

MINUTES - GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

NOVEMBER 26, 2023

AT CHARLOTTE SQUARE COMMUNITY ROOM AND ON ZOOM

Meeting Schedule: No December meeting. Next General Membership Meeting is Sunday, January 28, 2024 at 4pm at the Charlotte Square Community Room.

Guest Speaker: Clayton Jones, Director of Government and Community Relations at the University of Rochester. He will report on the University's efforts concerning properties at the Carlson building (former YMCA), the East End Garage, and Block F. Bob DiPaola introduced Clayton. He is our contact point for matters relating to these properties.

Summary of Clayton Jones' presentation:

UR focuses on and is committed to its presence in the City, especially in the Center City. Clayton articulated five "pillars":

1. Reduce preventable emergency department visits. (The UR is building a new emergency room tower to expand those services at the Medical Center, but wants to create community-based access to such services as well.)
2. Increase access to health care, particularly primary care services in the downtown/center city areas.
3. Clinical planning.
4. Increase access to primary care physicians and program providers.
5. Increase economic development in the City.

The UR has identified 6 properties/services that it could develop, but Clayton did not elaborate on which ones they are targeting. The UR is asking: "What does the community actually need?" They have contacted 40 community-based partners for input, including GPA about 1 year ago. There is new leadership at the URMC and a new strategic plan, so this process is evolving.

The former YMCA at the Carlson building is not operational. The Y closed it, so the building should not be referred to as a YMCA. The Y put it up for sale through a bidding process. UR and other entities submitted bids. All downtown swimming pool services have been closed, leaving no gym/recreation/swimming pools in the City. (The closing of the Y has adversely impacted downtown residents – especially urban youth. The former Y naturally served as a diverse community. Barriers were broken down by mutual interests in exercise and Y activities).

UR is in the process of closing on its purchase of the East End Garage and is developing garage improvement plans. UR wants to work on creating vibrancy around Gibbs St. and the Eastman School of Music (ESM) students and programs.

At the Sibley Building, UR is providing dental services for low-income residents. Clayton also mentioned NextCorps, a UR-owned startup incubator, and desires to expand what he called, a relatively unknown gem.

With further research, Judy found these facts: *With significant support from New York State and the federal government, the University invested \$16 million to establish NextCorps, a regional business incubator, as the anchor of the City's Downtown Innovation Zone and the \$200 million redevelopment of the Sibley Building. NextCorps currently supports 65 high-tech startup companies and the world's largest business accelerator for optics, photonics and imaging startups. See flyer at: <http://www.ogcr.rochester.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UR-Community-Benefit-One-Pager-FINAL.pdf>*

Additionally, if anyone desires more information, Mark Wilson has been intimately involved off and on with this incubator for 25-years.

Clayton opined that the BID discussions will play into this. NYS gave funding for downtown economic development.

UR is the largest employer and property owner in the City. UR's long range goal envisions a downtown presence where the Medical Center, Eastman Music School, and possibly also the Engineering School and the Simon School of Business could have a presence. Clayton mentioned that 90% of the 130 students living at Innovation Square are from UR. In summary, the Urgent Care plan is only one piece of the long range plan that the UR has for this area.

Q&A Session:

Several attendees were vocal about their disappointment and despair about the Y closing. All downtown swimming pool services have been closed, leaving no gym/recreation/swimming pools in the City. The closing of the Y has adversely impacted downtown residents – especially urban youth. The Not-For-Profit legal status was questioned, especially in light of several new and seemingly profitable Y complexes built in several suburban locations over the past 5-10 years. The administration said that financial losses at the downtown location were the main reason for closing the Downtown Y.

Roz Goldman said GPA was instrumental in getting the tile murals installed onto the East End Garage, and asked Clayton to include the artist and the GPA before the UR makes any changes to that wall. Clayton promised to do that. He said the entire garage needs a lot of work. The garage will not be removed from the city tax roles.

The UR Strong Minds Adult Mental Health Services at 150 North Chestnut Street has been operating for four years. Services offered include a variety of mental health services to address the diverse needs of adults age 18 to 65. Suzanne commented that we don't know what's going on at this clinic, and that people are moving away from the neighborhood and it's becoming an unsafe area. See <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/locations/mhw-general-adult-outpatient-services>

It was mentioned that (1) if UR operates downtown, the properties will be taken off the City tax roles and (2) Sometimes the UR comments are not trustworthy and not specific enough for GPA. Clayton agreed. They don't know all the answers because the planning is evolving.

