

2022-11-06 Arbor District Board Meeting Minutes

The Arbor District board met 2:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Present: Kyle Miller, Chuck Litecky, Sarah Buila, Judy Ashby, D. Gorton, Peg Falcone, Pheral Lamb.

Absent: Brian Swoboda

Also present: AD member Sandy Litecky

2:00 Kyle called the meeting to order

Additions to the agenda: Sandy report on City housing and old fire station report. D. moved, Judy second, approve agenda.

Minutes: D. moved, Judy second to approve minutes of June 15 and September 25 board meetings.

Treasurers Report:

- The balance in our account as of 9-30-22 is \$1,529.35
- The account is at Region's Bank in Carbondale
- Judy Ashby and I are signatories on the account
- The account number is 6902034364
- Checks read: "Arbor District Neighborhood Association"
- Underneath the account name on the checks, the name West Central Carbondale Neighborhood Association with the Federal Tax ID# 371-24-0171 are listed.
- I have done a brief search for this number in State of Illinois sites, without success, so it's unclear whether we are "legal" at this point

Discussion followed regarding ADNA's status as a non-profit organization. We deduced that the West Central Carbondale Neighborhood Association might have been originally formed as a state recognized non-profit corporation, but if so, it was before the memory of any current board member (going back to 1996). D moved, Sarah second, to form a committee regarding the organization's legal status, seeking legal counsel where necessary. (NOTE: The Tax ID above appears to be that of an individual, not an organization, suggesting WCCNA never organized as a state non-profit corporation.) Committee formed: Kyle, Pheral, Jane

Decision to review by-laws at a meeting in December.

Bucky Dome celebration: Everyone attending reported good turnout, strong support for joint Bucky Dome – Arbor District collaboration and anticipation of the completion of the visitor / community center. The need for fundraising to raise sufficient funds was noted as an area where the Arbor District can help.

Sandy reported on the City's housing grants: Since May through 3rd week of October, the City had made 18 rental conversion grants, 19 down-payment grants, 4 curb appeal grants.

NE: 1 conversion with down-payment; 1 curb appeal

NW: 1 conversion with down payment, 3 down payment

SW: (Kent to old Murphysboro Rd. to N. Parrish) 2 curb appeal, 1 conversion, 1 down payment

Southernmost (W Mill to Main, S. Wall to Dixon, E. Park) 7 conversions, 2 down payments, 1 conversion and down payment. (full report here:

[https://go.boarddocs.com/il/coc/Board.nsf/files/CKDREG6DA247/\\$file/FY23%20City-Funded%20Housing%20Presentation%2C%202022-10-25.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/il/coc/Board.nsf/files/CKDREG6DA247/$file/FY23%20City-Funded%20Housing%20Presentation%2C%202022-10-25.pdf))

Old fire station (North Oakland). John Deas and Allison Smith came before the Planning Commission seeking a special use permit for a food truck mini-park. It would permit 4 to 5 permanent food trucks to be placed on the grass between the station and the house next door, plus 2 revolving slots. Coffee will be inside. Also asking for a liquor license. Parking is limited to around 22 vehicles on site; talking with Schnucks about using their parking lot. Discussion focused on the failure of owners to follow through on promises made when buying the property from the City and its increasingly blighted appearance. The Planning Commission approved the plan; it will be on the Council agenda November 15.

Holiday gathering: Liteckys will host the gathering December 10, 6:00 p.m. Jane will send previous flyers to Kyle

Welcome Students sign – Sandy will send image to Kyle

Arbor District proposal by D. Gorton. Included as addendum to these minutes. Discussion: D. proposed several working groups to discuss the following issues; to be convened by the following board members with members recruited from the membership: D. - Immigration, Judy - holiday decorations (Halloween, Winter), Pheral - zoning, Kyle - renewables & solar, Kyle - traffic, Sarah - crime.

Jane will write narrative, circulate to board, then send to neighbors

Next meeting date: Wednesday, Dec. 14, 6:00 p.m.

D. move, Sarah second, adjourn. 3:30 meeting adjourned.

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE, ATTRACT NEW RESIDENTS AND SECURE SAFE AND COMFORTABLE HOUSING IN THE ARBOR DISTRICT

D. Gorton

The Arbor District, a designation that Hugh Muldoon and I developed 10 or 12 years ago, is the older part of Carbondale that incorporates the houses of the 19th century merchants and professionals, the early 20th century railroad employees, the midcentury faculty at SIUC and the latter 20th century student ghetto. It also has repurposed grocery stores and shops that were part of the urban fabric up until 1974 when a standardized suburban style zoning was dropped onto a traditional neighborhood. The zoning was so out of place that the north side of Cherry is R-1 single family dwellings and the south side is R-3 multifamily, apartments anything goes. The zoning runs literally through the middle of the street. While people have complained for years that there is no parking on Cherry in the Arbor District it goes back to homeowners fearful of students blocking all the parking spaces.

