

Minutes
Minnetonka Community Commission
Meeting of March 30, 2009

1. Roll Call

Commission members present: David Hakensen, Betty Johnson, Michael Kelly, Paul Kobs, Barb Westmoreland, Melissa Williamson-Herren

Commission members absent: Eduardo Jimenez, Laura Stotts Gorans, Paul Thyren, Courtney Wieden, Anne VanHorne

Guests: Mayor Terry Schneider and Assistant City Manager Geralyn Barone

Staff: Jacque Larson

Chair Hakensen called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

2. Discussion Items

A. Visit from Mayor Terry Schneider and City Manager John Gunyou

Commission members welcomed Mayor Terry Schneider and Assistant City Manager Geralyn Barone, who was attending in place of John Gunyou.

Mayor Schneider explained to the commission that since he joined the council and began reviewing applications for boards and commissions members, he has been continually impressed by the quality of people who want to be involved with the city. He would like to expand beyond the boards and commissions to involve these people with the city.

Schneider related that when he moved to the city in 1971, it was easier to get to know neighbors. The city itself wasn't as organized and didn't have events like the Summer Festival and Open House, but there was lots of neighborhood activity. Now he sees less neighborhood activity.

He would like the commission to think about how a sense of neighborhood can be created among residents. Some people identify with a housing development or a school, while other areas of the city are not as defined.

Schneider sees the commission as providing a jumpstart to residents to get them connected with their neighborhoods. The commission might start by approaching the neighborhood block captains with the idea that the city is trying to create more connectivity among neighbors, and ask questions about the neighborhood they belong to.

Schneider sees the community commission as a champion for this effort, but that the neighborhoods themselves should organize. He suggested that the Web site might have a section devoted to neighborhoods that would provide information about city resources available to neighborhoods. For example, information might include how to request that a street be blocked off for a neighborhood party.

Schneider guesses there are 15 to 20 identifiable neighborhoods, and indicated that if 10 neighborhoods in one-quarter of the city organized, this initiative would be a success – if 20 neighborhoods organized, the initiative would be a great success.

Also, Schneider sees identifying neighborhoods and neighborhood leaders as a way for the city to get the word out as well, with leaders perhaps acting as proponents or advocates for city initiatives.

Schneider said the commission should take a month or two to come up with ideas for this initiative, and perhaps roll it out at summer city events.

Johnson suggested that Sherwood Forest might be a good neighborhood to start with. That area has seen a phenomenon of people who grew up there now moving back as adults.

Schneider added that perhaps the Web site could list examples of what various neighborhoods are doing. He also has names of residents who are interested in this initiative and may want to act as “ex officio” members of the commission to help get this program going. He suggested having a pitch ready to go for the April 30 annual meeting of the neighborhood watch block captains.

Barone explained that the city just received the results of the annual residential survey. The results of one question indicated that 60 percent of respondents identify with their neighborhood; while 30 percent identify with the city of Minnetonka; and 10 percent identify with their local school.

Schneider suggested adding a question to the annual survey regarding neighborhoods. He also suggested running articles in the Minnetonka Memo about neighborhoods, such as the history of various neighborhoods, how they got their names, etc.

Westmoreland added that the commission has been working on how to make people welcome as they move into the community, and this initiative fits perfectly.

Kelly asked if we have neighborhood signs like St. Louis Park or Minneapolis. Schneider said we don't but we could do that.

Schneider emphasized that the whole premise of the initiative should be that it is self-generating – that the commission and city staff provide the tools but that neighborhoods organize themselves.

Barone and Schneider left the meeting at 6:02 p.m.

B. Discussion

Discuss the mayor's presentation

Kelly suggested letting people rent vegetable garden plots in city parks.

Hakensen said the city has several initiatives going that allow residents to volunteer, such as adopt a park sign or natural resource initiatives but that they are in silos and could be brought together as resources for neighborhoods.

Kobs said he thought it was a great idea, and that having the official endorsement of the city and the commission would make it even more interesting to residents.

Kelly volunteered for the subcommittee to further discuss this initiative.

Hakensen mentioned his concern that residents are already very involved in various activities and that technology should be used to help people organize.

Westmoreland suggested starting with a pilot neighborhood for this project.

C. Minnetonka Reads

Larson reminded commission members to check their calendars and plan to attend at least one of the Minnetonka Reads book clubs in April. She reported that two schools will be visited by author Katherine Applegate on May 4, in addition to her appearance that evening at Ridgedale Library. She also told commission members that the library is hosting a book club at Minnetonka Heights for students who live there.

D. Meeting Minutes

Kobs asked that the meeting minutes of November 24, 2008, be corrected to show that he, not Paul Thyren, abstained from voting on the Reflections Award winner. Westmoreland moved to accept the minutes of November 24, 2008, as corrected, and January 12, 2009.

Williamson-Herren seconded the motion. All present voted in favor of approving the minutes.

At 6:35 p.m., the community commission members joined the Economic Development Authority meeting to hear a presentation on the Opportunity City Pilot Program. The presentation included results of a housing audit in Minnetonka, and a report on community change that detailed demographic changes in Minnetonka housing and households from 2004 to 2007. Also present at this meeting were members of the city council, park board and planning commission. For details on this presentation, see the EDA meeting minutes of March 30, 2009.

Discussion (continued)

At 8:45 p.m., the community commission gathered again to continue its discussion of the mayor's neighborhood initiative idea and to finalize plans for the April 13 joint meeting with the city council. Kobs left the meeting at 8:30 p.m., so there was not a full quorum of the commission present.

Larson suggested that the joint meeting with the city council include a report on what the commission has accomplished since its inception in 2007; highlights from this year's Minnetonka Reads program; and a quick outline of the neighborhood initiative program suggested by Mayor Schneider. Larson also mentioned she would like various members of the commission to volunteer to handle portions of the report, so the council doesn't hear from just one person.

3. Adjourn

Meeting concluded at 8:55 p.m. Since a quorum was not present, a motion wasn't necessary to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacque Larson
Community Relations Manager