

GPA Meeting Minutes

Meeting #: G 11

Date: 2/15/26

Time: 4:00 pm

Location: Room 209, Eastman School of Music

Type of Meeting: General Scheduled

Participants: (see attached)

Approval of Minutes: Rick McGrath moved to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2026 General Meeting; Roz Goldman seconded. Acceptance was by majority vote.

Speaker & Discussion: Dr. Mitch Gruber, At-Large City Councilmember

Dr. Gruber emphasized that no issue is trivial when engaging with city government, and residents should feel comfortable reaching out to their elected representatives. He outlined a protocol for residents with concerns, which includes calling 311 (maybe more than once) to log the issue, and then reaching out to the neighborhood association to identify the main points, who will then contact Dr. Gruber. Dr. Gruber also mentioned challenges with long-term issues like those involving substandard businesses, citing a zoning issue at 57 University that took many months for resolution.

An update was provided on the Inner Loop North project, noting that there had been a vote on a small amount of state money recently, marking the first related vote in about a year. Dr. Gruber has advocated within city government for meetings with neighborhood associations regarding issues like traffic studies before the city proceeds, stating that he's been assured that public meetings would be set up shortly. The delay in the traffic studies is partly attributed to the Federal Highway Association now asking different types of questions than anticipated.

Dr. Gruber is actively helping to finalize the new recommended zoning code, which he expects to be made public imminently, either this month or next. Once public, the code will undergo at least three months of review by the Environmental Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Planning Commission, during which neighborhood groups are strongly encouraged to review and provide consolidated feedback. The new code is intended to facilitate more building in Rochester and modernize archaic zoning laws in commercial corridors, particularly in the Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest.

Sandy Mayer, our member, and Dr. Gruber are working on ROC Vision Zero, a program which is planning public forums in April and May regarding reducing the city speed limit and implementing automated enforcement. Dr. Gruber believes passing laws that are not enforced, such as reducing the speed limit without enforcement measures, is not productive. He emphasized the need to discuss automated enforcement, including speed cameras and red-light cameras. The use of automated enforcement, such as school bus arm cameras, has been effective, and he suggests implementing 8 to 12 mobile cameras that rotate locations, similar to a successful model used in Dayton, Ohio. When questioned about the past removal of red-light cameras, Dr. Gruber acknowledged that the cameras had actually been successful in significantly reducing accidents at 37 of 39 intersections, but they were taken away due to arguments that they disproportionately impacted poor people. Dr. Gruber suggested that a change would be to not focus on one neighborhood and noted that technology is now substantially better, as exemplified by the bus arm cameras and the rigorous scrubbing process to eliminate faulty tickets. The aim is to change bad behavior, such as running a red light, not to issue tickets for minor infractions, nor to pad the city coffers. A member commented that the "Vision Zero" initiative sounds admirable, but we currently struggle with effective enforcement, referencing issues with the fact that the speed limit on Lake Avenue is 30 miles/hour and yet speeds have been clocked at nearly 80 miles an hour. Both the member and Dr. Gruber stressed the need to "put some teeth" into the initiative, with fines that will actually cause driver behavior change. Dr. Gruber noted that he favors enforcement because he desires responsible driving, not just an increase in tickets.

A concern was raised regarding police presence and overtime costs for the two police cars stationed at Planned Parenthood (University Avenue) every Thursday. Dr. Gruber explained that with about 100 police vacancies, officers are very busy, and when short on personnel, traffic enforcement is the first to go. Some special events (like those held by the Rochester City School District or police presence at the East Ave. Wegmans) are paid for by the requesting entities. However, others, such as festivals, are absorbed by the Police Department. Usually, this police coverage is voluntary to police officers, with seniority given first selection of the overtime opportunities. This can lead to budgeting challenges as overtime pads pensions for those closest to retirement (who are the most senior of officers). Three options to address this challenge include saying no to some events, increasing charges to cover long-term costs, or changing the bargaining contract to ensure overtime is not exclusively taken by those nearing retirement. A member raised concerns about the significant and costly police presence, often involving two police cars on overtime, watching small-scale protest actions at Planned Parenthood. The member noted that the coverage is perceived as unnecessary, given the lack of historical violence, and the member has been told the city is paying the overtime bill for this coverage. It was suggested that making the police presence random would be better than continuous coverage, and the topic is scheduled for discussion at the next PCIC (Police Citizen Interaction Committee) meeting.

Dr. Gruber addressed a member's concern about Monroe County Department of Transportation rejecting city requests for painted crosswalks, explaining that Rochester uses Monroe County DOT (and therefore its rules) as its official traffic engineer, and the county's perspective is often very suburban. This reliance is creating friction because the county's mentality does not align with the needs of city communities where walking is critical. The Mayor Evans administration will need to decide whether to negotiate a better mutual understanding with the county or incur the significant expense of hiring the city's own traffic engineer.

