

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MERION CIVIC ASSOCIATION
FEBRUARY 24, 2015

The regular February meeting of the Board of Directors of the Merion Civic Association was held on Tuesday, February 24, 2015, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Merion Tribute House with President Michael Seiden presiding.

Directors present were Anderson, Eisenberg, Feuer, Gordon, Greenberg, Lam, Ross, Rutzel, Seiden and Sinai.

Directors absent and excused were Browne, Ettelson, Flaks, Hill, Kalner, Lavoritano, Marmon, Murphy, Quinn, and Potok.

Irv Finkel, Bill Katz and Roz Seiden from Merion were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by President Seiden, who first welcomed all present.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made and seconded and the January meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report – There was no report as the January report was given on February 3, when the January meeting was held, due to inclement weather in January.

President's Report – President Seiden began his report by announcing that he has updated all the committees on the website. Flag Day is scheduled for Thursday, June 11, 7:00 p.m. All are invited to bring a picnic and sit on the lawn while enjoying the music of the Merion Concert Band. He encourages the participation of the Social Committee in organizing the event. President Seiden announced he would like to explore the idea of an oral history program and get the input of a speaker from the Lower Merion Conservancy and/or the Lower Merion Historical Society.

President Seiden welcomed Merion neighbor, Irv Finkel, to bring to the meeting several items related to the development of the St. Charles Seminary tract. Mr. Finkel focused on the impact of that development on traffic along Wynnewood Road as well as Idris Road, which is a narrow street with parking along one side. He pointed out that the traffic study that was done regarding Wynnewood Road was limited, in his view, and stated that St. Charles is interested in dense development of up to 800 units, which would significantly change traffic patterns. Although the development will be in Wynnewood, Mr. Finkel suggested that Merion Civic schedule a joint meeting with both the Wynnewood and Shortridge Civic Associations. The involvement of the civic associations on this issue increases the resident impact at Township meetings.

A discussion followed, with Todd Sinai suggesting that the Merion Civic Association should develop a position on the whole development in addition to writing a resolution to be presented to the Zoning Hearing Board. A current ordinance stipulates that St. Charles should not be allowed to have two entrances onto Wynnewood Road, so why is it being allowed? The main gate will remain open, presumably to be used to serve the tract to be developed, and the other

entrance facing South Highland would serve the campus of the Seminary. In addition, Mr. Sinai stated the need for us to think globally in terms of increased traffic, which will eventually include the impact of the building of the 45,000 sq ft Whole Foods at the intersection of Wynnewood Road and Lancaster Avenue. He also stated that the civic associations do not hold the burden of proving that the changes that are coming are bad, but rather, it is for the Township to prove that the changes are good.

The Zoning Hearing Board has scheduled a discussion of the St. Charles application at its April 2 meeting, so a joint meeting could take place at the Merion Civic regular meeting on March 24, which President Seiden will try to organize. It was suggested that a working group of Merion Civic members be appointed to meet, to include President Seiden, Kevin Murphy, Todd Sinai and others, and develop talking points to present to the other Civics, agreeing with George Ross that such an effort would ensure effective discussion and a coherent response.

Committee/Representative Reports:

Land Use, Zoning and Community Relations: Les Greenberg reported that the Lower Merion Zoning and Planning Commission will discuss the Wendy's restaurant on City Avenue at the May 4th meeting. The R7 zoning district code has been amended to allow the construction of townhouses. The Ardmore townhouse development at Cricket and Spring Avenues, zoned as R6 and R6A, has been approved and will be made possible by the razing of 4 houses. In other news about Cricket Avenue, Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) approved the demolition of 2 buildings to create temporary parking during the construction of the Dranoff project.

Cultural and Social Planning: George Ross presented fundraising information about MadMex, a restaurant in the Wynnewood Shopping Center. The restaurant offers seating for 50 people for a fundraiser and requires a \$35.00 minimum charge per person, plus the gratuity. There was a discussion about whether Merion Civic would like to host a fundraiser at the restaurant; whether the cost/person is too high; and whether possibly the food could be delivered to the Tribute House instead of using the restaurant. President Seiden asked that the Social Committee explore the idea.

Commissioner's Report -- Commissioner Brian Gordon began his report by reporting on the gun ordinance issue. To give some background, in the fall of 2014, Governor Corbett introduced a new law, and it was passed, which allows the carrying or discharge of firearms in Township parks. Gun rights organizations are prepared to legally challenge any township code that does not conform to the new law. At the January 7, 2015 Commissioner's meeting, the Board decided to disregard the revision process required, despite the threat of a lawsuit. Our current code allows only police department staff to carry or discharge firearms in our parks. Recently, however, the Board of Commissioners decided it will amend the code to avoid a lawsuit, but wants to limit the use of firearms in parks. On March 15 at 1:00 p.m. a rally sponsored by 2nd Amendment proponents, will be held at the Bala Cynwyd Park to celebrate their "God-given right." Commissioner Gordon suggested avoiding the park on that date as there will be people carrying weapons.

Commissioner Gordon then turned to the issue of community response to police department treatment of African-American residents of Lower Merion, which focuses on poor relations between the two groups and makes residents feel they are being profiled. Brian met with residents and community and religious leaders, stating that the meeting scheduled with them was well-attended and elicited new insights into how the community feels unjustly treated. In

response to this meeting, Commissioner Gordon submitted a letter to the Police Chief with special requests on how to improve relations going forward, and he is waiting for a response. His letter specifically addresses not only the recent snow shoveling incident, where residents felt the police unfairly profiled and then mistreated the individuals stopped for attempting to work without a permit. He feels the incident highlights societal issues as well. Commissioner Gordon suggested the following steps be taken to ameliorate relations:

1. "Return to true community policing model, not just a committee" by recruiting members of the police force who are interested in community policing in Ardmore and Bryn Mawr; who will walk the beat during their shift; organize games at playgrounds; be approachable to residents and their children; listen; continue to improve policing and partner with the community to fight crime and ensure that people feel safe. These selected officers would be assigned to specific neighborhoods for extended periods of time to build mutual trust.
2. Improve police training in race relations, cultural competency and diversity and look into best practices in race relations nationwide and then apply those principles to Lower Merion.
3. Appoint a community relations coordinator who is trained in community relations and works with the community to focus on improving policing services.
4. Have a recruitment officer who works closely with police officer candidates, by providing information on areas of study, achieving good grades, what colleges to attend and then following up with the recruitment process, testing, dates of testing, how to prepare for the exam, the interviews and, finally, how to conduct themselves if hired.
5. Finally, Commissioner Gordon suggested meeting with other commissioners to get their ideas.

Commissioner Gordon also touched on community response in Ardmore to all the proposed new construction of townhouses. Residents feel they and their children are being priced out of the opportunity to remain in Ardmore as housing becomes less affordable to them.

A general discussion followed about how to attract more neighbors to the Board meetings. Ideas included focusing on specific issues such as a shade trees project as well as maintaining attention on the "hot" issues, such as development at St. Charles Seminary. Commissioner Gordon suggested a get together of the directors in the spring to canvass the neighborhood as a group to knock on doors, introduce themselves, the issues, and invite participation.

Old Business – None

New Business –There being no other new business, a motion was made and seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9:31 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors will be held at the Merion Tribute House on Tuesday, March 24, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,
Helen Guy, Secretary