

West University Senior Service Board Minutes

January 14, 2016

Present: Michelle Moore (Chair), Becky Arnold, George Baker, Sarah Ballanfant, Candyce Beneke (Secretary), Selby Clark, Susan Davis, Carlos De La Torre, Judy Faulkner, Virginia Lootens, Stan McCandless, John Palmer Absent: Ruth Becker, Rebecca Dozier, and Joe Mitchell
City Council Liaison: Burt Ballanfant, Sarah Ballanfant – absent Staff: Toby Brooks, Tim O'Connor
Residents in Attendance: Alida Drewes

Minutes:

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. A quorum was present. John Palmer moved to approve the Minutes of December 10, 2015 as presented. Selby Clark seconded. The motion was approved.

Activities and Previews (Toby Brooks):

Toby discussed sending cards to absent board members Joe Mitchell, who recently fell, and to Mary Ryerson, who had a stroke and is going to rehab.

Toby reported on the following January events: a fabulous trip to Beaumont to the McFadden & Chamber home from the 1900s, the first West U Chair Volleyball Tournament (another to be held in February and an event in August in partnership with Bellaire and the YMCA), the free 10 week self-defense class which had 27 people, the Community Volunteer Service Project, and speaker former Astros player, Charles Gipson of the 2005 World Series. She also reminded us of the City's invitation to the upcoming Marathon Breakfast.

APAC Report (Virginia Lootens):

Virginia handed out a paper copy of the January 7, 2016 meeting of APAC. She was recently elected as an officer of the organization - the Second Vice Chair! Virginia also highlighted a training class to be held in January by the Harris County Long-term Care Ombudsman program to become a certified volunteer. See the handout for additional notes.

Council Meeting Report (Burt Ballanfant): Absent – No Report

Good Neighbor Team (Becky Arnold):

Becky reminded us of our meeting next Thursday, January 21, 2016, during which we will sign Valentine's Cards for our seniors.

Parks and Recreation Report (Tim O'Connor):

Tim had several items to report. First, permits were acquired for the construction project on the west end of Colonial Park and surface clearing has begun. He noted that the City will meet or exceed the 90 day construction schedule to meet the April 19, 2016, opening date. Next, he noted that Brittany _???, the Recreation Manager for the City, will be coming back to work on January 25 after an extended maternity leave. Tim reported that his and Susan's offices have been remediated for non-toxic mold and that they will be moving back to the Community Center next week. He also reported that there was a little moisture in the facility's north walls, but that no mold or leaks were found. The walls were cleaned with Clorox. The Senior Services' office also had some non-toxic mold in the carpets and were cleaned.

Tim reported that the West U Parks and Recreation Department had been awarded the Gold Medal by the Texas Recreation and Parks Society, which has very high standards to meet! He thanked our City Council, voters, and Citizen Boards for their support and is inviting the Citizen Board Chairs to attend the award presentation.

Michelle Moore agreed to attend to represent the Senior Board.

Other items mentioned were:

- outdoor fitness stations on the west side of the new part of Colonial Park
- possible fitness stations along the track at the West U Rec Center, sponsored by the Friends Board
- Park signs are being installed – sponsored by the Friends Board and coming in under budget
- possible additional security lighting in the playground area at Colonial Park (if it can be installed without spilling over to residences) and also in the west area of the West U Rec Center property.

The Board discussed the pros and cons of different types of lighting (tree, ground, etc.). Tim reminded the Board to read the weekly reports he provides and noted that he is willing to answer any questions.

Carlos De Le Torres asked Tim about the possibility of fixing up the esplanades on Bellaire and Bissonnet to make the entrances into West U more attractive. Tim reminded us that these areas are owned by the City of Houston and, after much discussion, suggested that Mr. De Le Torres send him a letter, then Tim will draft a letter to the Senior Board and the Parks Board, and then send to City Council.

Previous Business/Action Items:

1. Appoint Task Force for Senior Tax Exemption – deferred until the next meeting
2. Signatures for county bus complaint letter – needs one more signature and should go out tomorrow

New Business: Discussion/suggestions for additional Senior benefit initiatives

Michelle Moore had asked for the Board to submit ideas for Senior tax or other benefits. Only two people sent replies – Stan McCandless and Carlos De Le Torres. Stan questioned the ages which define which citizens are considered “Seniors” for West U senior services. He commented that 50 or 55 is too young and suggested moving the minimum age to 65, OR for those who request services and/or have participated in the past.

Carlos De Le Torres handed out copies of a proposed “West U Benefits for Seniors – An Agenda for the Taskforce.” He wants a task force to look at the scope and purpose of the Senior Board and to identify and quantify existing and new offerings/benefits for seniors – not just taxes. He wants to look at the value of the benefits and which are most appreciated, needed, expensive, etc. Michelle asked Tim and Toby if their staff would put together a list of current senior benefits (in addition to the real estate tax exemption discount for those over 65 - such as trash removal discount, discount on dog/cat registration, discounts at the Rec Center, free Colonial Pool Membership at age 65, transportation to doctors, etc.) to send out to the Senior Board. She also asked Toby to put together information on the history of senior tax exemptions for the last 30 years. Toby will send this information out to the Board by email to read and discuss at our next meeting. Michelle noted that any proposed senior tax exemption changes would need to be submitted to City Council by the end of March, with the final proposal due in July.

LOTS of discussion ensued! Current senior benefits were discussed and Virginia Looten commented that we don’t need a task force until we have a baseline of historical information as to the existing senior services and their associated costs to the City.

Citizen Comments:

Alida Drewes made several general comments: that all Senior Board information must be made available per the Open Meetings Act (it is), that some seniors are banned from Senior Services events, that the Senior Meeting’s Agenda and Minutes should be on the City’s web cite (the Agenda is posted before the meeting and the Minutes are posted the following month after they are approved), and that West U taxes should be spent on West U citizens. Ms. Drewes also suggested that the park lights currently being considered be put on a timer or motion detector and that citizens should be consulted on their preferences.

Adjournment: Michelle Moore moved to adjourn. Stan McCandless seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Candyce T. Beneke, Senior Board Secretary