Jane and I knew people who were involved in the Zoning effort, particularly Randy Nelson and Helen Westburg and her husband Bob. Helen was the only woman mayor of Carbondale. She and Randy, among a number of university staff, helped form the Blue-Ribbon Commission to study planning in Carbondale. They were responding to the explosive growth of SIUC and the lax 1920s zoning that made it easy for developers to override residents' interests and build apartments and dormitories for students in what is now the Arbor District and to convert single family homes into rooming houses. The old code was also largely silent on new subdivisions – hence the large number of streets that don't go through.

The 1974 Blue Ribbon Commission brought forth a plan, ran for office and elected a majority on the Council and developed the current residential zoning plan.

It was the era of high modernism where political scientists were explaining that only experts, not ordinary residents, could govern a city or determine zoning. An off-the-shelf national “best practices” zoning was dropped on Carbondale. The R-1 areas were made low density without the stores, and barber shops. Apartment buildings and rooming houses were grandfathered in as were some lawyers and doctors offices We still have the sign that held the shingle for Dr. Leo Brown that hung in our front yard. Despite the area from Cherry to Main Street that was zoned R-1, the area north of SIU was viewed as what Jeff Dougherty, when he was City Manager, called a “student neighborhood”. If a homeowner complained about loud parties, trash, or whatever they would be reminded that they lived in a “student neighborhood” and if they didn't like it they could leave.

In fact, many people did leave, some renting their old houses to students and others selling to existing landlords. Slumlords would position the wildest fraternities next door to retired couples to drive them out and sell to him. I once saw a rugby team that resided in Jim Cummins house – across from retirees on Cherry St - make their way east on Cherry St. tied together with a large hemp rope. There were several dozen men and women drunk and swaying on their way to the strip. Our neighbor, Kathy Cohn, saw them, ran out of her house and was immediately tied up

in the rope. We didn't see Kathy for several days, but she reported she had a great time. Some years later retiree Bob Child, who lived directly across the street on the R-1 side, notified the police that there were drug sales going on in the old rugby house. A drug enforcement task force descended onto the house, frog marching druggies into the front yard where they perched with their hands shackled behind their heads. A terrible scene.

Clearly the zoning, which was a variation of suburban zoning codes, didn't work in the older neighborhoods. Quiet homeowners with families were placed side by side with some mighty raucous folks - mostly students. The conveniences of a corner grocery, legal or medical offices, small stores and shops were gone (except for the grandfathered spots). Now, you had to have an automobile, actually 2 automobiles in many cases burning up cash. The old walkable, livable neighborhood had been suburbanized.

The rise of the slumlords which began in the late 50s continued with poorly maintained houses occupied by reams of students in R-1 zones nearly destroying the neighborhoods. The city, which has always been allied with the slumlords, did not enforce the law on occupancy. Like many things that the city is responsible for enforcing... "its just too much trouble.... too hard...we don't have enough staff....the judge won't convict".

Until recently.

The drop in enrollment of SIUC, coupled with Covid and distance learning dramatiucakly reduced student housing needs. That tied in with a general slowdown in college enrollment in working class/middle class universities, forced the financial capitulation of most slumlords. Radine Paper has given up and the new owner of many of her properties is pushing a scam called "Rent To Own". Barrett Rochman, who also developed Blue Sky Vineyard - and spent time at Marion Federal Pen for a property tax-buying scam - died. Michael Wadiak, who owns properties along Cherry St., hasn't rented most of them for years. Even James Cummins who lives in Chicago and owns the house next to the Bucky Dome visitor center seems to have given up. Mary Alice Hamilton who owns Sun Valley properties and did excellent rentals has sold out. The drop in enrollment coincided with a generational turn over.

Ironically, first rate properties are fully rented at profitable price points by responsible landlords. But such rentals are hard to find. The result is vacant houses all over the Arbor District that are eyesores and attractive hovels for squatters. Simultaneously during the era of cheap money and low interest rates, houses were selling all over the Arbor District. The new owners bought houses at low market rates and low appraisals. We sold two houses - one to a group of tenants and another to a retiree from Arizona. Now the money has tightened up again. But there are still relatively good deals or those who qualify.

ZONING

The first project in improving the quality of life, attracting new residents and having safe structures is zoning. I have long advocated an "overlay" district for the Arbor District. It would

take note of our housing history by instituting the ideas in the New Urbanism: walkable neighborhoods, nearby services, neighborhood businesses, and environmental awareness - not car centric. It isn't like we are in danger of an iron foundry or a pesticide factory on the corner of James. We have people all over the US who are engaged in eCommerce, digital entrepreneurs and WFH. They are not allowed to have home businesses under our code. There are many other recommendations made by the advocates [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New Urbanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Urbanism).

HOUSING GRANTS

The city has given a small amount of its funds to rental conversion - around \$65,000 is budgeted. I understand that during the recent low interest rate environment they actually exceeded the grant funds to facilitate more property sales. That was a first, but it was certainly an improvement.

The City showed its skewed priorities when it granted almost a million dollars of COVID ARPA dollars to social service agencies for their buildings (grants were for \$518,000 to tear down the original high school building, once the anchor of the North West neighborhood and \$450,000 for an HVAC system for Eurma C. Hayes Center). If the City was truly concerned about our housing crisis, they would have funded programs to convert and rehabilitate rentals to homeownership at a high enough level to truly help low-income people buy them. That would have been better for all the older neighborhoods. And, alternatively, funds to rehabilitate the old high school and place it on the tax rolls should have been investigated. Instead, the worst choices were made.

