

WISPPA

Women Involved in South Pasadena Political Action April 11, 2015 Minutes

Date: April 23, 2015

Location: Calvary Presbyterian Church

Present: Gary Pia, Connie Wardlow, Dollie Chapman, Ron Rosen, Ellen Daigle, Clara Richards, Debby Fox, Betty Emirhanian, Lela Bissner, Judith M. Harrison, Kim Hughes, Nancy Wilms, Janet Braun, Lisa Boyd, Georgia Wood, Gail Maltun, Diana Mahmud, Mark Smeaton, Becky Thompson, Linda Sullivan, Gretchen Robinette, and Wayna Kato

I. Approval of March 7, 2015 minutes—Approved and seconded by Dollie Chapman and Gary Pia.

II. Guest Speaker: David G. Watkins, AICP Director of Planning and Building, South Pasadena – In her introduction Dollie Chapman shared Watkins background and career highlights with the group. Watkins has been with South Pasadena for 15 years now, including approval of the Mission, Meridian Village and Gold Line Plans. Previously Watkins had been a planner for 10 years with Pasadena and 14 years with the City of Irvine. He received his Bachelors from Redlands and his Masters from Cal Poly.

Watkins shared that working in South Pasadena has been “very gratifying,” over the years because of the “high level of community engagement.” He then proceeded to update our group on the specific plans and focus for his “small planning department.”

He began by explaining that his department is “in spring training,” for the strategic planning that will be necessary to update our general City Plan, as well as the Mission Street plan which is older still. Our plans, which guide our long term goals for our city in 15, 20, or 25 years down the road are “showing their age.” As Watkins explained, the plans are developed in part on population and so, as population grows planning is “very vulnerable” to changes which may be necessary in long-term planning. He anticipates that our big statements of keeping a small town atmosphere will continue, but re-examination will ensure that our plan continues to be responsive to where we are going and a good guide to our steps in the process.

Parking needs and mobility (circulation) continue to be challenges, for example, especially with intended growth of the Gold Line to Azusa and beyond, which will necessitate longer and more trains and more parking! He said that by looking at our General and Mission Street Plans together we can save a quarter of a million dollars. Council has designated a reserve fund for the planning process and Watkins anticipates that by 2016 we will have most of the funds necessary for the new plans’ cost. Then, the key will be structuring community input because he knows that we will participate! He explained to our group that good outreach and structure will help us stay engaged so that we can “move in and hit fast,” to get to the EIR process.

Next he updated our group on the status of the Rialto Redevelopment plan, explaining that it would be a “two-pronged,” effort and while it is going well, it is not going very fast. The first part of the effort will be to fix the exterior and the group’s intent is to restore the Rialto as it was, although replacement of things like the roof may necessitate some changes. The second prong of the effort will be to restore the inside. At this point the second floor is planned as office space and the first floor as retail, including

perhaps a restaurant, and hopefully maintaining the entertainment component. He explained that the development group must proceed with the exterior first because it will be easier to market to tenants when the outside looks appealing. So, by summer we may “see some folks working on the outside.” The question of who will pay for inside modifications, whether tenants or development is yet to be resolved and we won’t get a chance to “sign off,” and give input until it comes to Cultural Heritage.

Watkins explained that two key parcels which are continuing in negotiations with the City has resulted in a delay with the Downtown Project. And While the Bank of America is settled, the Citizen’s Bank negotiations continue. Cornerstones of the project will be parking, now south of Mission and 12 affordable senior housing units on the site of the old nursery project. Once the Banks are on line, the ad hoc committee can be reactivated.

The School District project calls for 80 1-bedroom apartments and a three-level subterranean parking garage, which will include space for residents, school district, and 41 public spaces. The development agreement allows the group to create their best plan and then the legacy partners, the city and the school district would need to agree. But first, the project must have environmental clearance which would include traffic and hydrology considerations, for example, and might require mitigations. After the School District approves the project, we would get it and we aren’t bound to approve. We can review at that point and even disagree with the environmental review process.

His point was that this is a slow process that will include Cultural Heritage and Public Use before it can go to the Council for approval. Finally, he noted that the process seems to be slowing further as the school district is receiving more funds from the state, which is recovering economically, and so feels less urgency to push the process along.

