

Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council



Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council General Meeting and 2007 Annual Meeting of Stakeholders

March 14, 2007

Approved by the Board,
as written, on 5/9/07

MINUTES

A duly noticed meeting of the Board of Directors of the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council (“GWNC”) was held on Wednesday, March 14, 2007, at the Wilshire United Methodist Church, 711 South Plymouth Boulevard. The meeting took place immediately following the closing of the polls for the GWNC Board of Directors Election that took place throughout the day at the same location. Charles Dougherty, President of the Council, called the meeting to order at 8:04 p.m.

The Secretary called the roll, and Board of Directors members in attendance were: Yigal Arens, Chickie Byrne, Moon Chung (who arrived at 8:15 p.m.); Cindy Chvatal, Charles Dougherty, Elizabeth Fuller, Jane Gilman, Rudolph Gintel, Margaret Hudson, Susan O’Connell, Mary Rajswing, Thomas Roe, Jolene Snett, Jane Usher, James Wolf, and John A. Woodward III. The following absent Directors were represented by their Alternates (noted in parentheses): Carolyn Bennett (Jon Vein); Larry Eisenberg (Gary Gilbert, who arrived at 8:35 p.m.); Arlin Low (Frances McFall), Shemaya Mandelbaum (Richard Battaglia, who arrived at 8:09 p.m.); and Gary Zeiss (Russell Sherman). Directors Arnold Castaneda, Roy Forbes, Tom Gibbons, Lisa Hutchins, Van Dyke Parks, Michael Rosenberg, Ruth Silveira, Baruch Twersky, and Robert Wishart were absent and were not represented by an Alternate.

The Secretary stated that 18 of the 30 Directors were represented in person or by an Alternate at the beginning of the meeting and that a quorum was present.

President Dougherty asked the Secretary to present the Minutes of the previous meeting, and the Secretary stated that the Minutes of the Council’s General Meeting of January 10, 2007, had been distributed to Directors by e-mail and had been posted on the Council’s *greaterwilshire.org* web site. Additional copies were distributed at the meeting. Next, upon a Motion made from the floor and adopted without objection, reading of the Minutes was waived. The Minutes were approved as written.

President's Report

President Dougherty welcomed the very large number of Stakeholders in attendance (well over 100). He stated that this meeting, which followed the all-day Election, would serve as the Annual Meeting for 2007 and that he was very gratified to see the large turnout of Stakeholders. Mr. Dougherty said he wanted to take this opportunity to thank all of the Directors and Alternates who have stuck through their (and the GWNC's) initial term – which turned out to be a year-and-a-half (instead of just one year). He said that, although so much of this first term had been spent on organizational matters, in particular the revision of the Bylaws and the adoption of Election Procedures, the Council had begun to undertake neighborhood-oriented substantive work as well. He then distributed a small glass paperweight as a GWNC memento of appreciation to each of the Directors and Alternates serving the GWNC.

Treasurer's Report and Initial Organization

Treasurer Susan O'Connell distributed a two-page "Expenditures Report" with a page for each of the two fiscal periods since the GWNC's certification in 2005. The first page, for the City fiscal period through July 2006, showed total GWNC expenditures, between October 1, 2005, and May 1, 2006, of \$2,133 out of the total GWNC Budget of \$37,500. The second page, for the City fiscal period beginning in July of 2006, showed total GWNC expenditures, between May 1, 2006, and March 1, 2007, of \$16,430 out of the total available City funds (through March 2007, including the unspent carryover of \$35,367 from the preceding fiscal year) of \$72,867 (as compared to \$72,850 in the GWNC Budget for the current City fiscal period ending in July 2007).

Assuming there were no additional expenses payable as of the March 14, 2007, date of the Expenditures Report, and assuming that the remaining City allocation for this year (three months) is \$12,500, GWNC has available \$68,937 for the rest of this fiscal year. Ms. O'Connell mentioned that GWNC has received a number of requests from local community groups that would like money. President Dougherty noted that Director Mary Rajswing is acting as the GWNC's liaison to the City's "Million Trees Initiative" and that the Initiative also may be an activity that seeks GWNC resources. A copy of the Expenditures Report is attached to the Secretary's record copy of these Minutes.

At this point, President Dougherty introduced and welcomed Naheed Qureshi, a DONE Project Coordinator for the East and Central Area in the DONE Field Operation Division, who alerted the GWNC to the upcoming April 21st Congress of Neighborhoods and the April 28-29 Mayor's Day of Service. President Dougherty then said that, because so many Stakeholders were in attendance because of Item 8 on the Agenda, he would now take Item 8 out of order.

Discussion / Possible Board Action re: Larchmont Community Concern: La Luna

President Dougherty asked Director Jane Usher to introduce the matter to the Board. Ms. Usher explained that there recently had been extensive community uproar about the possible imminent departure of the longstanding local Larchmont Boulevard restaurant, La Luna Ristorante, due to a dispute with the restaurant's landlord, who has leased the space to another restaurant.

Ms. Usher said the concern is not just with the change of tenants in this particular building, first Cottage Antiques and Village Footwear Kids, and now La Luna. What has generated 646 petition signatures is a concern about the future of the entire Larchmont Village neighborhood shopping area. She asked the rhetorical question, "What does the GWNC have to do with the future of Larchmont?" She answered that "dealing with the future of our neighborhood is exactly our task."

Ms. Usher referred to the recent *Los Angeles Times* article that described how small, generally-local commercial tenants throughout the City are feeling the pressure of rising commercial rents. Change is happening. She said she is hoping that, in our community, "change will happen not to us, but with us."

Ms. Usher said this is an emotional issue with many of our Stakeholders, and she urged that the evening's discussion be civil and respectful of one another's differing views. She said she had asked Stakeholders Beth Garfield and Wally Knox to talk about the special "Q" zoning conditions that already exist on Larchmont, and she also indicated that Councilmember Tom LaBonge is aware of these issues. At this point, Ms. Usher introduced Councilmember LaBonge's Field Deputy for this area (and local GWNC Stakeholder), Carolyn Ramsay.

Ms. Ramsay made available copies of, and read from, the March 14, 2007, letter from the Councilmember. (A copy is attached to the Secretary's record copy of these Minutes.) In his letter, Councilmember LaBonge listed his priorities for the village and indicated he would organize a public meeting within 30 days to establish "what we would like Larchmont to be." He continued: "At the outset, we must acknowledge two things: there are economic forces at play; and some information is not accessible because leases and agreements have been made privately and continue to be private."

Ms. Usher thanked Ms. Ramsay and other members of the Council Office staff for being in attendance, and then Ms. Usher called on Stakeholders to present their concerns to the GWNC Board of Directors.

M'Leigh Koziol described the challenges she, as owner of the former Remember When shop, and other tenants have faced. Tom Cairns, a local resident and attorney for Mr. and Mrs. McCullough, owners of the building that houses La Luna, said he was not speaking in his capacity as their attorney. He said that a public forum like the GWNC is not the appropriate place to try to resolve a private matter. That, he said, is the job of the parties and/or a court. Tom Kneafsey, another local resident and a commercial real estate broker active in Larchmont transactions, told of his business interests on the Boulevard since 1979 and of some of the changes that have taken place (*e.g.*, the arrival and departure of G.B. Harb & Son; the departure of Jurgensen's; the change of Penguins Yogurt to Starbucks Coffee, etc.). He described how he feels "the street has come alive."

Joseph S. Fischbach, the attorney for La Luna, said he was speaking only because Mr. Cairns had spoken and because the owners of La Luna had asked him to thank the community for its support. He then described the lawsuit and some of the bones of contention between the landlord and tenant. Randy Esada, a business owner on Larchmont, urged that La Luna's standing up to its landlord be supported by the community. Vincent H. Chieffo, a 26-year resident, mentioned that Larchmont commercial rents and values have been going up because of the community's support of Larchmont businesses. He said that landlords, tenants, and patrons "owe each other the respect and concern such that an individual's actions do not damage his neighbors."

