbana’s future, such as*

* *hiring a new city administrator to oversee day to day city management while*

*eliminating the chief of staff position.*

* *capital investment in much needed street surfacing projects, for example, Vine Street between Green Street and University Avenue, Lincoln Avenue* *from Green Street to University Avenue, Race Street from Washington Street to California Avenue, and Springfield Avenue from Gregory Street to Coler Avenue.*
* *A study to develop a strategy to address city facility needs.*

*To sum up, the philosophy behind the budget is “facing facts, transparency, and structural fix”.*

**Question #2:** Please provide an update of the Carle taxation lawsuit and the next steps procedurally. Please give an update on your work with Carle to build a more positive relationship with them.

**Answer:** *The lawsuit is ongoing. The State Supreme Court decision at the January 12, 2017 hearing to send it back to the lower court is a significant financial setback. It will be several years before there is a resolution.*

*Given the great potential of Carle and the Carle Illinois Medical College, improving relations with Carle makes financial sense. The city stands to benefit from providing services and amenities to the 35,000 people who work at Carle, and the 30,000 patient / visitor clientele coming into the city*.

In other remarks, Diane said she plans to keep in touch with Urbana residents through e-newsletters. Meetings have been taking place with residents, and apartment managers and owners in the Silver/Vawter area to get their input on the Overlay plan for improvements. A Peace March on May 6 initiated efforts to beautify that neighborhood and improve relationships with neighbors. A video on the Urbana story is being developed to welcome newcomers.

**AUDIENCE QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS**

**On The Champaign County Board**

A former Champaign County Board member urged people to pay attention to Champaign County Board issues, especially those that impact county facilities such as the Nursing Home and jails.

**On Carle**

Disagreement was expressed by an audience member over Diane saying that the Carle case was “as good as lost”. Diane corrected that as a mis-statement and mis- interpretation of what she had said earlier on. She repeated what she had said that the case was sent back to the lower court on a legal technicality, and for now there was no resolution.

**On Urbana’s Property Tax**

The comment was made that one out of 25 consider Urbana over Champaign and Savoy when buying a house.

Diane said the goal is to close the gap between Champaign and Urbana by reducing the tax rate and increasing the tax base. 30 percent of properties in Urbana (schools, parks, churches, the University) are tax exempt. Economic development is focused on building up the tax base.

Paul Poulosky added that the county sales tax, approved by referendum, helped to pay for the bonds for school facilities. The last payment is due in 2018. This will reduce the property tax rate.

**On Urbana Schools**

A comment was made that property tax is not the only factor to consider when buying a home. This person said his choice of Urbana over Champaign was based on the result of a comparison he made of the two school districts. The educational environment and the schools were the factors that influenced his decision to locate in Urbana.

**On Lincoln Square and the Landmark Hotel**

Asked about the status of these 2 structures, Diane pointed out that both are privately owned. Negotiations concerning the hotel are ongoing. Looking ahead to the MCORE project eventually extending Green Street’s improvements to Race Street, she envisioned changes that would transform the mall/hotel complex into a more vibrant downtown site.

**On Video Gambling Businesses**

The question concerned the location of 3 such businesses in close proximity on Philo Road. Diane agreed there was no need for any more, and said 2 applications had been turned down. She said there are zoning regulations that stipulate the distance between businesses, the number of machines allowed, where these establishments can be located, and requirements for approval.

**On Larson Park and Crystal Lake**

Tim Bartlett said repair work on the tennis courts at Larson Park was near completion. He noted that the asphalt on tennis courts has a life span of 6 to 7 years. Blair Park’s tennis courts are also closely watched. Pickle Ball might be coming soon to the parks.

Funds approved by referendum are supporting the rehabilitation of Crystal Lake. Truck loads of sediment have already been removed from the sediment basin. There is some water pollution from medical waste and coal ash that will need to be treated.

**Closing Remarks**

Kathy expressed thanks to Pastor Bob Rasmus of St. Matthew Lutheran Church for allowing SUNA to use the Fellowship Hall.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM