

Fairhaven Neighbors General Meeting Minutes, September 5, 2007

Fairhaven Park Pavilion, 7:00 p.m.

Board members present: Vince Bičiūnas, Glenn Denkler, Michael Lilliquist, Paul James, Sue Kaun, Janet Simpson, and Ralph Thacker. (Quorum)

Board member absent: Elinor Pravda (excused), Jim Johannessen (excused), Glenn Denkler (excused), and Bob Keller (excused)

1. Board Member Leaves of Absence

Due to travel, board members Glenn Denkler and Bob Keller have requested extended leaves of absence (Glenn 3 months, Bob, 6 months)

2. Approval of August Board Meeting Minutes

Minutes were amended to include list of board members present/absent.

3. Treasurer's Report

Approved by email prior to meeting. Checking balance \$723, savings \$1,361.

4. Neighborhood Plan Update

Janet is acting committee chair in Glenn's absence.

The subcommittee work sessions have been ongoing. The next meeting of the full committee is scheduled for Sept 11, at which an outline of the draft should be presented. One task will be to check for completeness. The economic development subcommittee has just sent its draft to the committee.

The land use committee will meet again tomorrow (9/6) at 5:30 at Doug's office on Dupont. One question that has arisen is whether the committee is overstepping by making recommendations on specific properties that might benefit members of the subcommittee. Stuart Plotnick called for fuller disclosure of any conflicts of interest, and disclosure of which neighborhood each person lives in. Some land use committee members never attend meeting of Fairhaven Neighbors, yet some have complained that they were not included in Fairhaven Neighbor's association decision discussions. No qualifications were set for update committee membership, because we wanted to be inclusive. Michael Lilliquist noted that Seattle allows associations to not strictly observe neighborhood boundaries, when the project or program naturally extends across such boundaries.

5. MNAC Report

Thom reported that most of the Mayors Neighborhood Advisory Committee's (MNAC) time is devoted to each neighborhood representative sharing the news from their neighborhood.

6. ABN

FN currently sends no representative to Assoc. of Bellingham Neighborhoods (ABN) meetings, which are scheduled for the 4th Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club.

Mary Lou will try to attend the Sept 25th meeting, and Stuart says he will attend the October meeting.

7. CSN

The Coalition of Southside Neighborhoods is organizing a candidate's forum for local elections, on October 4th at the Firehouse PAC.

8. Neighborhood Potluck

The potluck was cancelled due to a scheduling conflict with a previously scheduled event on the Village Green. The current plan is to hold a holiday potluck party at the Todd's former Fairhaven B & B.

9. City-Facilitated Discussion about Neighborhood Association

Contrary to previous reports, these are facilitated discussions, not mediations, meaning that the discussions are not binding. They may result only in recommendations which would then be brought back to the neighborhood association.

The first meeting was Aug. 28th, and the next is scheduled for Sept 13th. At the first meeting, substantive matters were not yet discussed; the participants are still laying the groundwork and the ground rules. Fairhaven Neighbors was represented by Jim Johannessen, Brad Rose, Janet Simpson, Stuart Plotnick, and Vince Bičiūnas. Across the table were Phyllis McKee, Doug Robertson, Connie Shannon, and Ted Mischaikov, each of whom reported that they represented only themselves and their own commercial property interests. The Fairhaven Association merchants group reportedly has decided to not participate, and to not allow anyone to represent them. Each participant has been asked to sign a 3-page process and procedures form.

Stuart Plotnick said that each of the commercial property owners has a legitimate place at the table, but none of them can speak for the majority of business owners or operators. He observed that it is ironic that the self-appointed group of people accusing Fairhaven Neighbors of being non-representative of business interests is itself not representative.

Paul James indicated that he teaches mediation, and that he thinks the current process is inappropriate because the two groups have unequal standing. A facilitated discussion, he observed, is designed to fast-track an agreement.

Vince Bičiūnas summarized the background history. The origin of the conflict had to do with Fairhaven design review regulations. The neighborhood association was challenged because of its advocacy. The conflict is about the power that comes with city recognition.

In this situation, the City abdicated its responsibility to designate which association(s) would be recognized, and instead asked the competing factions to decide amongst themselves. FN has pushed to reform FN in order to respond to shortcomings, but has opposed the idea of an all-new organization with assigned board membership. FN believes that it has always been open and democratic, and has always been representative of all participants. We need to continue to push for an open and democratic neighborhood association.

It was noted that the Fairhaven Village Association, although recognized by the City, is a closed association with undisclosed membership.

There was considerable discussion of the appropriateness and healthiness of the facilitated discussion as presently constituted. Where are the merchants, the signers of the petition, who wanted to be better represented? Who is at the table, now that the merchants have chosen to not participate? And what authority do they have to speak? Do we need to re-visit the idea of credentials at the next meeting, before proceeding further? Shall we insist that the discussions be opened up to other participants, to the public as well as to interested merchants? Are we making a tactical mistake in granting “equality” to a select group of large commercial property owners, vis-à-vis the residents and the greater business community? It was noted that commercial property owners are in an unequal relationship with their merchant tenants, and this was one reason given for why the merchants do not want to get involved.

It was the generally held opinion among attendees that FN agreed to a discussion with the merchants, yet that is not who showed up. It was also generally agreed that broader participation and representation and openness would lay the foundation for a better process and more a democratic outcome. Michael pointed out that the outcome of this discussion process will set precedence for the rest of the city’s neighborhood associations, and perhaps they should be included in some way. In general, attendees were concerned about the legitimacy of the process as it is currently constituted, and would like to see it improved

Sue Kaun made the following motion, seconded by Paul James and modified by friendly amendments:

In order to support a more inclusive and democratic process regarding the disputed recognition of the current neighborhood association, the general membership of Fairhaven Neighbors 1) withdraws permission of the five members of Fairhaven Neighbors participating in the facilitated discussions to represent the entire association, and 2) desires that the facilitated process be continued with broader, democratic participation, open to the full membership and to all stakeholders in Fairhaven, to take place in an open public meeting on, before or at the next general meeting of Fairhaven Neighbors, which is scheduled for October 5, 2007.

Motion passed with only a single nay vote (Michael). President Biciunas was asked to communicate FN wishes to the other involved parties as soon as possible, by email.

It was further decided that FN wants to work with parliamentarian Ann McCartney, to improve our rules of business and procedures where appropriate.

Sue made a motion, seconded by Ralph, to postpone the neighborhood plan update meeting scheduled for September 11, 2007, pending resolution of concerns about the facilitated discussion process. Passed by unanimous voice vote.

Ralph then made a motion, seconded by ??? to instruct the president of Fairhaven Neighbors association to write a letter to planning director Tim Stewart requesting that the City hasten its activity to move forward with the process to revise the Fairhaven design review regulations. Passed by unanimous voice vote.

10. Change in Policy Regarding Meeting “Minutes” versus “Notes”

Deferred.

11. Map Your Neighborhood Program

Deferred.

Adjourned at approximately 9:20 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Michael Lilliquist, FN secretary

Next General Meeting of Fairhaven neighbors: 7:00 p.m. on October 3th, 2007, at Fairhaven Park Pavilion.