Ms. Usher then explained that, more than a decade ago, special zoning restrictions had been adopted for Larchmont Boulevard between First Street and Melrose Avenue, with stricter restrictions relating to the long block between First Street and Beverly Boulevard. That block has been designated "neighborhood-serving commercial." She then asked Beth Garfield to explain further about these zoning issues.

Ms. Garfield said she and her family moved to Larchmont Village 26 years ago and, nine years later, moved to Windsor Square where they now live. She recounted how, previously, she had just watched as certain chain stores (Blockbuster Video, Rite-Aid) took space on the Boulevard some years ago. Now, the imminent departure of La Luna has motivated her to try to do something to "keep Larchmont, Larchmont." She explained that the City's "Q" ordinance (which means there are "qualifications" on the underlying zoning) adopted for Larchmont Boulevard limits the number of restaurants that can be permitted on "Lower Larchmont" (First to Beverly, including any commercial frontage wrapping around on First Street and Beverly Boulevard). She indicated that there already are more restaurants than the zoning allows, and she suggested that others join her in "not setting foot in any other restaurant in that space if La Luna goes."

Wally Knox said that he was happy to have had his wife explain about the "Q" condition because he had just come to speak about "the joy of Larchmont and knowing the owners of the stores I patronize."

Ms. Usher thanked Mr. Knox and the many other Stakeholders who spoke and indicated that it was time for the Board to discuss the matter. She said it was her belief and hope that the GWNC would empower a balanced committee to study the issue and report back to the Board. President Dougherty thanked Ms. Usher and all of the previous speakers. He said that Larchmont is right in the center of the GWNC and that he thought it was appropriate to create a committee to study Larchmont's future and to open up that committee to interested members of the community. He noted that such a broad GWNC committee would come under the provisions of the Brown Act and that the committee's meetings would require public notice and other types of Brown Act compliance.

Gary Gilbert noted that the next Board was the subject of the election earlier in the day and that its members are as yet unknown. Mr. Dougherty responded that that does not matter because the committee will be open to Board members and non-Board members alike. Jolene Snett said this was an important matter and to remember the changes that overtook, and then blighted, Westwood Village. Susan O'Connell agreed and said "Let's use the energy in this room. Everyone should volunteer and help."

At this point, Cindy Chvatal made a Motion that the GWNC create an Ad Hoc Committee on Larchmont to study the situation and report back with a recommended course of action. Jon Vein seconded the Motion, and the President called for discussion.

Frances McFall supported the Motion, noting that it was "too bad we didn't come together before. Let's come together more often." President Dougherty then observed that there first should be public discussion on the Motion if anyone in the audience wished to speak. Susanne Chase suggested that there could be a small tax on each neighboring residence and that the money could be distributed to the landlords to help them keep rents low. Don Speton asked how Stakeholders could sign up to serve on the committee. Steven Lewis urged that the committee carefully structure its "charge" or "mission." Michael Genewick suggested that the committee have representatives from each of the residential associations in the areas immediately surrounding Larchmont.

The President then asked for additional Board member discussion. Patty Lombard agreed that it will be important to clearly articulate the charge of the committee. The committee needs to oversee a well-orchestrated, thoughtful process. Chickie Byrne suggested it was time to vote. Yigal Arens observed that, while the future of Larchmont may be most pressing now, the committee's recommendations perhaps should have more general application. Jim Wolf said that the committee can, and should, carefully structure its charge. As chair of the GWNC's Land Use and Zoning Committee, he will be happy to assist. He agreed with Mr. Arens that we should not overlook LaBrea, Melrose, and other commercial areas that may be experiencing similar issues.

Following this discussion, the question was called, and the Motion to create an Ad Hoc Committee on Larchmont to study the situation and report back with a recommended course of action carried unanimously.

Mr. Dougherty then asked Ms. Usher and Mr. Wolf to co-chair the committee, and they agreed to do so. Ms. Usher noted that, because she is a member of the City Planning Commission, she will recuse herself from any Commission consideration of the Larchmont issue should the matter ever come before her Commission. President Dougherty thanked Ms. Usher and Mr. Wolf and asked Directors and Stakeholders who had spoken on the matter to please volunteer to work with the committee.

