

United Growth for Kent County, Inc. Minutes of Coalition Meeting June 19, 2007

Present: Conrad Venema, presenter from The Rapid; Herb Ranta, UGKC Treasurer; Marsha Wilcox, Open Space Committee Vergennes Twp.; Mary Jane Robinson, City of Wyoming; Dave Bee, West Michigan Regional Planning Commission; Kari Bliss, Bazzani Associates; Steve Petrides, Kent County Health Department; David Bulkowski, Disability Advocates; Alan Rumbaugh, Grattan Township; Kevin Wisselink, The Rapid; Blake Hamilton, MSU intern; Christine Helms-Maletic, Midtown Neighborhood Association; Stephanie Gingerich, S.E. side resident; Mike Williams, Aquinas College; Cynthia Price, Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council; Fran Pepper, interested citizen; Jill Myer, Kent County Health Department; Kendra Wills and Carol Townsend, MSU Extension.

Chair Paul Haan could not be present, so Vice-Chair Mike Williams welcomed everyone and introductions were made around the table.

PRESENTATION ON THE RAPID'S PLANS: Conrad Venema of The Rapid's planning department made a PowerPoint presentation in answer to the question, "The transit millage passed, so what's next?" He detailed the extension, realignment and frequency/added service on existing routes, and the creation of a new route on the West side. He then discussed plans for Bus Rapid Transit, on which they are already working. This would entail dedicated lanes, and creation of "nodes." Jim Fetzer of The Rapid is preparing to submit a grant application to the Federal "Very Small Starts" program - although the price tag is proposed at \$36 million, that is not considered a large amount in the transportation world, and the Feds had realized that smaller transit systems should not be competing with places like Chicago for funding. Conrad thought The Rapid had a very good chance, though there are complex arrangements yet to be made in finding non-Federal match. He had a slide showing a draft/work-in-progress diagram of "Potential Downtown Grand Rapids Circulator Alignments and Destinations." There is discussion of mounting a campaign to obtain private funding for a streetcar route, which can be built quickly. Carol Townsend wondered about the effect on neighborhoods of some of these projects. We thanked Conrad Venema for presenting and Kevin Wisselink for making arrangements.

PARKS AND RECREATION REPORT FOLLOW-UP: After Walt Gutowski's presentation at the last Coalition meeting, we had proposed further discussion in June. Kendra had e-mailed the City of Grand Rapids Blue Ribbon Panel's Parks and Recreation Report with the request that people review it in detail. There was some question about whether this would fall solely under the Revitalizing Neighborhoods Committee (RNC), but it was felt that the Coalition's consideration would not preclude the RNC from taking further action. The group thought the recommendation that had the most potential was the Parks Foundation, and Paul Haan had sent along comments reflecting that that was moving forward, and that he felt UGKC should participate in some way. (Mike Williams' wife Mary Alice is also serving so there is an information pathway.) There was a sense that City parks actions should be taken in conjunction with Kent County and communication should be encouraged.

After discussion, Cynthia moved, Herb seconded, that the Coalition support the creation of a Parks Foundation in Grand Rapids with the suggestion that exploration be conducted on forming a Regional Parks Authority and on appropriate funding sources for parks, trails, open space and agricultural preservation, working with the County Parks and Recreation Commission. The motion carried.

We also discussed favorably the Adopt-A-Park recommendation, which is already taking place.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The board is pursuing an increase in active, paying members, with a goal of 100. We are currently over 50, but there will be a calling campaign, starting with people who were members last year but had not joined again.

Organizational details are still moving along. For example, we have opened a checking account. Kendra, Carol, Cynthia and Herb had gotten a very good start May 30 on the 501(c)(3) application, getting all the way through the form, and Kendra will follow up with sending it.

LAND PRESERVATION EDUCATION: Marsha reported that she and Kendra had met with Kristine Huizen and Milt Rohwer of the Frey Foundation about the grant submission. The Frey folks asked a lot of questions, and Marsha and Kendra did not come away with a sure feeling about whether UGKC will get the funds, though they are still hopeful. Kendra said that they seem unlikely to fund the organizational portion of the request, nor possibly the "urban" portion, or at least in lower amounts than requested. While waiting for Frey's decision, Marsha is working on developing a list of landowners to approach.

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE: Christine reported that there are 4 things the committee is primarily working on:

1) Monitoring the City of Grand Rapids zoning rewrite for neighborhood concerns - she, Carol and Herb went to the public hearing and were impressed with some of the provisions such as buffers and tree preservation. The committee is still considering whether to hold a public meeting between now and August 23 when the planning commission is currently scheduled to vote on the ordinance. There is the possibility that there may be more need for public education after it passes, provided that the committee continues to feel that neighborhood interests are being met. Cynthia mentioned that Suzanne Schulz had said she intends to incorporate LEED-ND (Leadership in Environment and Energy Design-Neighborhood Development) specifications in G.R. development requirements with the hope that the U.S. Green Building Council will automatically LEED-certify anyone who has gone through the City's process. 2) Continuing to research Special Improvement Districts and following up on tax increment tools to be used for neighborhoods. 3) Sponsoring meetings with neighborhood groups, such as "How to Work with Developers," and possibly a "Green Neighborhood" contest; 4) The Parks and Rec issue, to be determined. Jill is also heading up a small committee to determine what the impacts are on neighborhoods of the more macro-scale economic development going on, but they had not met since the last Coalition meeting.

Carol pointed out that Christine and Kelly Otto had accepted a Blueprint Award at the Growing Communities conference the previous week for Midtown's area-specific plan.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Marsha will attend the Land Conservation Ballot training on behalf of United Growth for Kent County in July. Due to lack of registrations, the seminar has been scaled back, and will cost only \$25 or \$30.

JULY 17 COALITION MEETING CANCELLED: Kendra announced that the board had decided to cancel the July meeting, and advised the 2 committees to explore whether they wanted to meet on the regular day, another day or not at all.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Price