

Minutes Neartown Association Meeting 2/28/06

- **Allen Ueckert called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.**
 - Mark Johnson noted that the Neartown website had been enhanced and he requested feedback on the site. [Mark can be reached at: mark@PhotoArchitect.com]
 - Dale Harger indicated that there would be a session with Chief B. Lumpkin and Sgt. Wilson at 7:00pm on March 20th, in the upstairs event facility at Rouge. Avondale is hosting this important session. Chief Lumpkin, head of Neighborhood Protection, will be addressing *how the community can best employ Neighborhood Protection* as a tool for enforcing the ordinances designed to maintain health, safety, and welfare in our environment.

- **State Rep. Garnett Coleman (D. – Houston District 147) addressed the East Montrose Management District.**
 - Rep. Coleman, who has sponsored the authorizing legislation for several Management Districts (MD), covered what a MD is and how it operates. The Representative indicated that there was considerable misinformation about the subject. Summarizing:
 - A MD is a special improvement district designed to provide for improved services for a given geography. Formation of an MD requires a petition of a minimum of 50 commercial property owners in the area. Governance for an MD consists of a mix of business owners/ property owners/ civic members. The existence of the Board is established through state legislation and Board Members are government officials. While the State can authorize a MD through legislation, it cannot create it.
 - Rep. Coleman indicated that the authorizing legislation is built on a template that has features that will not usually be animated in the MD. This has created considerable confusion – e.g. the power to float bonds (which require a commitment of a continuing revenue stream) may be authorized in the legislation, but there is no intention to exercise the bond funding mechanism.
 - The MD normally develops a Service Plan that identifies the priority areas to be addressed and the mechanisms to solve problem areas. Typically, visible security has been a first priority for MD's, e.g., with HPD contracted to provide bicycle patrols.
 - Assessments are set by each MD to be based on assessed property values from HCAD. With the exception of the Midtown Management District only commercial interests are assessed. Capital improvements, e.g. distinctive brick placement at cross walks, or the streetscape features at the Galleria, may also be a part of the plan.
 - The East Montrose Management District was authorized in the last session of the Texas Legislature.
 - There were a number of questions from the floor that articulated concerns about the equity of and issues surrounding “settling” for existing government services as delivered by the City, with MD's emerging to take on what was perceived to be the role and responsibility of elected officials. Lack of time prevented further discussion on these issues.

- **Council Member Sue Lovell addressed what is happening in the City to address the graffiti problem.**
 - CM Lovell noted the large number of City/ County/ State governmental, quasi-governmental organizations that must be involved in a coordinated response. CM Lovell has been instrumental in identifying funding to help launch a response.
 - Who are the graffiti producers? CM Lovell indicated there are three sources: gang members, elementary and middle school students who are emulating others, organized urban groups (often with pumper sprayers) who are affluent young adult white males with an affectation of “artist.”
 - The City is looking to modify launch a campaign that will:
 - involve Keep Houston Beautiful/ Stop Trashing Houston;
 - work with 311 to manage complaint resolution better (e.g. address complaint to the right agency among the many involved);
 - extra funding has enabled the development of an RFP to obtain 20 crews to supplement current abatement resources;
 - through an inter-local agreement with TxDOT the City will do abatement on property which is TxDOT’s responsibility and charge the abatement cost back to TxDOT.
 - In addition, it is expected that within the next few weeks a new ordinance and modifications to existing ordinances will be proposed to City Council that will:
 - reduce allowable graffiti abatement time to 10 days for commercial interests;
 - permit waivers to be signed that will allow the City to access private property for the purpose of abatement;
 - require retail stores to lock up spray paint with no sales allowed to minors;
 - provide for rewards (likely in the \$500 – 1,000 range) for information leading to tagger identification and successful prosecution. CM Lovell mentioned that in Phoenix, where this method has been used, there have been instances of individuals earning significant reward monies. Rewards are viewed as having a workforce multiplier effect for the police.
 - It is expected that in the next few weeks a news conference will be called to announce these elements of the campaign to “take back the City.”
 - Suzanne Anderson shared with the NTA pictures of property she owns/ is developing with severe cases of tagging. Suzanne indicated she has provided the police with a name, website address, and residential address area for the person responsible at her location.
 - Graffiti info items:
 - tagging a school, church, or community center is a felony.
 - www.cleanmontrose.com is a website sponsored by the Museum Business District Alliance for graffiti-related communication. Text of the property access waiver is available through cleanmontrose.
 - CM Lovell indicated that the City has information relating to paints that provide a surface that is easy to remediate after a Tagging attack. This info is available through CM Lovell’s office: 713-247-2013.
- **The meeting was adjourned promptly at 8:00pm.**