

**East Allentown Rittersville
Neighborhood Association**

MINUTES

President Dennis Pearson called the regular monthly meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. on February 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 thirteen other neighbors were present at the meeting as were Councilman Joe Davis, Capt. Tony Alsleben and Officer Christianson of the Allentown Police Department and Phyllis Alexander, Allentown Neighborhood Coordinator.

Secretary Dave Schell handed out copies of the minutes of the meeting of January 19, 2015. It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes as distributed, and the motion carried.

President Pearson noted that there needs to be correction to the September, 2014 minutes. The correct address on E. Walnut Street that is turning into a garbage dump is 246 E. Walnut.

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.

President Pearson called on Phyllis Alexander, who introduced herself to those who she had not previously met, and asked the group if there was anything that she could take back to the city tomorrow. She will then get the contact person so the neighbor can contact that person directly.

One neighbor said that the plowing/salting is not being done on E. Hickory Street. She called the city and was told that it is a third class street so it is cleared last. It is not being plowed or salted at all. Other neighbors also noted the same difficulty in the 500 block of N. Godfrey Street and the 400 block of N. Jedd Street (between Jerome and Jasper Streets). Alexander asked if anyone has any compliments on the snow clearing operations. Several neighbors said that they had and she requested that those who are pleased with the snow-clearing operation send compliments to Mark Shahda, the city Streets Superintendent at mark.shahda@allentownpa.gov.

A neighbor from N. Jerome Street noted that 404 N. Jerome Street continues to be a problem with the siding peeling from the property. This problem goes back to Hurricane Sandy several years ago and the owner has been fined repeatedly.

A business owner from the Union Boulevard Area brought to the group's attention a problem with "public art"—wall murals appearing on several buildings in a form similar to graffiti. While we have an anti-graffiti ordinance in the city we don't have ordinance to deal with this sort of art in Allentown. Sometimes there is graffiti enclosed within the "artwork." His concern is that we want to have something that is appropriate for the neighborhood. He feels that we are asking for trouble with increased gang activity related to this. He has spoken to Capt. Alsleben and Francis Dougherty, city Managing Director. The city of Philadelphia has had such an ordinance for the past thirty years. Philadelphia has a panel that looks at potential art and if the

panel approves the proposal, it goes to public comment and a vote by those within the line of sight of the proposed location. He further noted that some customers are afraid to visit their businesses at certain hours of the day due to this.

Phyllis Alexander reported that the Faith Evangelical Free Church, located on Hamilton Boulevard in Trexlertown will have 1,000 of their members volunteering to do work on projects in the City of Allentown on Sunday, April 26th. They are asking for proposals from city residents for cleanup or other projects that they could accomplish. Alexander asked if anyone present had any ideas, and said that people who have ideas subsequently pass them along to her (alexander@allentowncity.org or 610-437-7679). One neighbor suggested a cleanup at Keck Park. This month the city will be collecting information and suggestions. Suggestions will be assigned to a team leader from the church who will come out and do a site inspection during March, and if the project is adopted it will be assigned to a team for implementation on April 26th.

Alexander also noted that this coming Wednesday and Thursday (February 18 and 19) the city will be sponsoring two events at City Hall in recognition of Black History Month.

President Pearson reminded the group that the Leonard Buck Dinner is the third Thursday in April. Both a community leader and police officer will be honored, and people who would like tickets to the dinner should contact him.

At this time Pearson had to leave for another meeting and VP Pandaleon took the chair for the balance of our meeting.

Capt. Alsleben made a presentation about the fact that they are seeing a good bit of fraud at this time of year, particularly from people who are pretending to be from the IRS. That agency will not call you to ask for money. People have also been given calls allegedly from PPL about cutting off their power unless they make an immediate payment. Usually businesses are targeted by those calls, but occasionally they go to individuals as well. If possible, get name and caller ID and report the call to the police, or just hang up. Neither PPL nor the IRS will make calls demanding money.

As to the city crime aspect, 2014 compared to 2013 showed serious crime down 18% across the city. On the east side the homicide rate was up, but that was due to two murder-suicides. Trend for past eight years has overall been down.

The group discussed the graffiti situation. As we had been previously told the city has a graffiti removal machine and team but the equipment does not work well in cold winter weather. If the police get a call about graffiti they document it, looking for gang information after which the graffiti is removed promptly.

A neighbor noted some problems with this in Keck Park and also some other threatening activity in the area. She feels safe for the moment since with the bad weather the bad guys are not out. Once the weather warms up a bit, however, this will change. Alsleben noted that there had been a rumor of gang initiation at basketball games in the park—turned out to be not true. They hope

to be adding a camera in that area. Some cameras are coming in and he has requested one at Keck Park and one for Airport Road, but is not certain if his request will be fulfilled. He noted that people should report problems since they now have the software to log the issues and spot trends. For example, if loud activity is reported repeatedly at a certain location of Friday nights, they can put resources into that area on that day. He also discussed how people making reports don't have to give their name. The neighbor said that didn't mind giving her info to the police but didn't anyone to come to her door as people watch everything and this would mark her with the troublemakers.

Vice President Pandaleon asked Alsleben about the public art issue. Alsleben has spoken to the neighbor who brought up the matter, but granted that the police do not have the legal power to deal with it as long as it doesn't involve gang signs, in which case they came out and deal with it. On one occasion the mural had what might have been taken for gang signage, so they had the artist make some modification so that it didn't look like gang symbolism. The business owner noted that at least one business is leaving that area along Union Boulevard due to the artwork and that the real estate broker handling the matter said that surrounding businesses may find their property values dropping.

City Councilman Davis said that he has also had conversations with the neighbor about this.

Secretary Schell noted that several people were new at tonight's meeting and that they could add their email addresses to his list for distribution of the minutes and sometimes several other relevant mailings throughout the month. Emails are sent out with the addresses on blind copy so their address is not visible to others on the list. He also apologized for the delay in preparing the mailing that we plan to send to all addresses in east Allentown and promised to have the project completed by next month.

Vice Pandaleon asked about how we feel about the wall mural artwork, and what we should do about the matter. Discussion ensued, during which Councilman Davis noted that this could be brought up at the "Courtesy of the Floor" before city council meetings, which are held at 7:00 p.m. on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. It was agreed that Schell will consult with the neighbor who raised the issue and Schell will make a presentation to the council meeting at the meeting of Wednesday, March 4th.

Pandaleon briefly noted the contents of several newspaper clippings about events on the east side that an attendee had brought to the meeting.

There being no further business, adjournment was moved and seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully,

David A. Schell, Secretary