

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MERION CIVIC ASSOCIATION
OCTOBER 27, 2015

The regular October meeting of the Board of Directors of the Merion Civic Association was held on Tuesday, October 27, 2015, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Merion Tribute House with President Michael Seiden presiding.

Directors present were Feuer, Gordon, Greenberg, Hill, Lam, Lavoritano, Murphy, Ross, Rutzel, Seiden and Sinai.

Directors absent and excused were Anderson, Eisenberg, Ettelson, Marmon, Potok, and Quinn.

Merion resident Roz Seiden was also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m. by President Seiden, who first welcomed all present.

Approval of Minutes

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

Treasurer's Report – Dave Rutzel summarized the 2015-16 budget, previously approved at the Annual Meeting. The Civic Association membership continues to decline, but dues increased because of the modest increase that the Association approved last year in each dues category. In order to maintain a solid financial footing, the Finance Committee, at its September meeting, decreased the revenue estimate to \$12,000 and decided to eliminate several items from the new budget, some of which represented activities no longer sponsored by the Civic, and some because there is a lack of interest in either the Civic Association or the Merion community. Deleted items include fundraisers, the Flag Day concert, newsletters, and the Neighbor-to-Neighbor events. The Annual Meeting budget was decreased; funds for Merion maps was added; office expenses budget was decreased; Station and Grounds was slightly increased to cover the cost of new window boxes; Lower Merion Conservancy was allotted a modest amount. In summary, the proposed 2014-2015 budget expenses were projected at \$13,796.00. Actual expenses were \$12,596.96. The proposed budget for 2015-2016 expenses is \$12,545.00. Dues received last year totaled \$13,021.00. The projected dues receipts for the coming year is \$12,750.00

It is clear from studying the budget that the Merion Civic Association must recruit new members.

Mr. Rutzel announced that the Merion Civic Association has applied to the Merion Community Association for a grant of \$1,000 to be used for capital expenses, such as the station window boxes and maps of Merion for the train station.

Mr. Rutzel stated that the budget needs to be amended if there is a request to spend more than 10% of any category amount already approved. Following this process will avoid large amount requests during the year which may be made that would violate the approved budget. Every effort is being made to contain and lower costs.

Clarification of the cell phone cost as well as the post office postal expenses was requested by the directors.

A motion was made and seconded, and the Budget for 2015-2016 was approved unanimously.

Commissioner's Report: Commissioner Gordon reported that he had met with Mark Reed, President of St. Joseph's University, to present and discuss the Civic's and the neighbors' perception of the changes that have occurred in the neighborhood as a consequence of University policies. Among those issues was the on-street parking on Raynham Road; trash along the roads, the annual track race through the neighborhood. Small things add up, and Merion does not want to become a "college town." Rather, it wishes to preserve the character and quality of life that until recent years was unchanged and unchallenged by the institutions within the community. Commissioner Gordon requested conformity to Zoning Hearing Board Decision 4191. The document delineates the markers for defining the relationship between the institution and the neighborhood, forbidding such things as outside P.A. systems. Commissioner Gordon suggested that 4191 be studied carefully by legal counsel to distill from it a list of markers.

The Comprehensive Plan summary can be found on the Township website. In many instances, Commissioner Gordon feels the document is forward looking and the Executive Summary demonstrates that the Township staff is beginning to listen to the community in terms of what institutions are demanding and how those demands affect the quality of the neighborhood, such as parking issues. Portions of the document are progressive in terms of the environment, circulation, water resources and affordable housing. Institutions have reacted negatively to the portions of the Plan that attempt to limit their expansion. Future conflicts with institutions seem inevitable.

A discussion about institutional growth followed Commissioner Gordon's statement that he favors limiting the growth. Director Kevin Murphy, former president, who attends meetings of the Federation of Civic Associations, stated that he feels that Township staff disdains the civic associations and favor the institutions. Director Todd Sinai feels that the Township staff is in charge of the community instead of the residents, wishing to implement their own vision for the community, and that it is naïve of the community to think that institutions are not going to pursue their goals. Mr. Sinai believes the Merion Civic Association should raise funds to pay for representation of the community at Zoning Hearing Board sessions.

The BMW dealership in Bala Cynwyd, built right up to the sidewalk is an example of development that not only dominates the corner at Bala Avenue, but overwhelms the streetscape in scale and changes the character of the shopping district because there is no attractive set-back of the building.

