

Super Neighborhood Alliance
Minutes from Meeting held May 14, 2018



Guests

Chris Brown, City Controller
Kimberly Hatter, Mayor's Office
Alyce Coffee, Solid Waste
Rhonda Sauter, Department of Neighborhoods
Mayra Hypolite, Department of Neighborhoods
Roberto Medina, Public Works
Margarita Dunlap, METRO
Randall Ellis, METRO
Veronica Lamb, H-GAC
Lydia Abebe, H-GAC
Jeff Taebel, H-GAC
Oscar Vega, Preserve Houston Northside
Gladys House-El, Freedman's Town
Joseph Smith, Freedman's Town
Sylvester (Skip) Reeder, Houston One Voice

Jack O'Connor, SNC 17
Michael Huffmaster, SNA Chairman, SNC 18
Jane West, SNA Secretary, SNC 22
Doug Smith, SNC 25
Sandra Rodriguez, SNC 27
Terry Cominski, SNC 31
Marcy Williams, SNC 36
Mike Bercu, SNC 36
Cindy Chapman, SNC 37
Ray Washington, SNC 39/40
Stan Sarman, SNC 43
Huey German-Wilson, SNC 48
Juan Sorto, SNC 49/50
Albert Coleman, SNC 49/50
Randall Baxley, SNC 51
Keith Downey, SNC 52
Joetta Stevenson, SNC 55
Bridgette Murray, SNC 57
Thomas Wang, SNC 62
Jim Honey, SNC 62
Amy Dinn, SNC 64/88
Kathleen O'Reilly, SNC 66
Tomaro Bell, SNC 83
Scott Cubbler, SNC 84

Super Neighborhood Representatives

Philip Salerno, SNC 05
Ricky Miller, SNC 05
Ed Browne, SNC 10
Mark Klein, SNC 12
Pedro Ayarzagotia, SNC 15
Randy Jones, SNC 16
Greg Sergesketter, SNC 16

I. Introductions and Approval of Minutes for April 9, 2018:

Doug Smith moved, and Tomaro Bell seconded approval of minutes for April 9, 2018, meeting subject to the following revisions to the section about Chapter 19 requested by Randy Jones: (1) new elevation requirements do not apply to additions that are 1/3 or less the size of a foundation slab; (2) detached garages are not taken into account in the formula for calculating when an addition must be elevated; and (3) the "flooding" used to justify the Chapter 19 amendments was both under- and over-stated; **the motion carried.**

II. Announcements: Chairman Michael Huffmaster

A. Recovery Houston: No update. Follow updates on the website: www.houstonrecovers.org.

B. I-45 Coalition: Kathleen O'Reilly commented that there is no news from the I-45 coalition, but that recent meetings w/ TxDOT have been positive and have created an on-going dialog. She also reported that issues related to the first segment between U.S. 59 and downtown have been largely resolved. Philip Salerno added that TxDOT has agreed to run an elevated transit corridor on I-45 but has not yet agreed to do the same on I-10. He said that he's met with METRO's CEO, Tom Lambert, in an effort to build support for an elevated transit lane on I-10 to connect the NW Transit Center with downtown. Tomaro Bell asked about

compensation to be provided to residents of Clayton Homes and Kelly Courts — public housing projects that will be demolished to accommodate the widening of I-45 — and commented that vouchers alone would not be sufficient. Kathleen O'Reilly responded that TxDOT does not rebuild such projects and that issues presented by the planned demolition of these housing projects are major unresolved issues for the segment of the project where they are located. Keith Downey commented that he's yet to see an estimate of the daily traffic volume expected project completion. Jim Honey said the traffic volume on just the HOV lane is estimated @ 45,000 vehicles per day.

C. Complete Communities: Chairman Huffmaster reported that the next steering committee meeting will be May 15th. Vice-Chairman Juan Sorto reported that draft plans for the five Complete Communities have been released, were presented to City Council's finance committee at a specially called meeting, and can be accessed via the Planning Department's website: www.houstontx.gov/planning. He also reported that the public comment period for the draft plans will run through May 23rd, and that CM Edwards has stated that the administration's goal should be to support action items that the community supports, and to see that the Complete Communities plans are coordinated with the city budget.

III. City of Houston 2019 Budget Overview: City Controller, Chris Brown

Chris Brown, City Controller, opened his presentation by recognizing that SNC members care about the city, ask tough questions, and deserve transparency. He stated that the city controller's job is to acts as the taxpayers' watchdog. Controller Brown said that he would provide Chairman Huffmaster an electronic copy of his slide presentation for sharing with SNC members.