In other updates he shared that “thanks to our efforts,” the city is looking into a new ordinance for massage parlors in town to have in place before our moratorium expires. He reminded us that we need to keep in mind that the new law will sunset in 2017 and so we need to be aware and draft our best plan at this point. Vons/Pavilions has been bought by Albertson and he is anticipating a merger so this may present a “huge development opportunity,” which would include parking. There has been “lots of interest” in the Blockbuster property which is on the cultural heritage list because the stucco façade hides an art deco original structure. Discussions have included a restaurant which would include some on-site parking.

His department also is working with Cultural Heritage on a new ordinance which includes a new inventory update indicating where structures are in town that have un-reinforced masonry from before the 1930s. He estimates that there will be approximately 30 structures for which the city will have to set up compliance procedures and perhaps 6 to 12 which must be abated to comply with earthquake standards. The “state of the art” Cultural Heritage Ordinance will include a “solid inventory of our historical buildings,” which can be available on the web for residents to access in an interactive mapping format to see if they are part of the inventory!

In response to questions from the group Watkins said that he hopes that the Convalescent Hospital on Mission, “will go away.” He pointed out that the Conditional Use Permit for the facility was based on a 1948 zoning code and after May 1996 was out of compliance, yet was allowed to expand. He knows that the facility is under investigation for Medicare fraud and is on the police chief’s desk, and hopes that the problem will be resolved. He also said that the city plan for a tunnel is “nothing more than a dotted line

on a map.” The environmental issues of the tunnel will be handled by the EIR and he urged us to be sure to participate.

- a. **Special Update – Community Garden**—Connie reported on the Community Garden and Gretchen Robinette concluded the update. The Garden, located at 1028 Magnolia is scheduled for grand opening on May 2nd. Thirty three plots, 4 feet by 12 feet, are planned with a yearly fee of \$60. Thirty percent of plots are scheduled to go to residents “within a short radius,” and based on the attendance at the fundraising effort, they anticipate a waiting list will be necessary. Gretchen said that funds have been raised for 12 plots and she said a website for donations is set up to help offset the cost for young families, older people and apartment dwellers.

III. Reports

a. **Treasurer’s and Membership Reports** – Dollie Chapman reported that we have \$3,655.00 in our checking account to date. We received a lovely thank you note from Monica Hubbard for our \$50 donation for “Wired Women,” and the Executive Committee approved an annual donation to support this website, which includes weekly emails focusing on events and job opportunities for women in the Pasadena area. We now have 71 members, having added 2 new members since our last meeting.

b. **City Council Liaison Committee Report** – Nancy Wilms reported that the highlight of the March 4th meeting was the finding of the City Attorney regarding the UUT that “there was no need to act,” immediately. The UUT issue is on the Council agenda for April. Also, feelings were mixed about synthetic turf despite our need for water conservation. A key issue for a new ordinance was enforcement so it was not adopted at this time. At the March 18th meeting the public was urged to comment on the EIR. Diana requested more CERT trainings, which have been very successful. The Rialto facade was discussed as the first step to progress on the redevelopment plan, as well as the SPARC program.

At the April 8th meeting water was the big issue as it was announced that our city had been assessed a 35% reduction! At this point Councilmember Mahmud reassured the group that we had been put in the highest tier when they found that we were one gallon over the usage levels and the City already is following up with the Water Control board to modify our position with better information from Global Water. Mahmud explained her concerns that Global water is not giving us accurate numbers and so the city is looking at our contract with the group and trying to get better information. Member Gail Maltun shared her problems with finding passwords for personal use from the company when she wanted to check her numbers which seemed high. Mahmud reported that the city already is considering getting more help for Debby Figoni, a part or full-time person for a new program which could include enforcement of new, stricter guidelines.

c. **Public Safety Commission** – Janet Braun reported that the Convalescent Hospital is a big issue for our police chief right now. Their Certificate of Operation was revoked by the state in January when they had flunked four inspections. In addition, the hospital is under investigation for Medicare fraud. Our group also questioned why the hospital was not indicted when a woman with mental issues went to the nearby gas station, doused herself with gas and set herself on fire. It would seem that the hospital would have an issue with treating a woman with

mental issues when they are not certified for mental health care. Further it seems that patients are being “comp’d” for their care right now by the hospital owners who have many other facilities until they get recertified, which they are trying to do. Finally, they are not in compliance with their convalescent home CUP since they are apparently offering board and care now. It was suggested that we may be needed for a letter-writing campaign as the city tries to find the “last punch” to get rid of the hospital owners in town.

