

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING of THE GIFFORD PARK ASSOCIATION
Thursday, September 21, 2023

DATES TO NOTE

Wed., Oct. 4, 5:30 pm: Weed Whack Wednesday, Pocket Park at corner of E. Chicago/Geneva

Tues., Oct. 10, 7 pm: Elgin Historic District [EHD] Committee Meeting, 155 S. Gifford St.

Sat., Oct. 14, 1-4:00 pm: Fall Fest, Gifford Park

Thurs., Oct. 19, 7 pm: GPA General Membership Meeting, Elgin History Museum

Sat. Oct. 21: Nightmare on Chicago St. (Be aware of downtown streets blocked off beforehand)

IN ATTENDANCE

Barbara Evans, Tyler Grace, Janine Hnatusko, Trish LaFleur, Matt Martin, Dan & Pat Miller, Mark & Glenna Preradovic, Officer Payne

CALL TO ORDER: GPA Vice-President Tyler Grace

R.O.P.E. REPORT (EPD Officer Payne)

Two incidents of note occurred in the EHD this month, both of which involved gun shots, one at a house in the 400 block of Park Street. Although the owners weren't home, two suspects have been arrested. The other incident occurred around 5 p.m. near the corner of Villa and Fulton Streets. Although the bullets hit a stop sign, the arrested suspect admitted he'd been aiming at the EPD squad car. Fortunately, the EPD officers were out on the beat. As to how the new law that eliminates cash bail will affect the three in custody, Officer Payne said that the EPD is undergoing training as to the procedures required by the new law and that he would be able to answer our questions about it at our next meeting.

After explaining why the EPD restricted the number of cars participating in the Hispanic Heritage Month parade this year to 300 and established a set parade route for it, Payne reported that most were pleased with the results. He also invited all to attend the EPD's Halloween Extravaganza, which will be from 5 to 7 p.m. on October 19th in front of the police station at 151 Douglas.

SECRETARY's and TREASURER's REPORTS

With no meeting in July and absent a quorum of Board members in June and August, a motion was made to approve the May, June and August minutes. It passed unanimously.

Although money gained from sponsorships is not yet all in, Dan could report that ticket sales for this year's house tour were \$22,568. Also incomplete are the tour expenses, including the cost of the booklet. Paid out, however, has been the money spent for the after party: \$2,622.16, of which approximately \$160 is for leftover soda and materials that will be used at other GPA events. After detailing other bills paid—including \$1,548 for our storage locker and a \$433.91 donation to the Watch District—Dan reported that to date GPA has \$175,111.85. Approval of this report was also unanimous. Because the rates for CDs have raised dramatically, Dan is looking into putting some of the \$87,173.89 GPA currently has in its checking account into additional CDs.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Elgin Historic District (Pat Miller, Chair)

Pat once again is appealing to GPA members to join this most vital committee so that more can be accomplished. The next meeting will be at her house at 7 p.m. on Oct. 10.

The report in the September minutes of the Sustainability Commission's [SC] intention to return the 14,000 sq. ft. hill at the far-east side of Channing School's playground to its natural vegetation raised concerns from more than one because after the native seeds are planted, it will take 3 to 5 years for the new vegetation to grow in. This will require 3 to 5 years of weeding, but as one of the reasons given for this project was that the hillside is too hard to maintain as is.... The Millers and Paul Bednar met with the Park & Rec's Greg Hulke to express the concern that rather than a hillside of native plants, there will be a hillside of weeds. Matt Martin will contact the SC's chair Tom Armstrong to learn whether the proposed plan is being reconsidered. (That the SC is also considering doing the same removal/reseeding of some of the land where the East Side Community Gardens are is of equal concern because of the failure to maintain the few small areas of native plantings currently edging the sidewalk.)

After the discussion of its proposal for an exterior painting grant for residents of the EHD at our August meeting, the Grant Committee—a subcommittee of the EHD composed of Chair Pat Miller, Paul Bednar and Tyler Grace—revised its proposal 1) to include contracted labor in addition to exterior paint and primer; 2) to increase the amount from up to \$1,500 to up to \$3,000, which will be reimbursed after the completion of the project; and 3) to restrict the GPA members ineligible to apply for it to the members of the Grant Committee. Barbara Evans moved to accept the revised proposal (Draft #3); seconded by Trish LaFleur, the motion passed unanimously.

The recipient of GPA's Architectural 50/50 Grant Program is at work on the restoration of the porch at 162 S. Gifford St. The Plaque Application for 421 Division St. was approved and the owner reimbursed by GPA for \$97.50 (half the cost of the application fee and/or research up to \$100).

To be presented at the October general membership meeting will be a proposal for a grant for chain-link fence removal in the EHD.

2. Membership Committee. (Tyler Grace, Chair)

The addition of five new members brings GPA's total to 220 in 145 households. Welcome Bags are being delivered to the new ones.

3. Program Committee (Janine Hnatusko, Chair)

Presented with the possibilities for GPA's upcoming Fall Fest on Oct. 14th, the general consensus was "yes" to the popular clown/balloon artist and painting pumpkins Dan will secure but "no" to face painting, which took too long and thus served too few to make the cost worthwhile; "yes" to cookies and apple cider donuts but "no" to candied apples (too expensive); "yes" to the little kids' games, such as the duck pond, but with the stipulation that we would need to replenish the supply of small rewards for them. The announcement that the City's Block Party in a Box is no longer available after Labor Day was met with "Why?" and "What are we going to do for the tables, chairs, canopies and games that come with it?" Janine was then directed to contact the City to plead our case for having the box party trailer available for Fall Fest.

As for a special event that is informational— All present agreed that we needed to have one and thought that January or February would be a good time for it. As severe storm warnings resulted in only a few attending the special 2023 April meeting featuring information about plants native to our area and suitable plantings for historic homes, it was suggested that this be repeated, or if not this, something on landscaping. Another possibility was a program on

exterior painting of historic homes. But as Pat noted, experience has taught us that paint companies' programs are lacking. She and others recommended a St. Charles' woman's program on this as excellent.

4. Publicity Committee. (Trish LaFleur, Chair)

Fall Fest will be publicized on Facebook as well as possibly by a flyer.

A postcard publicizing GPA's new exterior painting grant is being delayed until after our October meeting, when it is likely that the proposal for a chain-link fence grant will be approved.

5. Historic Elgin House Tour (Matt Martin, Chair)

After serving as chair for three years, Matt announced that due to family/work obligations, another would need to step up to chair the 2024 tour. However, Matt will call a meeting of the Steering Committee in late October to review this year's tour and start things in motion for next year's.

Excluding docents and other tour workers, attendance at this year's tour was 1,246, which is up 20% from last year. Of course having two glorious days certainly helped. Successful, too, was the house staffed with bilingual docents, for they reported that although translators were not often required, people were pleased that an effort had been made to accommodate them, as was evidenced by the increased number of Hispanics on the tour.

Citing what we have done in the past for tour homeowners whose homes do not have a Heritage Commission dating plaque, Barbara recommended that GPA pay for the cost of one for 825 Douglas. From the research already done for the tour booklet, she and Trish will prepare the application at no cost to GPA. Barbara also recommended that GPA pay for the cost of a plaque to replace the incorrectly dated one on 1005 N. Spring. After a brief discussion, Dan Miller moved that GPA pay a total of \$140 (\$70 per) for plaques for the above houses. Seconded by Pat Miller, it passed unanimously.

Tyler presented Paul Bednar's proposal that as a thank you for once again opening their area's homes for the house tour, we give the Northeast Neighborhood Association [NENA] a one-year, up-to \$2,500 grant for a single project of its choosing, to be reimbursed at the completion of the project. Matt Martin moved to make this so. Seconded by Trish LaFleur, it, too, passed unanimously.

OTHER REPORTS

1. National Watch Historic District Labor Day Gathering

According to the GPA members who attended, what the small group trying to revitalize this neighborhood needed more than the \$433.91 GPA donated to them for the event was advice on how to build an organization. There was, for example, no publicity about what they are attempting to do and need help with. Furthermore, many of the attendees did not even live in the area.

2. DNA's Neighborhood Outreach Meeting with the City's Director of Neighborhood Housing Services [NHS], Jennifer Phillips (847-931-5933) (Barbara Evans, GPA's representative)

Although the 311 service and Public Health Inspections fall under the umbrella of NHS, the focus of this meeting was on the third department within NHS: Code Enforcement. Prior to COVID, only two code officials were responsible for all of Elgin's residences. Now, however, the City has been divided into 9 districts, each of which has its own code official. And

that official oversees both residential and commercial buildings. This department also has a secretary responsible for all the paperwork resulting from violations.

As Elgin has gone from being the 8th largest city in IL in terms of square acreage to the 6th largest, these 10 people's workload sounds overwhelming. Not surprisingly, therefore, while inspections are no longer solely driven by complaints, residents are still encouraged to report violations, even tho 9 times out of 10 they are on the department's radar. (It is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease, after all.) Those concerned about repercussions of doing so can protect themselves by prefacing any call to NHS with the statement, "I wish to remain anonymous." Be aware that to follow what is being done to address a complaint, one needs to ask for a report case number. And for major concerns, also put them in writing. (An email will suffice.)

For minor violations, such as unmown lawns and trashcan storage, the code officers can get a violation processed within 48 hours. More involved ones, however, get held up by the legal process required to execute them. Add this to the workload they already have, it is not surprising that when asked what those of us representing our neighborhoods could do to help, Ms. Phillips replied, "Be patient."

Realize, too, that the interiors of owner-occupied homes are not inspected unless someone calls in to report a possible code violation, such as an ET answering an emergency call, for example. (If relatives are the occupants of a single-family home, it is not considered rental property.)

Addressing the concerns about rental properties expressed prior to this meeting, Ms. Phillips noted that since 2020, the number of Elgin's has dropped from around 3,000 to 1,000. (Just how many units are in a single property vary.) This is, of course, for listed properties. As for unlisted ones, to bring them into compliance with the City's ordinance requires detective work by neighbors who can observe the comings and goings of occupants at all hours and then bring their observations to the attention of their district's code official.

Ms. Phillips also provided the following links for those who want specifics about Elgin's requirements for rental properties.

- Rental License: <https://www.cityofelgin.org/317/Rental-License>

It should be noted that the figures for numbers of rental licenses in Elgin that are given in the introduction are from 2019.

- For the properties that have a Rental License, see the Listing and Map at <https://www.cityofelgin.org/DocumentCenter/View/48844/Rental-License-Listing-?bidId=>

- The City's Landlord Training Program is mandatory for all residential rental license holders in Elgin. See <https://www.cityofelgin.org/1194/Landlord-Training-Program> for details.

- Residential Rental Inspection Checklist: <https://www.cityofelgin.org/DocumentCenter/View/73274/Rental-Inspection-Checklist-web>

- Real Estate Transfer Stamp Process: <https://www.cityofelgin.org/428/Real-Estate-Transfer-Stamp#:~:text=The%20completed%20transfer%20stamp%20form,to%20transferstamp%40cityofelgin.org.&text=For%20additional%20information%2C%20please%20contact,if%20outside%20of%20city%20limits>

Because those of us in attendance all live in historic districts, we asked why the real estate transfer stamp does not require a realtor to disclose that a property is within a historic district, for there are instances in which less savvy buyers have been stunned to learn, for example, that they cannot put vinyl siding on their house. According to Ms. Phillips, the City is reluctant to require such a disclosure on the transfer stamp because of possible legal action. However, as Pat Miller noted tonight, not only does the City of Aurora have such a requirement; the entire state of Texas does as well. To mitigate Elgin's reluctance, Elgin's Historic Preservation Planner

Christian Sundquist regularly checks real estate listings. If a property in a historic district is not so identified, she calls the county so that it will be.

Unfortunately, it is up to the prospective buyers to know that unethical realtors exist and may not disclose that a property has code violations. Because bringing a property up to compliance will come out of their pocketbooks, when considering buying, they need to make a FOIA request for code violations, for the City cannot disclose them without one.

Undoubtedly much to Ms. Phillips' relief, the City's Crime-Free Housing program is under the umbrella of the Elgin Police Department. The officers in it get called in primarily when there is a problem around residential properties.

This meeting with Ms. Phillips lasted approximately an hour and a half, and had she/we had more time, probably could have gone on for yet another hour. My (B. Evans') suggestion would be that we invite our code officer to attend a GPA general membership meeting occasionally so that questions/concerns our EHD residents have can be answered/addressed. It was Pat Miller, who attended the meeting with me, however, who made a concluding statement with which everyone readily agreed: Building strong neighborhood associations is the best way to ensure that property violations are dealt with.

As it was 9:15 p.m., the motion to adjourn the meeting was quickly seconded and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Evans, secretary