Neighborhood Planning Assembly
All-Wards Meeting – Full Notes

Date of Assembly: 1/17/2018
Start Time: (Commence): 6:30 PM
Finish Time: (Adjourn): 8:30PM
Location: Robert E Miller Center (130 Gosse CT.)
Notetaker: Nate Orshan

Steering Committee Members in Attendance:
Richard Hillyard: Ward 1
Infinite Culcleasure: Ward 2/3
Jeff Clark: Ward 4/7
Linda Deliduka: Ward 4/7
Margaret Molpus: Ward 4/7
Chris Trombly: Ward 4/7
Jim Holway: Ward 4/7 - Moderator
Nate Orshan: Ward 5
Charles Simpson: Ward 6

(1) Open Forum

Summary:
Jim provided updates re the September 2017 All-Wards meeting re Memorial Auditorium. Attendees discussed the idea that the NPAs are no longer taken seriously by the City Council and the Mayor as an intentional result of having their budgets scaled back from a historic amount of $40-50K/Year/Ward to the current $400/Year/Ward, with the (also reduced) difference now allocated to Community Development Block Grants. There was broad consensus that the NPAs should get more money, both to effect “micro-grant” type of projects and as a means of being taken more seriously in City government. Action Item for Nate: Talk to Ward 5 Steering Committee re providing $50 to reimburse for costs for the All Wards Memorial Auditorium.

{Note: The discussion about the NPAs’ budgeting and purpose interleaved slightly with the discussion of providing an NPA forum for candidates for office and ballot items. For the sake of these notes, the latter has been removed and placed into a subsequent section, (2).} 

Jim: Memorial Auditorium update: Reported back out to all NPAs

Jim: Miro did a news story re changing the way he’s soliciting input; they’ve got engineers looking at it. Asking City Council, but not sure what that is. I just know there was a change in direction and some question would be on November ballot. I imagine election season will have that as a topic for some candidates.
Experience shows that the All Wards needs a structure that’s less deliberative. The process has revealed itself re community-wide issues that they need tighter timelines.

Fareed (Attendee): I’m with the Infinite for Mayor campaign. I’m thinking about the fact that there’s no legal obligation for City Council to respond to resolutions we come up with. What would be the means of changing that? Legal charter change?

Linda: Charter changes involves going to the legislature, so maybe try something that doesn’t take so much energy.

Jeff: We give City Council a platform to come and talk, but we don’t have a platform.

Linda: NPAs used to have more power and more money. They were held more accountable, but City Council also paid more attention to ‘em. Now they’re viewed as a “pimple on the chin”. That’s partly because we don’t have clout. We used to get $40-50K/year per ward, and then they listened. Some candidates are saying that NPAs should have more clout and power. If we have more money, they’ll take us more seriously.

Richard: Memorial Auditorium night was effective, with a galvanizing effect. Miro ignores NPAs.

Fareed: Ward 5 NPA could be more inviting, a la Ward 2/3 with dinner.

Jeff: How do we get attendance up? We got new signs for Ward 4/7, we do X/Y/Z, but...

Martha: I recently attended the Ward 5 NPA, and they had a great meeting. Someone came from Howard Center, there was useful info. We need better communication and participation for All Wards. I and others worked hard to get the Memorial Auditorium thing going and after that...nada. I personally found that very discouraging. If you want to be a serious player, you’ve got to do some serious work.

Jim: Each NPA is autonomous and has their own structure. We do have to come up with something that... Let’s put the “how to” into the next agenda and then get more into the weeds.

...{Discussion of an NPA forum for candidates for office and ballot items, see (2) below.}...

Fareed: I think who’s in the mayor’s office influences how much money is allocated to NPAs.

(Broad consensus that the NPAs need more money.)

Linda: You need to advocate for more money. We used to have $40-50K or more per Ward. We’d get equipment at Ethan Allen park, do something big with it.

Jim: I have a spreadsheet showing projects that the NPAs have done; we just can’t do ‘em.
Jim: The CDBG is where our money used to be. HUD money goes into CDBG, which goes to CEDO, which then goes to us. Each City Council councilor has roughly the same amount of money that the NPAs used to have, it’s just in the CDBG grants now. But the process for getting paid is too confusing. (Cites issues getting City Council councilors Kurt, Dave, and Ayers all agreeing “take it from my CDBG money”). It’s money that we used to be able to do things with. Now it’s Council money per Miro.

Jim: The process by which the CDBG doles out money isn’t working.

Chris: I’m on CDBG board, and we’re talking about money for social services, for example, affordable housing.

Linda: The total amount we’ve gotten over the years has decreased, too.

Phet: Question: Who applied for NPA grant money for CDBG?

Jim: That was back in the 80s. We don’t pay a role in that anymore.

Fareed: We’re fighting for democracy. It’s worth whatever it’s going to take to save this institution and make it thrive.

Infinite: Jane Knodell came to an NPA meeting one to one-and-a-half years ago, said there was money...we never heard about it again. Is there somewhere on paper that we can read about it?

