

United Growth for Kent County Annual Meeting March 18, 2008

PRESENT – Paul Haan, Kendra Wills, Cynthia Price, Herb Ranta, Elyssa Sangalli Hillary, Kim Van Dyke, Christine Helms-Maletic.

The meeting opened with Chair Paul Haan asking people to sign up for membership, to celebrate the fact that United Growth as an independent organization is a year old!

ELECTIONS: The slate for board of directors included Kim Van Dyke, Cynthia Price, Kevin Wisselink, and Bonnie Blackledge. Herb moved, Christine seconded that we nominate the slate, which passed. No other names were offered for the ballot. Ballots were passed around, to be filled out and tallied with the results to be announced at the end of the meeting.

SPEAKER: Paul Haan introduced the speaker. Mike Hamm is a food systems and agriculture expert, currently the C.S. Mott Chair for Sustainable Agriculture at Michigan State University. He was previously at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and there he co-founded and directed New Jersey Urban Ecology.

Dr. Hamm talked about the threats to agriculture land and the “ag in the middle” farms which are neither small nor large. He stressed that there is tremendous opportunity in an economic sense, but his research shows that if everyone moved to the recommended healthy diet Michigan would not have enough production to feed its population.

He stressed that we need to be sure to preserve not only the land, but the skills and knowledge for farming.

He talked about some of the things MSU is doing. He noted that the Student Organic Farm uses no fossil fuel to do its season-extending production in high tunnel hoop houses. Michigan also has a strong need for industries to process our agricultural produce, and he has been meeting with people from around the state to promote this.

UGKC members asked questions of Dr. Hamm, such as how commodity crops could be used differently, and how to position Kent County well (he suggested promoting Farm to School.) He said one question to ask of county government is how policy can help to catalyze new business in agriculture, and thereby economic development.

Kendra talked about the PDR program and suggested that we need an acreage figure for the tipping point at which local agriculture will become a losing proposition. Mike said that one way to view it is to ask ourselves, does making this choice preserve options for the future?

He also discussed the role of our abundant water in our agricultural future.

Paul spoke for everyone when he thanked Dr. Hamm for his excellent presentation.

TREASURER’S REPORT: Herb Ranta discussed the limited amount of money UGKC handles and summarized that since June of 2007, we have taken in about \$2100 and spent just about \$2100, so our balance is \$6000 just about as it was when we started. Up to now, grant monies have gone to MSU Extension. This may change in the near future.

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE: Christine Helms-Maletic reported that RNC has a project focus for the next 18 months on educating Grand Rapids citizens about the new zoning code. There is funding from Dyer Ives to support the project which will take place in 3 phases: brochures developed with Planning Dept. staff;

distribution to neighborhood groups; and three citywide workshops on themes that seem to rise to the top.

LAND PRESERVATION: Marsha Wilcox reported that the committee has a mock-up of the brochure that will be given to educate about all the land preservation options available. On April 19 there will be a celebration of farms preserved and kick-off of the project.

2008 CALENDAR: Paul announced that we have an event at Founders Brewery, a sort of Happy Hour get-together followed by a tour of the brewery (not quite set yet) and an informal tour of The Rapid building across the street. We went over the rest of the calendar of events Kendra had prepared. There will be a tour of Grand Walk later in the year.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Tomorrow from 11:30 1 the LEED for Neighborhood Development group is going to have a discussion about the LEED-ND 101 presentation PowerPoint.

Paul announced again that people should renew memberships by April 30, and reminded people that they can use Pay-Pal on-line.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Price