

Westwood Civic Association

General Meeting
February 21, 2012

Present: J. McNulty, J. Sess, I. McNulty, V. Baumann, M. Jenkins, K. Strasser, J. Minor, M. Kuhl, M. Gweyn, J. Kimmet, B. Weber, J. Hildebrand, and approximately 40 members and guests

Absent: J. Henke (excused)

J. McNulty called the meeting to order and led a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Next, J. McNulty announced that there is no treasurer's report this month. He also announced that, per a vote of the board at its last meeting, Irene McNulty is now a board member.

Hearing no corrections or questions, J. McNulty declared the minutes of the January general meeting and the February steering meeting approved as written.

In the absence of a formal fire report, J. Sess noted that the statistics were available at the back of the room and he highlighted the total calls.

District 3 Police Report

Rich Minella, neighborhood liaison officer, reported that there were 252 reported offenses in the past month. He noted the availability of the crime statistics reports. Officer Minella commented on an auto thefts pattern involving junk cars. Of the 32 auto thefts for the past month, 16 involved theft of junk cars in driveways. Since no title is required to junk a car in Kentucky, car thieves are hauling stolen cars to Kentucky for sale. Officer Minella also noted that 12 car thefts were from cars left with keys in the ignition at gas stations and convenience stores. He remarked that it only takes 12 seconds for an experienced thief to steal a locked car. An attendee commented on frequent parking violations along Harrison Avenue from 4-6 p.m. and expressed concern about this as a safety issue. Captain Neville said that officers monitor Harrison aggressively by citing and towing, more so than in other districts, but they cannot catch all offenders. S. Lewis expressed frustration that it took 48 minutes for police to respond to a call at 3222 Hanna when 6 children were seen cutting down a fence. She also asked about enforcement of parking laws around day care centers on Harrison by Baker. Captain Neville encouraged her to write a letter to the day care, identifying this hazard and asking for resolution and then trying for a face to face meeting before taking further steps. Next, S. Lewis inquired about details in a case in the 2700 block of Queen City Avenue in which a girl bit a police officer. Officer Minella confirmed the incident.

Westwood School

J. McNulty welcomed our guests from the Cincinnati Public Schools: Superintendent Mary Ronan, Westwood School principal Monica Battle, Jack Jose, principal of Gamble Montessori, and Michael Burson, facilities director of CPS. M. Ronan made a presentation, highlighting the status of Cincinnati schools and identifying reasons to celebrate, challenges, and opportunities. She noted that Cincinnati is the only urban district in Ohio with an effective rating. There are fewer schools in Cincinnati in the categories of academic watch and emergency. Dater Montessori is rated excellent, while Westwood School and Midway are both on academic watch. Next, M. Ronan noted that Midway School is employing turn-around strategies that have been effective at other schools and is very close to a continuous improvement rating. At Westwood School, all aspects of instruction are being reviewed, staffing for 2012-2013 is under consideration, there is a new principal, and the renovated school will be opened this summer. She commented that these changes provide us opportunities to re-envision what Westwood wants in its school. Mr. Burson showed some slides of the Westwood School renovation, including the new entrance, restoration of plaster in the auditorium, and the new gym. He announced that the move in is scheduled for June 4-6. Attendees made a number of comments, including compliments on the placement and design of the gym, the lay out, the brickwork, and the restoration of the school bell. Mr. Burson noted that they are doing more signage for the school.

Next, K. Strasser posed questions to M. Ronan, as prepared by Westwood Civic Association. In response to a question about the strengths of Westwood School, M. Ronan comments on strong community support, the new principal, and the renovated building. She pointed to the academic watch ranking as an area of continued concern. M. Ronan was asked about the impact of the voucher system. She commented on the major impact on the district: The laws keep changing and there isn't a cap on vouchers now. There are 3,500 students with vouchers, getting \$4,500 for elementary school per year and \$5,500 for high school; they often continue through high school. There are also three dozen charter schools that draw away 7,500 students. There are special needs schools as well. \$87M goes right to charter schools, vouchers, and special education schools. Ms. Ronan was asked about the new school boundaries. She commented that it is too large an area now and will move back to