Controller Brown said that the city is challenged to keep up with growth, that this year's budget shortfall is estimated to be \$114M. Approximately \$84M of that shortfall is expected to be closed with emergency funds, increases in sales tax revenue that followed Hurricane Harvey, and funds from a recently settled lawsuit. He said that the city's economic outlook is good due, in part, to positive economic activity from increasing oil prices. Even though the city has diversified it is still dependent on the oil industry such that an increase in the price of oil and gas results in positive economic activity in terms of jobs coming to Houston. This positive activity has some negative side effects, e.g., increased traffic and congestion, and rising housing cost. The median home price in Houston is now \$247k, and the average price is \$304k. Houston has AA credit rating in most categories; AAA is the highest. A high credit rating is needed to issue debt and the city can still sell debt successfully. Last year at this time the mayor successfully addressed the pension crisis by reducing the city's unfunded liability by @ \$3.5B; a reduction of almost half. Many state representatives and employee union groups worked together to help the city avoid that looming crisis. At the same time the city moved from an interest only payment practice to an interest and principle payment practice pursuant to which the city's current pension-related debt should be fully paid in 30 years.

Structurally Balanced Budget: Skip Reeder asked if the city is funding depreciation, and if the city is setting aside funds for deferred maintenance; Mr. Brown replied: "No," and acknowledged that the city is (1) under funding maintenance for utilities and public buildings, (2) lacks a structurally balanced budget, (3) needs @ another \$250M/year to achieve a structurally balanced budget, and (4) has hired a firm to provide a report w/ recommendations for how to work towards achieving a structurally balanced budget. He explained that a structurally balanced budget is a budget pursuant to which all the city's on-going liabilities would be paid annually. For example, he said that the city needs a trust to insure health care for retirees and needs to better manage its land and buildings. He said that the 611 Walker building is not fully occupied, and unused parts of the building could be leased to provide additional income. Gladys House asked if the city could use TIRZ funds for deferred maintenance; Mr. Brown replied that the city is looking at the possibility of recovering funds from some of the more lucrative TIRZs, and that in the previous budget cycle the mayor pulled some funds from TIRZs for public safety.

FEMA: Tomaro Bell asked how the city is fairing on its applications for FEMA reimbursement. Mr. Brown acknowledged that there is cause for concern as only about three projects have been submitted and approved; the challenge is working with FEMA's terms for 90/10 reimbursement which require the city to pay costs initially and hope that FEMA will agree to reimburse 90% of the costs. When asked if it would

be possible for the city to use federal disaster relief funds to pay for deferred maintenance, Mr. Brown said, yes, FEMA funds can be used to make buildings more resilient for future storms, but that the scope of the funding need is challenging. If city didn't have FEMA or insurance funds, the city wouldn't be able to rebuild. COH is leveraging these funds as best as possible.

Ed Browne commented that FEMA's funding expires in about three months and asked, "How do we get past that?" Controller Brown responded that Houston's estimated amount of damage is \$100B, but is only slated to recover @ \$33B in federal relief. Citizens will need to continue to press Congress for additional funds and recognize that recovery will be a long term process that may take years to complete. Controller Brown said that he would provide a sample letter to federal representatives for distribution to SNA members.

Scott Cubbler commented that many people with homes valued at \$50k or less aren't likely to receive any financial relief from FEMA, and asked, "How can those folks get help?" Mr. Brown explained that housing funds go from FEMA to the State of Texas' Government Land Office ("GLO") to the city's Housing & Community Development Department ("HCDD"), and that city residents needing financial assistance can go to the HCDD's website to learn how to apply for financial relief. Tomaro Bell announced that she had application forms for need-based housing repairs. Scott Cubbler commented further that @ 70k applications had been submitted for housing repair assistance but that @ 60k have already been denied. Mr. Brown said that he'd check the numbers. Keith Downey commented that the need for financial aid is great in the far N and E reaches of the city, that the impediments to receiving financial aid are many; and that more and more people are facing homelessness because FEMA is now evicting people from hotel/motel shelters. Mr. Brown warned attendees to be alert to frauds, scams, and misrepresentations that could prevent relief funds from reaching people in need. Kim Hatter from the Mayor's Office announced that a new project manager has just been hired who will report to Dept. of Neighborhoods Director Takasha Francis, and that the city is weighing the possibility of opening two additional neighborhood recovery centers. Keith Downey reported that the flyers that have gone out look like the original ones; even though the information has changed.