Braun also reported that we need to anticipate an increase in crime and be even more vigilant because proposition 47 has led our chief to expect more problems as the prisons reduce populations to reduce crowding. Fire chief Jim Frawley is leaving for Santa Cruz but Janet thinks we will continue to keep the 3-city structure as we look for who will take over. Finally, the Committee is hoping to confirm budget with the city to continue our CERT program in September, as well as capital needs for the department.

d. NREC Update – Kim Hughes reminded the group that May 18th is Earth Day. With the new water guidelines NREC concerns are only increased. Hughes pointed out that 20 trees were removed between February and March but 57 were added, and new trees need more water, plus turf guidelines become increasingly important. Further, she reported that there are now concerns that some of the trees on Chelton Way are hollow and replacement with supplemental watering will need to be considered. The concern is that now we know of the issue we must deal with it to avoid liability if there is a problem with the hollow trees. A sub-committee needs to be formed to look at the stables for a long-term contract. They are looking at more charging stations and better locations for public use. Finally they are working with Edison for the tree trimming schedule for trees near wires.

e. Website Update – Betty reported for Suzie Abajian that we are averaging 65-70 views a day with 20 unique visitors per day on our website. New links have been posted to the home page for the 710 public hearing days. We want to be more involved with WISPPA on facebook and so if we haven’t “liked” our page on facebook, we should do so. There is a link to the facebook page on the upper left-hand corner of the homepage of the WISPPA website. Thirty four people have so far, and our goal is 100.

f. Legislative Affairs Committee – Betty Emirhanian reported that she and Lela will be co-chairing the monthly meetings of the Committee. As issues that affect the City come up, they will share them with WISPPA.

g. The NWPC's Training Workshop for Women wanting to serve on Commissions held on March 31st was co-sponsored by WISPPA and was well received.

h. Lela reported that Richard Wilson discussed parking management and reform. Apparently there are more than three parking spaces for every car in California! But clearly, we will need “smart growth” in our area with specific local plans to manage outdated parking guides and meet increased needs near the Gold line. Thoughts included seeking shared parking with owners and charging for parking, as well as shuttles from surrounding areas, such as Ted Shaw’s building.

i. Gretchen Robinette suggested that we need a development subcommittee to help “bird dog” development groups in our town since there is so much going on right now, from the Rialto to parking issues.

IV. New Business

a. **710 Hearings** – Waynna Kato updated the group on the hearings and reported that the EIR is out and we have asked for an extension to review the 26,000 page document. In addition to the scheduled hearings listed previously two more hearings have been added, including one in La Canada and a second in El Sereno which are now on our website for more details. The No 710 Tunnel Action Committee spoke at the forum hosted by the League of Women Voters where we pitched light rail instead. However, Barbara Messina also spoke with “lots of hyperbole and many people in support.” Kato stressed that for this reason it is very important that we show up to the meetings and wear our No 710 buttons. There is a new Metro CEO, making \$320,000 a year, and he is a “rail man,” according to John Fosana from Duarte. Comments are due on the EIR by July 6th and Cal Trans cost/benefit analysis is due by the end of the month. Kato suggests that we focus on the 710 at our May 2nd meeting and what we want to communicate before the deadline. Kato explained that even though the DEIR is very long, we can review it ourselves and use a control word, like “tunnel,” which will be highlighted throughout the document so that we can search more quickly for relevant information for us. All we have to do is choose the work hit “control f” and we can isolate what we want to know more easily because that work will be highlighted throughout the document.

b. **Measure L** – The library is looking for more volunteers to get information out to the community on Measure L. Connie is working with Friends of the library and we can contact Betty to get more involved.

V. Future Meeting Dates at the Calvary Presbyterian Church:

May 2 – Next Meeting!
June 6
July 11
August 1
September 12
October 3
November 7
No meeting in Dec