

Meeting Minutes for Neighbors in South Roanoke

Organizational Meeting

Wednesday 17 December 2003 at Crystal Spring Elementary School Gymnasium
City of Roanoke, VA

Meeting called to order at 7:10 PM., Forty-two in attendance in addition to the four officers.

President Frank Smith welcomed all, went over agenda, introduced officers, reviewed efforts so far and mentioned next meeting, time to be announced, with guest speaker Mayor Ralph Smith.

Mrs. Kelly was introduced from Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership as a liaison between neighborhood groups and city government.

Smith went over the set up of new organizational website of www.soroneighbors.com.

K Bohon gave Secretary Report, which gave total of membership at year's end at 149 with five having pre-paid 2004 dues with five having pre-paid 2004 dues.

C Davis gave Treasurer's Report, which corroborated membership stats, bank balances and bills paid.

Vice-President Bill Thomasson spoke on membership and communication and further discussed the new web site, www.soroneighbors.com, as well as postal and e-mail dues notices to be sent in early 2004.

President Smith stated goal of 500 members out of a total of 2,400 households in the district. The organization has plenty of room for growth. We have not as of yet achieved status of 501-C3 non-profit status, so as of yet dues are not tax deductible but we are working with legal counsel to obtain this status.

Organizational by-laws will be compiled and presented to the organization at next meeting.

Smith then introduced guest speaker, Roanoke City Manager, Darlene Burcham

City Manager thanked group for invitation and congratulated organization on its growth. Offered support and said that neighborhoods are vital to businesses as well as residents. Roanoke has appeal to businesses as many small businesses are here by choice.

City Manager distributed copies of 2001 Comprehensive City Plan. The purpose is to prevent worthwhile projects from not being pursued and to allow persons to interact. Zoning ordinances are leading issue. She said that before 2001 Plan that zoning was haphazard. The ultimate goal is to balance residential and business zoning issues.

Specific zoning issues involve preserving three neighborhoods as single family dwelling neighborhoods. The improvement of river and creek corridors is of importance. There is concern over lack of attention to environmental and resource issues. Another goal is to preserve as much recreational and open space as possible.

An Institutional District is in the works that will specify areas for areas of public use, such as libraries and other community learning resources. Measures are also mentioned of how to

insure wise development in area of airport, as well as improving airport itself. Plans for communications towers will be undertaken to prevent eyesores. Efforts will be undertaken to reconcile compatibility of home based occupations with the neighborhood, as well as future placement of such institutions as halfway houses and nursing homes. The improvement of landscape is another matter demanding attention with an "Urban Forest" environmental issue on the table as well as improvement to parks. Parking issues also are addressed. Sign regulations are also under study to prevent visual clutter.

The City Manager summarized by declaring this a critical time in the history of our city. These plans are to be the blueprint of our city for the next twenty years. The plan replaces the last such plan which being

From 1988 is very outdated. These plans are vital to the city's future. Water/sewer and other infrastructure updating are also prominent in plans. The desire is to "diversify and de-concentrate" housing. Recycling issues are also to be addressed.

The City Manager having completed her remarks, President Smith turned the floor over to questions and answers with the appropriate guidelines. As unfortunately many speakers didn't identify themselves or spoke at such low breath, I will limit the narrative to Q and A format.

Q Concern over children's recreation facilities.

A Parks and Recreation plan calls for two multipurpose facilities to be built that may be adaptable to children's changing recreational interests. (fads) Also to make greater use of public facilities like property next to fire stations and school gyms; in short, to get full use out of seldom used facilities.

Q Concerns over school system.

A We have appointed school board, but they're "autonomous" and serve three year "staggered" terms. All inquiries were directed to School Board and their "autonomy."

Councilman Rupert Cutler said city is always seeking qualified candidates for school board.

Q Safe bicycle trails?

A Greenway project covers this issue. It is a priority issue. Downtown Greenway also on board. Traffic calming and narrower roads under consideration.

Q Are there fines for not shoveling snow?

A We'd rather exhaust all possible communication with errant homeowners before levying fines.

Q Traffic and speeding

A Road alterations and increased enforcement. Speed bumps are also under consideration. Even installing medians with trees in middle can calm traffic.

Frank Smith echoed many neighbors concerns over traffic on Avenham Ave and how Valley Metro buses speed at night. Both City Manager and Councilman Cutler promised that Avenham traffic would receive priority attention.

Q What are city's role models for these plans?

A Roanoke has been compared to "peer group cities," but the identity of these "peers" was not specified. Rather primary input has been directly from citizenry. City needs to market itself. It is to be a team effort with no one group dominating. Community can sell itself once people

visit for first time. But to keep them here, we must stress attributes, not faults. There is no room for regretful “what could have been” mentality. This is the here and now. Optimism need to replace negativity at all levels. Roanoke City schools are of good quality and the constant complaining about them is a hindrance to attracting and retaining folks. She said that Norfolk transcended its image as a gritty port city to become a thriving community. Roanoke needs to shed its image of an old railway town. City needs to retain and honor heritage, but not allow itself to be held back by same. We must recognize our limitations, will never be another Charlotte, but we can attract the small to medium businesses and remain a thriving hub of the area.

Q from John Kepley, Will five-year capital improvement, most especially the demolition and rebuilding of the two high schools be a budget buster? Will it impose crippling debt? Skyrocketing real estate tax?

A Cannot continue spending unchecked. Cost-cutting measures have been taken. Localities must balance their budgets. We are paying now for previous years of neglect of the schools and related facilities. Quality of life will attract economic prosperity and avoid red ink.

Q What about Norfolk? Plummeting bond rate? Inability to borrow in future?

A Development of MacArthur Center was key in Norfolk’s revitalization plan. Federal HUD funds were used, as in many cities. Retailing hub revitalized with Nodrstrom’s the leader, but funding later turned to private Bank financing with municipal buildings put up for collateral. It was a worthwhile undertaking.

At this point questions were requested to be directed back at Roanoke City issues.

City Manger stated that increased home ownership is among highest of goals, as this is the ultimate achievement in creating and maintaining a thriving community of active and concerned citizens who have a direct stake in city’s future.

Q Leaf removal?

A Bag’em and mulch’em is best method. City costs are very high. Leaves on streets are unsafe; clog drains and are potential fire hazard. There may be proposals to either give Roanokers incentives to mulch or provide biodegradable bags, which may be picked up separately and sold later as mulch.

Q Deer hazard?

A Antlerless deer are culled in parks and public lands at night but city is considering culling bucks as well as they are getting more plentiful. Sharpshooters are dedicated and working hard up to last dates at which they are allowed to cull, up to February 2004.

City Manager thanked all for hospitality. Offered CD’s for door prizes. President Smith presented City Manager with Christmas basket.

Meeting adjourned at 8:36pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

J Keith Bohon, Jr
Secretary