Ms. Bell commented that in the NE area of the city, the Department of Neighborhoods has been citing people for junk vehicles that residents can't afford to repair b/c they haven't received funds from FEMA or insurance companies. Mr. Brown responded that the city shouldn't kick people when they're down, and should recognize a Hurricane Harvey exemption.

Rebuild Houston: Philip Salerno asked if drainage fee funds were being used for Harvey recovery? Mr. Brown responded that Rebuild Houston funds could not be used for storm recovery, insurance funds would be used to repair and rebuild storm damaged property. He emphasized that city funds are not sufficient to meet the city's needs. He said that Harris County is planning to ask voters to approve a \$2.5B bond to address flooding and drainage needs. Randy Jones commented that Rebuild Houston needs more transparency because it is unclear where and how the funds are being spent. Mr. Brown responded that Rebuild has four buckets of funds, that Rebuild Houston was not a flood control initiative, and that general revenue funds going to Rebuild Houston can be used for street reconstruction. Mr. Brown said that he is working on a transparency initiative with state comptroller's office in an effort to make information more available on-line. Jack O'Connor commented that although the city may not be treating Rebuild Houston as a flood control initiative, people think it was a flood control initiative.

380 Agreements: Pedro Ayarzagotia asked if the city's 380 Agreements have been audited, specifically the White Oak Music Hall? Mr. Brown responded that a few 380's have been audited, but not the White Oak one. He acknowledged that a number of findings from the audits that have been done are concerning.

Houston First: Tomaro Bell asked when Houston First would be audited? Mr. Brown responded that his office is increasing its scrutiny of Houston First and would probably audit Houston First's response to Hurricane Harvey. He said that Houston First seems to think that they're autonomous, but as a local government corporation the tax payers are responsible for Houston First's annual budget of \$88-\$100M.

IV. Houston-Galveston Area Council (“H-GAC”) Liveable Centers Studies and Community Impact: Jeff Taebel, Director Community and Environmental Planning

Mr. Taebel began with an apology for having to complete his presentation in time to retrieve his parked car by 8:00 p.m. He introduced two members of his staff, Veronica Baxter Lamb and Lydia Abebe, who he said would be able to stay and answer questions after he has to leave.

Livable Centers are places where people can live, work, and play with less reliance on their cars, i.e., places that are close, compact, and mixed use. Livable Centers, with concentrations of residential and employment, support more trips by foot, bicycle, transit, or carpool. H-GAC's Livable Centers program works with local communities to identify specific recommendations, such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, that can help spark the creation of Livable Centers. Through the study process the local community identifies a vision for the study area. The studies contain an implementation plan to realize this vision. H-GAC's Livable Centers program has completed studies in urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the 8-county H-GAC region. How to make areas of the city walkable, liveable areas can be difficult because the city has thousands of miles of roads that are very challenging to make into walkable. Some places are obviously more “liveable” than others, e.g., Midtown; others are not so obvious, e.g., Airline Drive.

How do you get a Liveable Center Study? Every two years there is a call for proposals to cities and other taxing entities, e.g., management districts. The average cost for a Liveable Center Study is \$200k; HGAC pays 80%; a local government must pay the 20% local match. H-GAC serves as the project manager; whether any proposed projects move forward to implementation is up to the community. The Liveable Center Study is essentially a game plan. All projects are scaled to fit within the community at issue. Transportation projects proposed in such a study are plans that H-GAC might be able to fund in the future. About 24 Liveable Centers Studies have been done by H-GAC; approximately 16 of those have been in the City of Houston. Three or four Liveable Centers Studies are now underway. H-GAC has worked with diverse communities in an effort to develop plans to make roads safer places for bicycles. The Hobby area study also looked at how to improve street landscaping. Approximately \$200M of capital improvements have occurred in Liveable Centers study areas, and assessed property values in these areas have out paced those in Harris County in general. The butterfly garden in the Near Northside is an example of an implemented project. A fair amount of private investment has occurred in Livable Center Study areas as well; some aspects of studies have turned into marketing strategies. Upcoming studies are Brays Oaks; East Aldine, North Houston; Greater Eastwood; Montrose; and SW Houston which is a very large study area that may have a number of commercial hubs and connectors. Mr. Taebel said that he would provide his slide presentation to Chairman Huffmaster to share with SNA members. He encouraged people who like the studies to let their elected officials know and to advocate for their implementation. A good way to start advocating for a Liveable Centers Study is to establish an advisory committee and invite friends and neighbors to participate in a planning process. H-GAC has a number of on line tools to check how your community might take advantage of the features offered.

