

**East Allentown Rittersville
Neighborhood Association**

MINUTES

President Dennis Pearson called the regular monthly meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. on March 16, 2015 at St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Present: Four officers (President Dennis Pearson, Vice President Bob Pandaleon, Treasurer Bob Jacoby, and Secretary Dave Schell) and ten other neighbors were present at the meeting as were Capt. Tony Alsleben and Officer Mike Beidelman of the Allentown Police Department.

Secretary Dave Schell handed out copies of the minutes of the meeting of February 16, 2015. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes as distributed, and the motion carried.

Treasurer Bob Jacoby gave his report. The current balance is \$446.03, the same as last month. It was moved and seconded to approve the report as read and the motion passed.

Dennis Pearson reported that he has applied to the Lehigh County Commissioners for a position on the Lehigh County Authority. He further noted that there is a county regulation that provides that a person cannot be appointed to the county home (Cedarbrook) advisory board if he or she ran for public office and lost within the last ten years. Pearson reported that he is going to ask the County Commissioners to change this regulation. He noted that at one point several elected commissioners had favored privatizing Cedarbrook but that this sentiment changed after voters in Northampton County turned down the proposal in that county privatize their county home, Gracedale. Instead, Lehigh County is attempting to make Cedarbrook more self-sustaining.

A number of neighbors were present to discuss the public art situation that had been raised at last month's meeting. Secretary Schell read the statement that he had given City Council at their meeting on March 4th and reported on that meeting. Neighbor and area businessman Geoffrey DiVittorio, the owner and operator of East Side Tattoo on Union Boulevard—one of the businesses with the artwork—spoke to the meeting about his background and the art in question.

He noted that he was surprised and insulted when he read of our appearance before City Council on the WFMZ website. He spoke in some detail about both the nature of the artistic process and this art in particular. He handed out several examples of contemporary artwork. He was particularly concerned that our statement conflated graffiti and public art and felt that our organization made our accusations out of fear of change and fear of what we did not understand. Consequently, he was glad to get an invitation from an officer of the association to attend our meeting and explain his views.

An extensive discussion followed between neighbors who had been present last month when the matter was brought to our attention, Mr. DiVittorio, and others who had come with him to discuss the matter. This discussion involved the differences between art and graffiti, and our concerns that this art was being perceived by some customers of area businesses to be indicative of a declining or dangerous area. Secretary Schell noted that we had possibly erred by going to

Council before speaking with the property-owners about the matter. Mr. DiVittorio indicated that he has been told by city officials that a process does exist that needs to be followed before external work can be done on properties such as this art, but asserted his belief that this should deal only with whether the art was gang-related, dealing with criminal matters, and/or obscene, not with the media used or the artistic style as long as it did not deal with the gang, criminal, or obscene issues. Schell noted that we had been informed categorically that no such process existed, and that if one does that allays our main concern. We will look into the matter.

Neighbor Amman Jesani, the owner of Dell Motors—where the other artwork cited by us before Council is located—noted his concern with our contention that the artwork is scaring off customers. He had commissioned it on his building to draw interest in his auto repair business and would be interested in knowing the basis of our contention that customers are being driven away. We will attempt to get more information on this matter.

The association exchanged contact information with the two businesses and we will be in touch over these questions. At that point the two groups thanked each other for the open discussion and the meeting moved on to other matters.

Neighbors asked Captain Alsleben several questions about recent activity on the East Side. What was the event several evenings back that brought numerous officers and cars into the area of E. Tilghman and N. Jerome Streets? This involved an argument between two individuals and the report of shots fired. It was not believed that the individuals were local residents, but rather two persons who just happened to meet in that area.

What are the regulations about private concerns closing streets? On March 6th there was a lengthy closing of N. Dauphin Street near the Lehigh River Bridge project? There are signing requirements, particularly in a case like that where a dead end is the result, along with permits that ask how long the closure will be for and for what reason. Capt. Alsleben noted that there is a PennDOT field office in the area of the project that should be able to answer that sort of question.

Who should be called about missing stop signs? That would be the responsibility of the Streets Department. Secretary Schell noted that the sign on westbound Tilghman Street at N. Irving St. has been replaced by a temporary sign but the weight holding the sign up is insufficient and the sign was repeatedly blown over in the wind over the weekend.

President Pearson noted that there is a severe need for street cleaners to clean up the debris left over from winter in several areas. The corner of E. Tilghman and N. Maxwell Streets is particularly bad. Pearson also noted that he got a call from a resident of the Ellsworth Street area complaining that the Parking Authority is being excessively aggressive at ticketing him for parking in front of his home. The authority claimed that his car had not been moved for days whereas it had but had been returned to the same spot in front of his home. It is presumed that the authority is getting complaints since that area would not be a priority street for the authority.

In response to a discussion about stolen electronic equipment, Officer Beidelman suggested checking pawnshops. If your goods are spotted it should be reported to the police immediately.

Capt. Alsleben noted that the police get a regular report on items pawned in area shops, which they check against theft reports that they have received.

Pearson noted that when the East Side Fire Station was rebuilt the memorial to Garfield Schaeffer in front of the old station as removed. He stated that the association would like it to be returned. Secretary Schell will write a letter on the matter to fire officials.

Pearson read from a series of Morning Call articles concerning accidents or criminal matters on the East Side.

[At this point officers Alsleben and Beidelman departed the meeting for other business.]

Secretary Schell read some recent correspondence that he had had with Sensei Frank Bruno, who runs an East Side martial arts studio and who had offered to bring some of his students to do a demonstration. Schell had noted to Sensei Bruno that he might do better to contact the Midway Manor organization since they have some youth sports groups, which we do not. Schell also read a letter from a new resident expressing interest in getting involved. He noted to that writer that we are always glad for the interest and wondered if the person had any experience running yard sales as we could use a volunteer to organize and operate such a neighborhood sale, such as we did several years ago as a fund-raising operation.

Schell also showed the group progress on the newsletter that is to go to all residents of the East Side and expressed the hope that it will be finished and mailed before our next meeting. He also showed the meeting a flyer on the Pothole Hotline. Residents may call the hotline to report potholes at (610) 437-8775. The city has a goal of repairing potholes on high-volume streets within 24 hours and on lower volume roads within 24-48 hours, although if a very large pothole is reported a supervisor is sent to the scene earlier to determine if immediate action is necessary.

President Pearson noted that he would like to get a group of neighbors to go to an Iron Pigs game, but that a total of 24 persons would be needed for such a group.

There being no further business, adjournment was moved and seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully,

David A. Schell, Secretary