CRIME

On the morning of October 27, at 4:32 AM, shots were fired on 700 block of South Rawlings in the Arbor District. A wounded victim was transported to Carbondale Memorial where he died. Last week a man was killed on College Street. This is beyond unacceptable. Surely we can round up the people who are shooting and killing each other - mostly in our neighborhood. Petty crime such as stolen bikes is endemic. If the city can't fix it we should elect a mayor and council that can.

BUCKY DOME

Hugh Muldoon and I, in renaming the Arbor District, were interested in "branding" our neighborhood. Recently with the cooperation of the Bucky Dome Board the Arbor District helped get a grant that will create a Bucky Dome visitor center and an Arbor District Community Center. There is no more important institution in our community, at the neighborhood level, than the Buckminster Fuller Dome Home. Its potential is enormous and the spirit behind it is amazing having lasted all these years. We need to develop a park and any other support for their efforts. It's key to our branding.

EVENTS

Events are certainly a part of a branding effort. I think there are probably dozens of ideas for events that will call attention to our neighborhood. Here are a few:

1) Bike races, mile runs, or other outdoor events that course through our neighborhood. We can get the streets closed off, welcome food trucks and vendors and spend an afternoon watching healthy folk ride or run. Offer worthwhile prizes.

2) Seasonal displays are already happening on Cherry. The Halloween decorations are over the top and wonderful. We should extend it so that the whole neighborhood participates in developing a safe Halloween for trick or treaters as well as a remarkable visual experience. The Bucky Dome had wonderful pumpkin carvings that drew crowds. The same is true with Christmas decorations. Let's light it up and create a beauty spot. Give significant prizes to the best decorators.

SEEK FUNDING

I mentioned the rental conversion grants and the Covid grant to the Bucky Dome/Arbor District. They have made an immediate impact as we have seen. We should dedicate a team to seeking grants and awards. Of course, we have to have projects that are well thought out to apply for grants. Let's brainstorm for ideas that will benefit from cash infusion.

In this short essay I've given some historical background, views into the city government and fresh developments in our neighborhood. In addition I have argued for common sense zoning that will facilitate new residents, health and safety, comfort and environmental consciousness - The New Urbanism. Certainly we need to engage our newest residents in these efforts - they are frequently the most engaged in neighborhood revitalization. The ideas are not complex nor are they very hard to achieve. In fact they are within our grasp.

EXPAND RENTAL CONVERSION PROGRAMS

Here are some ideas pulled together by Ames, Iowa, home of Iowa State University, which is facing its own problems with vacant rental properties, with a survey of programs instituted by other cities, including Carbondale

<https://www.cityofames.org/home/showpublisheddocument/53062/637070778384700000>.

STUDY TRAFFIC PATTERNS AND CHANGE THEM

One way streets, no parking streets, significant delays trying to cross Walnut and Main due to high speed traffic are all artifacts of the highway engineers of the 1950s and 1960s. It was a car centric philosophy that argued for the quickest and easiest movement of vehicles. The idea was to facilitate traffic to malls and other businesses in the suburban pattern. The Arbor District was a victim of these ideas. We need to study and advocate for slowing traffic (has anyone seen tickets being issued for speeding on Walnut or Main?), and facilitating walking and bikes.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

“Community Solar” may be possible in our neighborhood. It is a way to drop rates for power without having to install a solar array on your home. Its available to renters as well as home owners. The city should facilitate the adoption of alternative power generation to lower costs of residents.

IMMIGRATION

We are amid a worldwide movement of peoples caused by war and unrest, climate change and economic aspiration. At this moment there are several families in the Arbor District who are war refugees, and more are seeking help. It is our opportunity to do the right thing in aiding these people – but we also gain in welcoming hard-working families who seek a new life. They will be part of our hopes for rebuilding our area.

THIS IS A CRISIS

Rex Budde, the current CEO of SIH recently testified before congress on behalf of rural hospitals. He spoke about the crisis caused by the Covid pandemic and the disastrous shift in staffing for the hospital. Nursing agencies went as high as \$250 an hour, elective surgery was postponed, and the hospital was overwhelmed with Covid cases. Even now the costs for staffing are so high that SIH is stopping its planned \$30,000,000 expansion.

The University Mall is losing key stores. That is where sales taxes that support city government are generated. Under pressure from online sales (where the city gets a fraction of the taxes) and the drop of students and administrators at SIU, the Mall is having serious issues.

Meanwhile city spending is proceeding seemingly without concern. Over \$30,000,000

A PROPOSAL

We should develop several study committees into these areas of concern such as traffic, immigration, zoning etc. and come up with concrete proposals for changes. But, we also need to have candidates for political office and commissions that can help implement our ideas.

We are residents of an inclusive, welcoming neighborhood, situated between the two largest employers in Southern Illinois. We have historically shaped the course of our city. Its time that we step forward again.

D. Gorton
November 6, 2022
Carbondale