

United Growth for Kent County, Inc. Minutes of Coalition Meeting May 15, 2007

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 by Chair Paul Haan. Also present: Andrew Johnston (Chamber of Commerce), Kari Bliss (Bazzani & Associates, Local First), Dave Bee, Ross from Lowell Twp., Bonnie Schupe Blackledge, Kendra Wills, Dean Salisbury, Marsha Wilcox, Carol Townsend, Blake Hamilton (MSU intern), Jim Ferro, Jay Hoekstra, Lee Nelson Weber, Mike Williams, Chad Fosse - citizen (Grand Rapids), Kevin Wisselink, Paula Blohm, Lowell Township Supervisor, Gail Heffner, Jill Myer, Walt Gutowski of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Parks and Recreation.

After people introduced themselves, we jumped to the Committee Reports.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Paul reported that the board had met, and that UGKC is willing to pay for one person to attend the Land Conservation Ballot training. The training takes place July 17-19, and there is a reduced price of \$225 for those not needing accommodations. Julie Stoneman of Land Conservancy of West Michigan had promoted this widely, saying it was one of the best she had ever attended. People wondered about the Hart of the Lakes organization sponsoring it, since they had never heard of it. Those who are interested should contact Kendra.

PRESENTATION ON (GRAND RAPIDS) BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON PARKS AND RECREATION: Walt Gutowski, who was on the panel, substituted for Rosalyn Bliss, the commission's chair, in making a presentation. The commission's report was distributed. Walt went through some of the recommendations, stressing that it was a very quick process with the main goal of figuring out how to make operations more efficient and "continue to offer quality services that are accessible and affordable."

He said that there will be a follow-up group to look at implementation, and he had volunteered to be on that committee. He talked mostly about millages versus an endowment, and said they interviewed other cities with different models for funding parks.

He also mentioned that they were looking at a variety of ways to help Grand Rapidsians feel more ownership of the parks. The commission recommended a volunteer component, particularly a sort of "Adopt-a-Park" system. In conjunction with that, Cynthia mentioned the excellent partnership with the City that the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council had developed creating community gardens on park land, and invited everyone present to the dedication of the Heartside Peace Garden at Heartside Park on June 4, which also celebrates National Hunger Awareness Day. Mayor Heartwell and Parks and Rec. Director Jay Steffen will speak. Jay Hoekstra asked about the possibility of a countywide millage, to include agricultural lands, which would help support city parks. Walt said they really concerned themselves with the city-owned parks, and suggestions for a millage vote were within city limits only.

Kendra brought up what Minneapolis had done, and Walt said that that city had served as a model for him, calling Minneapolis "light years ahead."

Paul asked what people could do to help, and Walt responded that indications of support for the commission, and Rosalyn Bliss, would be appreciated. Paul offered to continue the conversation about opportunities to support the commission, and suggested that we examine the report. We

decided to review the report for the June meeting and determine next steps after people have had a chance to digest it.

BACK TO COMMITTEE REPORTS: LAND PRESERVATION EDUCATION: Kendra reported on the Frey Foundation request which covers primarily the land preservation education initiative. There are three components: the land preservation effort would include face to face visits with landowners, educating them on how to preserve land, and other campaigns; neighborhood revitalization would ask for funding for studying the impact of the current economic building boom; and support in processing the UGKC organizational process, beyond asking for tax exemption. There is a lot of money to cover part of Carol's and Kendra's time. We will hear in August.

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS: Paul reported for Lori Stanton that one of the main questions the committee wants to answer is how much effect "all the cranes downtown" are having on neighborhood economics. Jill reported that she, Tom Cary, Heather Aldredge, and Gustavo of Grand Valley's Community Research Institute have been meeting to find the best ways to measure that.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION: Bonnie reported that there were not too many people interested in this topic to begin with, especially since there seemed to be overlap with Grand Valley Metro Council, and they could not agree on what they wanted to do. Therefore, they have decided, at least temporarily, not to meet. She suggested that possibly United Growth could sponsor some workshops to get the word out about communities taking advantage of the legislation encouraging joint planning commissions, and/or write an article for the newsletter.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: June 14th will be Metro Council's Growing Communities conference focusing on infrastructure. There will be a presentation on LEED-ND (Neighborhood Development) pilot standards, and a panel discussion about streets. UGKC developed a discussion by Lori Stanton and Christine Helms-Maletic about infrastructure challenges in existing neighborhoods. Kendra mentioned that we had given a \$500 sponsorship to the conference.

Marsha announced that the six townships involved in the Eastern Townships Coalition are sponsoring a photo contest to depict rural character, and Vergennes and Ada have a competition going to find the biggest tree!

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 for committee meetings.

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Price