

Greensboro Neighborhood Congress (GNC)

Meeting Notes

Thursday, October 13, 2016



GNC Co-Chairperson **Susan Taaffe** convened the **October 2016** GNC meeting at the Central Public Library, beginning with our traditional introduction of all participants.

Guest Speakers –

November Housing Bond

Assistant City Manager **Barbara Harris** described the process for developing the list of projects proposed for the \$25 million city housing bond that will be on the November ballot. (See full description of projects at <http://www.greensboro-nc.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=31044>.)

This list of projects was developed over 18 months in a process led by our City **Dept. of Housing and Neighborhood Development**. Believing that safe, decent and affordable housing is a community responsibility, they asked for ideas from the community. They entered into a partnership with the **Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro**, holding a series of community conversations in which about 250 people participated.

Ms. Harris explained that the city will continue to serve very low income residents out of federal funds, but the bond money would allow an expansion of homeownership opportunities to include those just over the cut-off line and allow leverage of private and additional governmental funds of approximately \$54 million. One goal is to create revolving loans, so money comes back in when loans are repaid. Revolving loan payments don't repay debt, but are reinvested into more housing.

Advocating for Your Neighborhood

The presenter, **Dr. David Wharton**, has lived in the **Aycock** neighborhood for 22 years. Located at the NE corner of downtown Greensboro, the neighborhood was begun around 1900, with housing essentially finished by 1930s. It had fallen into decline by the 1950s. Dr. Wharton described how neighbors formed their Neighborhood Association and later became a historic district. They are also a Municipal Service District, able to levy a tax within the neighborhood to be used for neighborhood improvements. In addition, they are one of eight city neighborhoods with a strategic plan approved by the city.

Among the challenges faced by the neighborhood have been the division by Summit Avenue; over a 20-year period they have continued to work toward improvements which are slated to begin in 2018. Improvements include a landscape median and bus shelters, and may include reducing Summit to two lanes with bike lanes going through the neighborhood.

Another challenge was the decision of the city to abandon War Memorial Stadium to build the new downtown stadium. The **Historic Aycock Neighborhood Association (HANA)** raised money to hire a Chicago firm to develop a War Memorial Stadium redevelopment plan. They lost the fight but did get commitment from the city to go forward with their neighborhood improvement plan. Some of Dr. Wharton's tips for advocating for your neighborhood include:

- (a) Keep your neighborhood association **active** even when nothing is going on. The HANA has bylaws and a vision statement. They use many internal communications, especially a Listserv (which is the most effective), although they also use Facebook and Twitter. Blogs can help for posting new info, photos, and meeting notes.
- (b) Maintain a web site to store planning **documents**.
- (c) Develop close **relationships** with city staff and city council members. Be very **polite** to city staff. Invite appropriate staff and City Council members to meetings when issues are being discussed. Invite law enforcement resource officer to all meetings to stay abreast of crime/safety issues.
- (d) Consider becoming a **501C3** so you can accept tax-deductible donations.
- (e) **Lobby**.
 - a. If speaking before City Council or a Planning Board, organize and decide who will say what.
 - b. If city staff members are unable to resolve issues, ensure **multiple people** write and email City Council.
 - f. If you are fighting unwanted rezoning, **hire a lawyer** if possible. The developers will have leading lawyers. Be ready to **negotiate**.

Other members present (from Glenwood, Sunset Hills, and Lindley Park) spoke to their past frustrations in attempting to get city staff (and in the case of Glenwood, UNCG) to respond satisfactorily to neighborhood concerns. Council member Sharon Hightower suggested that **Participatory Budgeting (PB)** could be a method for neighborhoods to implement important neighborhood improvements. Neighborhood plans seem to be a strong asset. It was also suggested that a future GNC meeting might address similar neighborhood concerns/frustrations.

Committee Reports:

Treasurer - Jack Zimmerman reports the GNC currently has a balance of **\$520.30** including checking and savings. Main expenses are website domain (paid every three years—recently paid) and the catered December social (costs about 400). Following discussion about the importance of networking that occurs at the social, a decision was made to continue with the social this year.

Announcements:

- Neighborhoods are encouraged to continue advocating for and participating in **neighborhood walks** with police.
- Our next GNC meeting is **Saturday, November 12, 9-11 am**, at the Central Public Library.
- Visit the GNC website at www.GreensboroNeighborhoodCongress.org for information about the GNC and notes from previous monthly GNC meetings.

Respectfully submitted by **Sue Stinson** of the **Westerwood Neighborhood**, October 14, 2016