Director George Ross, a member of the Planning Commission, criticized the Township for wanting to save money in the writing of the Comprehensive Plan by hiring unqualified Township staff that did not have full time availability to dedicate to the plan. Mr. Sinai added that the zoning process is the next step in implementing the Plan, and emphasized that developers will use the Comprehensive Plan whenever possible to achieve their goals, taking the terms of the Plan to its upper limits, such as the building height issue along City Avenue. He cited the planning process in Bryn Mawr as an exception to business as usual, in that world-renowned planning consultants, Sasaki Associates, was hired to assist in the planning process. Sasaki works on projects involving architecture, interior design, planning, urban design, landscape architecture and graphic design, and emphasizes collaboration with community ideas in coming

up with a final plan. This approach is in complete contrast to how Lower Merion Commissioners relate to their constituents. Director Ross added that Montgomery and Lancaster Avenues are quite unattractive and need to be changed with the help of the Township.

Commissioner Gordon announced that on Sunday, November 8 at 2 p.m. there will be a meeting at the AME Bethel Church, Merion Avenue in Ardmore, to discuss policing, zoning and affordable housing.

Director Kevin Murphy announced the slate of Executive Committee member nominees: Michael Seiden, President; Les Greenberg, 1st Vice President; Bob Marmon, Treasurer and Helen Guy, Secretary. He requested a motion to approve, which was seconded and approved unanimously.

President's Report:

President Seiden asked for a motion to approve the resolution written by Merion resident Thomas Schmuhl in opposition to the Kohelet development plan. A motion was made and seconded and approved unanimously. A copy of the resolution will be added to these minutes.

There was no report from Melanie Schafmeister regarding school issues, but there is a forum of School Board member candidates on October 28. Meetings are scheduled with the Superintendent of Schools and can be found on the Civic Association website.

A former resident of Merion, now living in Narberth, sent President Seiden a detailed map of the south side of Narberth to illustrate new zoning in Narberth that allows the church on the corner of Narberth and Elmwood Avenues to be converted to a commercial space. The Narberth Borough Council has suggested permit parking on both sides of Rockland Avenue, which impacts Merion. Open zoning running the length of Narberth Avenue may alarm residents of Merion. A funeral home has been proposed in a conversion of the home that now stands at the corner of Rockland and Narberth Avenues. The Merion Civic will monitor further notices of these issues as they are announced by the Narberth Borough Council.

At the Zoning Hearing Board meeting on October 22, regarding the Kohelet development, the architect spoke at length and created a discrepancy in what the actual proposed footprint of the new building is. He stated it is 11,000 sq ft, whereas all previous announcements have been 10,192 sq ft. The architect was asked about what he thought might constitute a negative effect of the new development on the surrounding neighborhood, and he said a regional school would be an example of a negative aspect. Previous testimony by school and Foundation representatives has stated that students will be drawn from Cherry Hill and Northeast Philadelphia, in effect making the school regional. Attorneys representing the Merion neighbors requested that the Kohelet's traffic study be presented to the Zoning Hearing Board before their own study, which will be scheduled for the next hearing.

President Seiden reported that the Merion Civic Association, along with four other civics, was assessed \$170 without being consulted, to pay for the sound system rented for the LM School Board Candidate Forum at the Church of the Redeemer. There was protest from several directors that this request was inappropriate and in the future such requests must be rejected. Carol Lavoritano made a motion to pay the assessed amount. The motion was seconded and approved by all directors in attendance excepting one. The Merion Civic Treasurer will be asked to issue the check.

Committee/Representative Reports:

Land Use, Zoning and Community Relations: Les Greenberg reported that the Bala Village issues are ongoing. The bridge crossing the Schuylkill River over to Manyunk along the Historic Bala Cynwyd trail will be dedicated in the near future.

Old Business – The previously tabled item regarding a contribution to the Build On organization was re-opened for discussion as some Directors did not wish to approve making \$150 donation to the organization for its student-donated help with the train station planting last year. Scott Feuer, Chairman of the Station and Grounds Committee, stated there was no need for further discussion as he had made a personal donation to Build On, and the issue should be dropped.

New Business – Director George Ross reported that he met with the Township Manager, Commissioner Gordon, Diana Mancini and Idris Road residents regarding the removal of weeds from the strip along Idris Road next to the railroad tracks. Orsi Lazar of the Botanical Association also attended the meeting and was helpful in laying out a plan for cleaning out the weeds and doing some re-landscaping. There was agreement that the plants chosen for the strip were not the best and plans are being made to put in ground cover, remove dead plants and select other plantings more appropriate for the site. The cost of redesigning and re-planting will be taken to the Township next year. Mr. Ross has organized a crew of neighbors to meet on November 7 to remove all the weeds and Chris Leswing volunteered to bring a group of community service teens to help. Mr. Ross asked that the Merion Civic donate \$50-150 to cover the cost of providing lunch to the volunteers and the cost of purchasing pesticide to eliminate future weed growth. He also requested that an email go out to the Merion distribution list to encourage greater community participation. Carol Lavoritano made a motion to amend the Station and Grounds budget with the addition of the requested \$150. The motion was seconded and approved by a majority vote.

There being no further new business, a motion was made and seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors will be held at the Merion Tribute House on Tuesday, November 24, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen Guy, Secretary