The RGE building is up for sale. UR wasn't the successful bidder. UR had wanted to consider it for student housing, administration offices, engineering studies. RG&E has not made their plans public at this point.

The UR has owned the Block F parking lot on Gibbs St. across from the Eastman Theater and the Eastman School dormitory for many years. The parking lot has been used for RPO concerts, the Fringe Festival and the Jazz Festival, parking for ESM and others. Clayton said the UR has no plans to do anything with that

block right now but may in the future. According to its deed from the City, UR was supposed to have improved the parcel within the first five years of its ownership and if not, the City would have the option to revert ownership back to the City. Question: Would the property revert back to the City at this point? If there's a discussion about Block F, we want GPA representation involved.

When noted that 4 of the 5 UR "pillars" are healthcare, Clayton was asked if he is representing URMC or all of UR. He confirmed that he represents all of UR. In subsequent talking points and in answering questions, Clayton broadened significantly beyond the 5 pillars that were articulated as the overall framework for the UR interests in this immediate area. Several attendees voiced confusion, and a desire to hear the overall grand visions of the UR in this area, more details about the plans and the status, and more opportunity to provide input.

Business Meeting Agenda

Treasurers Report -Rick McGrath. The current balance in account is now \$11,017.60 which includes restricted funds for Art, Plants, Social. Roz Goldman has been finding new members – up to 6 new members.

Membership Committee - New members welcomed: Dennis and Kath Kuo. Justin and Sarah Montanti (and their new baby). Roz Goldman is the new Chair of the Committee. She has been knocking on doors and handing out flyers. She said there are neighbors who are very vocal but who do not pay their dues. If members come to our sponsored/funded events and have not contributed to the GPA coffers, that is not fair.

Approval of Minutes of Oct 29 meeting. Tabled till next meeting in January.

Status of Holiday Party Sunday Dec. 10th at 4pm – Pam reported that there was an immediate volunteer response to help. The Eastman Student Dorm is a first choice and Charlotte Square Community Room is second option. One concern: the Bills are playing a game that afternoon.

Windsor Street Update – Bob DiPaola reported. Rick McGrath, Scott Frame and Bob previously have met with Dean Jamal Rossi of the Eastman School of Music to express our concerns/displeasure with the conditions of their dock area on Windsor St., and the negative effects to the neighborhood that this tractor trailer traffic generates. He was very attentive and unaware of these issues. He promised us immediate action. Since we met with him and his Operations Director, the gate to the dock area has been made operational. We will be meeting again with him in early December as to progress on the tractor trailer issue and will report again at the next General Membership Meeting.

Should there be follow-up to Ernest Lamour, President/CEO of the YMCA. The Y building may not be sold after all. Richard contacted Ernest prior to Ernest's move here and he has not replied. With the element of doubt discussed here with Clayton Jones about a sale, should we make another effort? Individuals in their individual capacity can write to Ernest expressing concerns about the closing. John Goldman has a contact at the Y and will see if anyone there will talk to GPA. Suzanne talked to the Y on Lewis Street and was informed that they are having to raise funds themselves to keep their services going. Can Evan Dawson at WXXI have a Y representative on his program? Can Jeremy Cooney help get answers?

Sandy Mayer said the Y is more interested in bricks and mortar and wealthy donors. Nothing that will service the downtown youth and citizens. Bob Keck said the Y is a non-profit. If all they are doing is providing services to the suburbs, they are not fulfilling their non-profit mission. Why not get the Attorney General involved?

Light Post Banners Downtown - Roz Goldman/Richard Rosen. No action from the City. If there's not enough funding from the City then the GPA can contribute to get them installed.

Public Safety Report: Pam DiPaola said the November PCIC committee meeting was canceled. They will provide a speaker for one of our General Membership Meetings in January or February.

Pedestrian Crossing at N. Union and Charlotte St – Richard requested approval to send a letter distributed to members today to Holly Barrett, City Engineer. Motion made by Pam and seconded by Gloria to approve sending the letter. A quorum was present and the motion passed. A copy of this letter will be posted on the website with these Minutes.

Report on Building Inspector Neighborhood Walk-through. Suzanne Mayer provided this summary of our walk on November 15, 2023 with Charles Reeves, Director of the Southwest Neighborhood Service Center (SWNSC) and Bruce Wilder, Chief Inspector for the City of Rochester. *Note*: Dan Rivera is the Code Enforcement Office assigned to the GPA. GPA attendees: Suzanne Mayer, Bob DiPaola, Mark Wilson, Judy Loeb, Roz Goldman, Carol Kellog.