Gladys House asked how areas are selected for study? Mr. Taebel responded through calls for proposals, the proposals are reviewed, and selected. He said that this year all of the proposals submitted were selected for funding. A key criteria is a commitment from the local government entity applying to pay the 20% match.

Recent applications are on-line and can be reviewed. Mr. Taebel can be reached at 713-993-4560. Randy Baxley commented that applying for and working through a Liveable Center Study years long process, and that in the city the key to a successful application is support of the district council member. Mr. Taebel recommended patience. Secretary West recommended perseverance.

V. Old Business: Annual Report, Survey

Chairman Huffmaster reported that the effort to produce an annual report is still in the works and that he may have information to share in June. He said that the draft is slow in coming due to a number of diversions. In the past an on-line survey has been used to gather current information about active SNCs; this year's survey still needs to be up-dated to include questions about hurricane recovery.

VI. New Business: Neighborhood Council Formation:

Chairman Huffmaster reported that the effort to create new SNCs and to hold a second council formation workshop has been on hold since the hurricane. He now anticipates holding a second workshop in the late summer or early fall. Thomas Wang reported that the recently formed Midtown SNC will be recognized and awarded a proclamation at city council on Tuesday, May 15th. Kimberly Hatter said that the Mayor's staff is discussing ways to improve how SNCs work with the city because we're all addressing the same issues.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Standing Committees

1. Flooding and Drainage

Flooding and drainage committee chairman, Mark Klein, reported that he, Chairman Huffmaster, and Secretary West met with Public Works Director Haddock immediately before the SNA meeting. Director Haddock reported that her staff is working on draft guidelines for Chapter 19 and revisions to Chapters 9 and 13 of the Infrastructure Design Manual ("IDM") dealing, respectively, with storm water management and storm water quality, and that red line versions should be available soon. Director Haddock said that town halls or other types of public meetings would be held about the proposed revisions, and that the goal is to have all of the drafts approved and in effect by September 1, 2018. Mr. Klein reported that the SNA representatives raised issues relating to process for approving Capital Improvement Projects ("CIP"), and asked for greater transparency, e.g., that projects undertaken by special districts be subject to the same or similar public engagement process as are projects undertaken by city departments.

2. Public Safety: Tomaro Bell reported that in the last month she's attended 16 different SNC meetings. She knew from TV news reports that Kingwood had been damaged by the hurricane, but she only recently witnessed the extent of the damage first-hand which has been exacerbated by area sand mines that support concrete plants. Over 200 people attended a recent meeting there to express concern about the lack of timely aid. Ms. Bell announced that she had applications for needs based home repair and rental assistance of up to \$1,300/month for one year. Ms. Bell commented that the NE part of the city needed improvements before the hurricane, and that damage caused by the hurricane has only exacerbated the need. She said that the cost of raising most homes in that area will exceed their value, and that implementation of the recent amendments to Chapter 19 threaten to displace residents there. She also said that the mayor intends to hold a referendum to lift the revenue cap on property taxes to raise \$90M for more police officers.

B. Advisory Committees: Deferred to June due to lack of time.

VIII. Announcements and Open Comments (5 minutes)

SNAPs: Philip Salerno asked about SNAPs. Mark Klein responded that if the question referred to SNAP grants, the current administration has not supported them and they are not currently available. Chairman Huffmaster said that he's asked Vice-Chairman Sorto to work on pulling together planning tools for the SNA. Vice-Chairman Sorto commented that the SNA doesn't have a comprehensive plan, but that having such a plan would be a valuable asset. He is working to pull together a plan for SNC planning. Chairman Huffmaster said that planning for SNCs would a good subject for a workshop that could bring together resources.

Hackathon: Randy Baxley announced that the City of Houston would soon be holding a hackathon, and that SNC members should come to present ideas for how technology could be used to make open data more useful and available to SNCs. He explained that a hackathon is an event at which technology experts work together to produce applications requested by participants. He said that he would provide the date and location to Chairman Huffmaster for distribution.

Franchise Tax Reports Due: Greg Sergesketter announced that for SNCs that are registered entities, Texas franchise reports are due on May 15th.

IX. Adjournment: 8:15