the old boundaries in place four years ago when Gamble closed. When asked what CPS's obligation to Westwood is, M. Ronan listed academic achievement, a good building, work on Westwood and Midway Schools. She was asked about the differences between schools like Fairview and Clifton and neighborhood schools in attracting people to a community. Ms. Ronan remarked on neighborhood and magnet schools of choice, commenting that CPS would welcome the Westwood community's ideas. Magnet schools draw from across the district, leaving neighborhood schools to struggle. CPS would work with us on any ideas for focus and programming. When asked what WCA could do to support the mission and vision of the schools, Ms. Ronan asked us to talk with parents, to see what they want, and to solicit community feedback. She encouraged WCA to work with the CPS public affairs department, to convey priorities, and to promote a stronger community by strengthening the schools.

Ms. Ronan and other school officials then took questions from the audience:

S. Lewis asked about establishing a grade school, similar to Walnut Hills. Ms. Ronan replied that admission tests will leave you with an empty school. She said you have to educate the children, whether they are college prep or not, but a college prep track is a possibility.

M. Kuhl asked how Westwood School would be made better. Ms. Battle noted that their slogan is "we're going to be the best at getting better" and she pointed to tutoring initiatives in partnership with the area churches, Kiwanis, and retired CPS teachers. She commented on data analysis, outside consultants who've advised the school, development of measurable goals, and a methodological approach to addressing areas in need of improvement. Ms. Battle noted that the school is partnering with Talbert House to work with intermediate and middle school students on counseling for academic and socio-emotional issues. There is also the Character First program in which the school works with children and parents, who are very involved in the school. She said the music program is coming back, along with the band program for 4th-8th graders.

Ms. Ronan was asked why Midway School isn't stronger since the construction of the new facility. Ms. Ronan commented that Midway missed continuous improvement by one point, and that new facilities do generally result in enrollment increases and when we open new buildings, enrollment increases and a slight bump in academic achievement, it takes a lot more than that. The district is looking at 90 minutes of reading and 90 minutes of math in troubled schools.

K. Bach, Westwood branch librarian, offered supplemental tutoring help through the library, since a part-time homework helper is being hired. This was welcomed by Ms. Battle.

M. Gweyn inquired about the possibility of a DAAP partnership, noting that there seems to be nothing for architecture and design.

I. McNulty expressed concern about the behavior of Westwood School children, citing neighbors who have pulled their children out of the school due to others' behavior and after school behavior problems from not crossing at crosswalks to kicking over trash cans.

V. Baumann asked why previous language programs didn't work. Ms. Ronan said she doesn't know but they weren't popular. This is open for discussion.

An attendee acknowledged that it has been delightful during the renovation not to have the behavioral problems of students along Epworth. While the speaker didn't expect the school to be wholly responsible for this, it raised the question of how to uphold community values and behavior expectations. School hours are 7:45 a.m. - 2:15 p.m. M. Battle has met with area ministers; a number of them offer after-school mentoring, tutoring, and snacks. Another attendee commented on the traffic problems around Midway School when school lets out and encouraged police assistance there.

B. Weber asked whether a school has to be out of academic watch status before not allowing vouchers. Ms. Ronan affirmed that, but added that it requires improved status for two out of three years and the rules keep changing, despite school improvement.

J. Minor asked about the partnership with the Seed Foundation and whether a site has been selected for that school. School officials said that an agreement has been signed with this organization that will run a boarding school for at-risk youth. They need funding, land, building, and dormitories, so it is almost two years out. M. Kuhl commented that she doesn't want that on

the west side and asked about sites. Ms. Ronan said that, with the exception of the school at Saylor Park, CPS doesn't own a large tract on the west side.

An attendee asked if Westwood School will require uniforms. Ms. Battle said that it is currently a uniform school and has no plans to change that.

K. Strasser asked if there are plans to pull 7th and 8th graders out of Westwood School. School officials said that is the plan for the 2013-14 academic year district-wide, moving away from the 7-8th grade middle school model. This is in response to keeping the younger children together and to address math instructional needs. This is expected to increase test scores.

J. Sess asked if residents can come into the school. Ms. Battle said yes, upon signing in. J. Sess further commented on the potential promise for a DAAP-oriented curriculum, with Mr. Burson adding remarks about the void and the possibilities.