We visited places that need attention by the owners. And we pointed out the well-kept part of the neighborhood.

1. 146 University Avenue has changed owners 2 times and the building now looks worse. Siding is mostly off. And there is garbage in the parking lot.
2. 150 City owned property - the lawn is mowed but there are weeds that need to be trimmed along the building and fence.
3. Carpenter Alley - traffic and thefts problems are persistent issues. Cars have been stolen as well as a ring camera on a door. The boards on the former Downstairs Cabaret building are not secure. Charles and Bruce were interested to hear about the parking lot owned by Chris Kawolsky and other issues with him.
4. Windsor Street – we talked about sidewalks that need to be standardized pursuant to the historic nature of the original ones.
5. We pointed out trip hazards at the corner of Main and Gibbs and the lack of maintenance of the Carlson (former YMCA) building grounds.
6. We pointed out the facade of the West Construction building, since the building permit was done a year ago and the facade is even worse than before, and the garbage accumulates.
7. We pointed out the 10-3 Selden Garage
8. 73 University looks much better but pointed out the breaking there.
9. 57 University - trash and weeds, and probable illegal use of the building in the Grove Place district
10. 137 Gibbs - maintenance - not sure what will be done.
11. Our intent was to continue on Richmond Street, Haags Alley and Windsor.
12. Also to ask about the signage on the barbershop at 511 E. Main Street (corner of Scio).

We will reschedule another walk-through of sites that weren't completed on November 15th.

Inner Loop North Citizen Advisory Committee Representative request. Bob Keck requested a volunteer who lives in the University Ave. area. 6-8 meetings over 18 months. Volunteers must attend at least half of those meetings.

ZAP: (Zoning Alignment Project) New Draft Code – Issues affecting Grove Place. Reported by Bob Keck.

The Zoning Alignment Project (ZAP) issued its latest draft Code and Maps. The draft code document is disappointing. It is, relative to other modern codes, badly organized and difficult to read and follow. Anyone seeking a good example for comparison would do well to look Harford, CT's code (<https://www.hartfordct.gov/files/assets/public/development-services/planning-zoning/pz-documents/zoning-regulations/zoning-regulations-06052020.pdf>)

Of particular interest to the GPA:

- 1) The historic district along with the Downtown Cabaret Theater (DCT) parking lot has been zoned MDR (Medium Density Residential) which permits residential use up to four units. A special permit is required for residential use beyond four units. MDR by default has a 20 foot setback, which means were someone to put townhouses on the DCT parking lot, they would need to be set back 20 ft from Scio. Oddly, even if the parking lot had been put in the Downtown Mixed-Use District (DMU), the same 20 ft setback would still apply. Outside the historic district, the rest of the GPA foot print is in the DMU, which does not have a lot of restrictions on use.
- 2) A hot item throughout the city is Air BnB and short term rentals. These are not permitted in an MDR, but would be allowed in the DMU.
- 3) The zoning for the DMU is odd and unimaginative. For example, buildings such as City Hall, Rundel Library and Christ Church would not be allowed. It does not appear that any real thought went into thinking about what the City wants the downtown to become. As it stands, new construction is very likely to look like what we got along Union Street where the Inner Loop East was filled in.
- 4) The ZAP team will be holding a public meeting Wed. Nov. 29 6:30 pm at Rundel Library (3rd floor). The link to the new draft code, maps and other resources can be found at: <https://rochesterzap.com/2023/09/20/draft-zoning-code-draft-zoning-map-and-draft-generic-environmental-impact-statement-now-available-for-review-and-comment/>

New Business.

Dana Miller informed Richard Rosen after this meeting that the proposed sale of seven parcels of vacant land from owner, Christopher F. Kawolsky, Director, 20-24 Windsor S, Rochester, NY Downstairs Cabaret to the Rochester City School District was submitted to City Council in August and was approved in September 2023. There was no foreclosure. The sale was completed thereafter. The parcels will be used to meet the parking requirements for the RCSD World of Inquiry School No. 58. Reference: Acquisition – 494 E. Main Street, 500 E. Main Street, 135 Scio Street, 141 Scio Street, 147 Scio Street, 151 Scio Street, 163 Scio Street.

Motion to adjourn by Richard Rosen, seconded by John Goldman. Unanimous consent. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Judy Loeb, Secretary