Jim: My buying the livestream equipment was a test of the process. Nobody has that written down; you can ask the CFO, and they’re unsure.

Charles: We moved our NPA meeting to a paid space for $50/night from Greek Church. Karen Paul offered to pay it, but we decided not to accept so we wouldn’t be in her debt. I don’t like to beg from an incumbent councilor, setting us up as their client.

Fareed: That’s what’s CEDO does.

Richard: CEDO used to do that up to 10 years ago. Noelle MacKay never comes. We should ask her.

Linda: It’s worth continuing the discussion on this.

Jim: City Hall controls all the money. It is about City all still deciding all those things. This has been a tremendous blow to civic engagement. Maybe we need a forum for NPAs that identifies these areas re the funding, re putting teeth in our resolutions. One of the beauty of the NPA model is that it is more grassroots.

Fareed: It’s a conflict of interest if we’re dependent on CEDO. It’s an existential issue.

Jim: All city departments are supposed to assist NPAs, and CEDO services the role of running the first two meetings.

Fareed: Bernie created NPAs as a mechanism to put pressure on City Council.
Unidentified Visitor: We don’t come to NPA meetings because they don’t have decision-making power.

Richard: I want to commend the FPF by Charles Winkleman re downtown neighborhood board and re slumlords and the fact that the Bove property has multiple violations yet gets green light to put up the hotel. It’s indicative of landlords being rewarded for bad behavior.

Linda: There was something on Channel 3 tonight re gentrification of Old North End.

Action Item for Nate: Talk to Ward 5 steering committee re providing $50 to reimburse for costs for the All Wards Memorial Auditorium.
Summary: Note: Meghan was not able to attend, but the attendees discussed the matter. Steering Committee members voted to discuss at the next All-Wards meeting (April 17) a plan for a special All-Wards meeting as a forum for ballot items in the run-up to the November 6 voting day.

(Note: Meghan O’Rourke did not attend the meeting.)

Richard: What’s happening in NPAs re citywide ballot items on Town Meeting Day? There’s only one NPA meeting between now and Town Meeting Day. It’d be healthy to have ballot items discussed, for example, dispatch centralization.

Charles: Brian Pine and Rights and Democracy are trying to get a luxury housing tax on houses sold over $500K (a 1% tax).

Richard: We’ll have 2 school board and 2 City Council races. Steve Locke’s coming from dispatch center.

Jim: Good point: filing for candidates is end of January. One idea: All NPAs organize a day-long forum instead of each NPA. It’d require a degree of organization and access to multiple rooms. You could do it like caucuses.

Richard: How about making the onus on the ballot items promoters themselves, for example, Infinite coming to NPA back in November. Infinite: I was a staff assistant, so we’d had the research ready at that point.

Jim: Signature collection or getting on the City Council itself are the two ways that something gets on the ballot.

Infinite: There are different means of getting the word out on ballot items. Most of us can’t even understand half the language that comes out.

Fareed: We could have the NPA All Wards be empowered to create city ballot items.

Jim: Having a centralized forum would save the mayoral candidates time.

Charles: A centralized forum might shortchange school board candidates. I’d suggest this time around having an All wards sponsored discussion with all the school board candidates.

Linda: We could do it for November elections, sort of a “softer opening” for it. I don’t want to start and not do it well.
Fareed: I have experience via Vermont Worker’s Center doing statewide streaming. People can make motions from Bennington. A town meeting for all political issues (Charles Simpson’s phrase.)

Jim: I’d encourage all NPA members to visit others to learn from them. Revisiting the question: Do we want to take on something THIS election season?

Charles: I’d propose to focus on the least-covered areas: ballot items + school board.

Infinite: The secret of the Ward 2/3 NPA success is its Community dinner, which has taken on a life of its own and is underwritten by, for example, Digger’s Mirth, Yoga studios...

Charles: I’m willing to go to my steering committee. I think it’d be good for the NPA process to do this.

Jim: OK so the choices are:
(Option A): We say, OK, we’ll figure out an All Wards forum that isn’t duplicative of what’s being done already this election cycle.

(Option B): Let’s add this to the agenda for the next All Wards, an existential evaluation of our role in the election cycles.

(Option A) votes: 2/9 steering committee members voted yes.

Linda: OK, add (Option B) to April’s agenda.

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(3) All Wards Meeting Date discussion
- Jim Holway

Summary:
Attendees discussed changing the dates of forthcoming All Ward meetings. All Steering Committee members agreed that the next meeting should be on April 17.

(4) NPA budget update, and Community Development Week Celebration
- Phet Keomanyvanh

Summary:
Community Development Week is the first week of April, and Marcy Esbjerg will be putting on different events highlighting the organizations CEDO has funded. In addition to the Herb Blumenthal Award at Contois Auditorium on April 4, there will be an opportunity for the NPAs to set up a table from 3:00 to 5:00pm to share information about them.
Motion to adjourn adopted at 8:30 PM.

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