Jack Jose of Gamble Montessori was introduced. He said that they are working on building a really strong neighborhood magnet school here. Further, he commented, it takes a neighborhood to stand up and be neighbors and reach out to people individually on behalf of strong schools

J. McNulty remarked on WCA's hope for building a good neighborhood and a premier school. He said we want our neighborhood children back in Westwood's schools and thanked officials and attendees for showing that we are headed in the right direction. In thanks, J. Sess handed out I Love Westwood t-shirts to the CPS guests.

Stride Partnership

Lekeisha Cook described the Stride partnership, an education partnership looking for people to "be the change" in both math and reading. Stride is working with Midway School now to find tutors for 150 students who need help in grades 3-8. Tutors get support and training. A background check is required.

WCA Board Nominations

J. Kimmet reported that his nominations committee recommends three candidates for board positions: Michelle Conda, Nick D'Angelo, and Tom Minor. He noted that Sr. Ann Rene McConn is stepping off the WCA board this spring to focus on WestCURC activities. Three board members whose terms are ending, J. McNulty, M. Kuhl, and J. Hildebrand, have expressed interest in running for re-election. I. McNulty was chosen at the last steering meeting to fill the remainder of a vacant position. With six people running for five spots on the WCA Board, an election will be held, with ballots to be mailed in March and bios printed in the next *Westwords*. M. Kuhl, J. Kimmet, and J. McNulty will all be election supervisors.

Welcome to Westwood Sign

J. Sess spoke to the issue of the disputed Welcome to Westwood sign at West Fork and Montana. The city said the sign was to be removed by March 1. J. Sess is asking the city to deal with the contested area, after residents in the area said they affiliate with Westwood, not Northside. Some attendees indicated a disinclination to move the sign.

Committees

B. Weber distributed a list of board committees and asked board members to send her their preferences for committee assignments before the next steering meeting.

Westwood Community Gardens

M. Conda asked about opportunities for volunteer hours for the WCG. M. Jenkins said that WCG welcomes volunteers and we need to coordinate their availability with needs.

NSP Funds

J. Kimmet reported that the WCA NSP proposal for \$5000 of spending allocations was submitted. The NSP review committee will meet on March 1. Once approved, WCA will be able to spend the money.

Safe and Clean Grant

J. Sess has submitted a grant application for \$10,000 to Keep Cincinnati Beautiful to put new sturdy, cleanable cast aluminum benches at bus stops. The city is in the process of removing advertising benches at bus stops.

WestCURC

Sr. Ann Rene reported that WestCURC is currently rehabbing its sixth and seventh houses, having spent \$700,000 to date on rehabilitation in Westwood. She also reported on the rain garden at 3081 Harrison to accept storm water overflow and plans for a park and ride at that site. She reported that the owner of the Honda store on Harrison plans to sell his properties in the near future and WestCURC is interested. She noted that Madcap Puppets will be looking for housing for its interns in the area. She also spoke about form-based codes, their potential benefit to Westwood, the March 6 orientation meeting, and the late April city-wide meeting.

2545 Harrison Avenue

This property is on the list for demolition with a hearing in the coming week. It's a multi-family building, apparently originally designed as single family and still zoned single family. It is reported to be in very bad condition. The Cincinnati Preservation Association is looking at it.

MOTION by J. Sess to indicate WCA's opposition to the demolition.

SECONDED by J. Kimmet.

PASSED with one vote in opposition.

National Night Out

K. Strasser suggested moving the location to Westwood School or Westwood Town Hall. She asked for support at the next District 3 Resources Committee meeting on March 28. Several attendees commented that it was very crowded when held there in the past. Others remarked that it is supposed to be more of a block party than a festival.

MOTION by J. Kimmet to encourage the movement of National Night Out in Westwood to the Westwood School or another more desirable location.

SECONDED by I. McNulty.

PASSED unanimously.

Westwood Town Hall Gardens

MOTION by J. Sess to approve up to \$500 for plants and gardening materials for the grounds at the Westwood Town Hall.

SECONDED by I. McNulty.

PASSED unanimously.

Westwood Home Tour

L. Kissel asked for volunteers for two shifts during the home tour on April 29.

Membership Drive and Meeting Guest Speakers

This will be discussed at the next steering meeting.

Adjournment

There being no other business before the board, J. McNulty adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted,

Mary Jenkins
Recording Secretary