A query was made about the status of the city's alleyway concept study. Dr. Gruber reported that a long-term study is underway to inventory all alleyways and determine responsibility and a plan for maintenance, which should be completed within the next year. There is a public meeting related to this inventory and possible solutions expected in March and he encouraged members to attend. An important realization was shared that code enforcement currently does not inspect alleyways, operating under the impression that they are not rights-of-way. The speaker asserted that alleyways absolutely are rights-of-way, and he will push the two relevant departments to acknowledge this and ensure regular inspections.

Regarding programs to encourage owner-occupied housing or condos, Dr. Gruber mentioned existing city initiatives like "Buy the Block" and new state funding for building single-family homes. He noted that the current zoning code makes building condos and townhouses notoriously difficult in Rochester. He hopes the new zoning code will be "frictionless" for building condos and townhouses, noting that a large condo project is soon coming online near Grove Place (the former Rochester Club building).

When asked about the success of the vacant building registry, Dr. Gruber noted that it is helpful for fire department preparedness, as squatting in vacant homes leads to many house fires. He offered to find specific numbers to better evaluate the registry's effectiveness.

Concerns were raised about neighborhood properties in very poor condition where the fines are too low to motivate owners to make repairs. Dr. Gruber noted that the city has hired an attorney to take egregious code violators to court, but this is often targeting out-of-town owners. He plans to look into specific addresses if provided him via email and offered to bring someone from Code Enforcement to the next meeting to discuss those properties.

A question was posed regarding the poor and dangerous condition of the Inner Loop North due to potholes, and deteriorated roads, asking if there is a maintenance plan until the ILN project is started. Dr. Gruber acknowledged that the Inner Loop is continually degrading and said that while specific bad potholes can be filled, he does not think a significant amount of money should be spent on it until a decision on the next steps is made. The ILN project is delayed due to substantial funding being held up by administrative "games" and lack of timely responses from the federal government. A member pointed out that while it is understood that maintenance had been postponed due to expectations of demolition, the current condition of the road is described as horrible and damaging to cars.

An update was requested on the lawsuit challenging the city's 'sanctuary city' status. Dr. Gruber responded that the issue is still active, but all signs point to the city being in a good position to legally defend its policy, especially since there is no current legal path for the federal government to strip cities of funding based on this status.

A question was posed regarding the empty retail storefronts on Main Street and what the city is doing to fill them, including the possibility of a downtown grocery store. Dr. Gruber explained that the city does not have a significant role in forcing property owners to fill storefronts, although they attempt to facilitate and grow the entrepreneurial ecosystem. It was noted that too many property owners are not actively looking to lease their buildings, presenting a significant challenge. Many of these properties are owned by absentee landlords. The discussion on a downtown grocery store noted that previous attempts to incentivize stores, such as Whole Foods in Chicago or Constantinos on Mount Hope, backfired because stores were subsidized to open but not to stay open. It was explained that grocery stores rely on actuaries who will open a store if the math indicates enough sales, meaning the city needs to change its high poverty rate and increase density to attract stores. While downtown density has reached 12,000 residents, the average income remains depressed, which is the primary factor discouraging stores like Trader Joe's from opening. One member expressed the opinion that he feels the market mechanism has worked in the neighborhood, citing convenience stores that are useful and reasonably priced at 275 Union Street and on Main Street.

Concerns were raised that every new housing development is low-income, which may not contribute to raising the average income (poverty rate) needed to attract businesses. Dr. Gruber clarified that the community has done a nice job ensuring predominantly new housing developments are mixed income, a reality he believes is not always clearly communicated. It was affirmed that every building on the Inner Loop East had specific mixed-income housing mandates required by the pilot agreements, therefore they are not 'all low-income'.

Treasurer's Report: Rick McGrath reported that there is currently five thousand six hundred thirty-eight dollars and thirty cents (\$5,638.30) in our treasury. Expenses this month were a renewal to Google Workspace for technology and a donation to the Eastman School of Music of three hundred dollars (\$300.00) in appreciation for the meeting space and the services they provide the GPA at no cost.

Committee Reports: There were no reports from the **Membership, Beautification or Public Safety and Code Compliance Committees.** The **Nominating Committee** chair reported they have met and are making good progress on identifying candidates for the upcoming Executive Committee vote. Interested volunteers for any position were encouraged to contact members of the committee within the next few weeks.

Action Items/Decisions:

- (G02-02) ROC Vision Zero Update: See above, Dr. Gruber's presentation, paragraph four (4).
- (G02-03) Neighborhood Bench Refurbishment: Not discussed
- (G07-01) Initiatives for Exec Cmte: Not discussed
- (G09-01) Update on Save the Green Space Committee: Richard Rosen reported activists leading the effort to convert the green space at Charlotte and Union Street into a park are lobbying the City Council. The Mayor has prioritized the site for affordable home ownership via an RFP process, but the Save the Green Space Committee feels the location is wrong for that use and is advocating that it remains as green space. A petition with over 500 signatures will be presented to Council on Thursday (February 19, 2026) asking them to consider the essential nature of the park for the quality of life downtown.
- (G09-02) Update on Bldgs. of Historic Value: Richard Rosen gave the update, noting that the group of buildings on Charlotte Street (#52-57) represent the only strip of original, high-density, mixed-income housing from the first few years of the city's incorporation (1830's). He stated that he wrote a proposal that the Landmark Society is currently reviewing to make it a small historic district with an explanatory plaque. He emphasized that the Landmark Society requires tons of letters of support to declare a historic district due to the political nature of the process.