Public Comments

President Dougherty then said the meeting would return to the regular order of the Agenda, and he asked if there were any public comments. There were none.

Board Member Comments / New Business

Mr. Dougherty asked about other business. Gary Gilbert said that today's election requires volunteers to help count the ballots. He said the Election Committee needs four non-candidates to help count, from 10:00 a.m. to noon tomorrow, and he asked that people who can help contact him.

Special Projects Report

Committee chair Margy Hudson thanked Liz Fuller for posting an update on Emergency preparedness on the GWNC web site, and she noted that the Los Angeles Fire Department and she have been scheduling "CERT Training" for July but may move the training to some other time. She indicated there also has been committee discussion of a possible landscaping project for Rosewood Avenue west of Rossmore.

(At this point, 9:30 p.m., Director Jane Usher left the meeting.)

Traffic Report

Committee chair Larry Eisenberg was not present. President Dougherty publicly acknowledged Dr. Eisenberg's diligent work on GWNC traffic issues and thanked him *in absentia* for his service to GWNC.

Submission of New 5-Year DWP Memo of Understanding #2 for Board Action

Alternate Jack Humphreville reported that a new Department of Water and Power Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") has been prepared with input from neighborhood councils across the City and that the MOU provides for an MOU Oversight Committee. Neighborhood councils are being asked to accept and approve the MOU. John Gresham asked if the MOU can be altered in the future, after its approval by GWNC and other councils. Mr. Humphreville said "yes" -- if both parties (the neighborhood councils and the DWP) agree -- the MOU can be amended during its five-year existence.

Yigal Arens asked if there are other documents that could be the subject of the MOU, and Mr. Humphreville replied that he did not know of any. Mr. Arens noted that the language in Section 8 of the MOU makes sense because the DWP cannot negotiate with each neighborhood council. Chickie Byrne observed that it would be appropriate for neighborhood councils to get more involved in conservation issues, and Mr. Humphreville stated that the Oversight Committee can express such concerns. He noted that he is the head of the Oversight Committee's Issues Committee. Ms. Hudson noted that the DWP was represented at the GWNC's recent Emergency Preparedness Fair.

Mr. Gresham moved that the GWNC approve the DWP Memo of Understanding #2 and that the GWNC approve Jack Humphreville's continuing as the GWNC's representative to the DWP MOU Oversight Committee and that the President and Mr. Humphreville be authorized to sign the Memorandum and such other documents as are necessary to effect the GWNC's approval of the MOU. Cindy Chvatal seconded the Motion. The President asked if there were any requests for further discussion. Seeing none, he called the question, and the Motion carried unanimously.

Zoning and Land Use Committee Report and Possible Board Actions

Jim Wolf, Chair of the Zoning and Land Use Committee, commended Margy Hudson for her hard work on behalf of the GWNC and its Board of Directors during its first term, and he also saluted the four officers for their exceptional efforts on behalf of the GWNC and the community. There was a round of applause from the Board.

900-906 Crenshaw Boulevard: A commercial enhancement of this property has been proposed. Residents of the Wilshire Park neighborhood have been working closely with the developer and have crafted some agreeable adjustments to the original proposal. The developer appears to be working to accommodate the concerns of the residents. This has been an excellent example of community involvement in a development project.

751 South Windsor Boulevard: Mr. Wolf reported that the Director of Planning had agreed with the recommendation of the Park Mile Design Review Board ("PMDRB"), which denied the project as proposed. Following the Planning Director's action concurring with the PMDRB, the developer withdrew his application.

Announcements

President Dougherty stated that next meeting, for the present Board AND the newly-elected Directors, would be on May 9, 2007, at The Ebell. The present Board of Directors is still the Board until the newly-elected Directors are sworn in on May 9th.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:56 p.m.

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Respectfully submitted,

Jane Gilman
Secretary