New Business: None

Open Discussion:

Bob DiPaola shared the name of the **new code enforcement officer** for the Southwest, **Bruce Wilder**. His phone number is **585-428-6877**.

He also commented that there has been mixed sidewalk maintenance in the historic neighborhood, reminding residents, that homeowners are responsible for clearing snow unless it is higher than 4 inches. The city plows sidewalks only when there is four inches (4") of snowfall.

A member stated that a significant issue is the large mounds of snow left by city street plows at the sidewalk intersections, especially for people needing walking assistance. It was suggested that homeowners/landlords be encouraged to use shovels to clear the intersections after the city plows pass, as the Eastman School of Music does.

Pam DiPaola shared that a city publication announced that gun violence in the city has dropped by 60%.

The former Downstairs Cabaret building, which has been in disrepair and vacant is currently for sale, priced at \$485,000. The consensus was that renovation would be prohibitively expensive, requiring \$1.5 to \$2.5 million, meaning it is likely to sit vacant for a long time. The option of having the city force a demolition for green space was raised, though it was noted that the building is privately owned.

Suzanne Mayer announced that the former Blessed Thistle Bakery building was located has been sold to Jackie Ortiz. Jackie's State Farm Insurance agency is planning on renovating the building.

Action Items/Decisions:

<u>What?</u>	<u>Who?</u>	<u>Deadline?</u>	<u>Status?</u>
G02-02 ROC Vision Zero Update	SMayer	ongoing	In Process
G02-03 Neighborhood bench refurbishment	BDiPaola	Spring 2026	Hold
G07-01 Initiatives for Exec Cmte	Members	ongoing	Open
G09-01 Update on Save the Green Space Cmte	LReilly	ongoing	In Process
G09-02 Update on Bldgs. of Historic Value	RRosen	2/15/26	Open

Next Meeting: Sunday March 15, 2026, 4:00 pm, Eastman School of Music Room 209. Suggested Speaker: TBD

Adjournment Time: 5:22 pm

Attachment: Participant Sign-In Sheet

Respectfully Submitted:
Pam DiPaola
Secretary

Feb. 15, 2026

Grove Place Assoc.

ESM Room 209

Meeting Sign-In:

- Barnatones, Brian
- ~~Bhattacharya, Tricia~~
- Buckpitt, Charles
- Carretta, Chris
- Carroll, Joanna
- Chafik, Jake
- Chafik, Liz
- Conquest, Deborah
- Cooney, Diane
- Cooney, Jeremy
- ~~Coppard, Bill~~
- Demina, Regina
- ~~DiPaola, Bob~~
- ~~DiPaola, Pam~~
- Doolittle, Nicki
- Doolittle, Tex
- Eisenberg, Jack
- Eisenberg, Sue
- Fink, Janet
- ~~Fink, Tom~~
- Frame, Kathy
- Frame, Scott
- ~~Frank, Dexter~~
- Goldman, John
- Goldman, Roz

✓ J. Frober

- Hamm, Robin
- Keck, Robert
- Kelly, Jessica
- Kelly, Ryan
- Kirvan, Liana
- Kirvan, Lars
- ~~Kolbe, Elizabeth~~
- ~~Kolbe, Jim~~
- Korjenevski, Sergey
- Kuo, Dennis
- Kuo, Kat
- Lewis, Linda
- Linehan, David
- Linehan, Janice
- ~~Loeb, Judy~~
- Marvin, Bill
- Matthews, Anthony
- ~~Mayer, Sanford~~
- ~~Mayer, Suzanne~~
- ~~McGrath, Rick~~
- Millick, Sally
- Orbach, Jill
- Papaj, Rick
- Paris, John
- ~~Pond, Chris~~

- ~~Pond, Kim~~ virtual
- Porter, Brenda
- ~~Pulley, Deborah~~ -virtual
- Reilly, Linda
- Rosen, Margery
- Rosen, Richard
- Saphar, Ed
- Saphar, Gabriel
- Shapiro, Sandy (+aide)
- Smith, Julie
- Smith, Stephen
- Staropoli, Rick
- Staropoli, Tiffany
- Sudak, Joyce
- ~~Tabbi, James~~
- ~~Tabbi, Joseph~~
- ~~Wager, Barbara~~ virtual
- Weyerts, Gloria Marie
- Wilson, Mark
- Woodring, Suzanne
- Wright, Dennis
- Wright, Sandy

Additional:

Pat Rivers ✓
Mercedes Vizquez ✓
Simmons
Dr. Mitch Gruber