

## Super Neighborhood Alliance

Minutes from Meeting held February 11, 2019, at the METRO Headquarters, 1900 Main Street



### Guests

CM David Robinson  
Kimberly Hatter, Mayor's Office  
Teresa Geisheker, Planning Dept.  
Mark Cueva, DON  
Ellary Makuch, HCDD  
Candy Anderson, HCDD  
Christa Stoneham, COH  
Shannon Martin, Harris Co. Prct. 1  
Abner Lyons, State Rep. H. Dutton  
Charonda Johnson, Freedman's Town  
Ashley Johnson, LINK Houston  
Margaret Dunlap, METRO  
Noah Budnick, Together for Safer Roads  
David Braunstein, Together for Safer Roads  
Kaelin Manuel  
Bill Baldwin, COH Planning Commission  
Mario Castillo, Your Houston PAC  
Nick Hellyar, District C Candidate  
Shelley Kennedy, District C Candidate  
Debra Denny  
Matt Dulin, Community Impact Newspaper

### Super Neighborhood Representatives

Philip Salerno, SNC 05  
Ricky Miller, SNC 05  
Angela Thibodeaux, SNC 06  
E. Rain Eatmon, SNC 06  
Ed Browne, SNC 10  
Mark Klein, SNC 12  
Peter Davis, SNC 14  
John Zavala, SNC 14  
Leigh Killgore, SNC 14  
Pedro Ayaragoitia, SNC 15  
Jack O'Connor, SNC 17  
Steve Ashy, SNC 17

Michael Huffmaster, SNA Past Chair, SNC 18  
Judson Bryant, SNC 18  
Jane West, SNA Secretary, SNC 22  
Mike Van Dusen, SNC 22  
Stacie Fairchild, SNC 22  
Kay Warhol, SNC 24  
Doug Smith, SNC 25  
Sandra Rodriguez, SNC 27  
Cheryl Palmer O'Brien, SNC 32  
Marcy Williams, SNC 36  
Sylvia Rivas, SNC 36  
Becky Edmondson, SNC 37  
Cindy Chapman, SNA Chairwoman, SNC 37  
Jeff Peters, SNC 38  
Linda Scurlock, SNC 39/40  
Bessie Mansfield, SNC 39/40  
Barbara Blue, SNC 41  
Stan Sarman, SNC 43  
Lupita Talley, SNC 46  
Ivory Mayhorn, SNC 47  
Huey German-Wilson, SNC 48  
Juan Antonio Sorto, SNA Vice-Chairman, SNC 49/50  
Albert Coleman SNC 49/50  
Rob Block, SNC 51  
Sylvia Cavazos, SNC 51  
Michelle Barton, SNC 55  
Janice Thomas, SNC 55  
Jessica Hulsey, SNC 63  
Lilianne Aguirre, SNC 63  
Tina Sullivan, SNC 63  
Amy Dinn, SNC 64/88  
Leroy West, SNC 71  
Tomaro Bell, SNC 83  
David Durham, SNC 84  
Scott Cubbler, SNC 84

**Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.**

**I. Introductions**

**II. Acceptance of Minutes from Meeting Held on January 14, 2019**

Tomaro Bell moved and Cheryl O'Brien seconded acceptance of the January 14, 2019, meeting minutes. Motion carried.

**III. Officers' Reports - Written Report(s)**

Chairwoman Cindy Chapman summarized her written report which was shared prior to the meeting: (1) The SNA is planning to conduct two training classes, one of which will be held on Saturday, March 30th at the HPD Southwest Substation at 13097 Nitida Street, Houston, TX 77045; the other will be held on a date and at a location yet to be determined. The training will be the same at both events and will include tips for running meetings and organizations, and fundamentals of planning. (2) Two new committees will be established: Bylaws and Policies to be chaired by J. West; and Communications; (3) M. Huffmaster is working on the surveys, please submit the survey for your SN promptly so that they can be collated in time for the March meeting.

**IV. Presentations**

- A. Derek Darwell, Harris County Survey - Not received.
- B. Sanjay Ramabhadran ("Ram"), METRO Board Member.

Ram presented an overview of the services that METRO provides and METRONext: A Plan for regional transportation for which METRO is now accepting public comment. The METRO Service Area is expected to add another 2 million residents by 2040, an increase of 50%. Population and job growth mean more people are moving into the service area—putting more demand on our transportation network. Meanwhile, the region is growing and the core is densifying, creating an environment where high capacity transit can thrive. METRONext will develop a Regional Transit Plan that will identify major capital investments and other improvements needed for METRO to meet the mobility challenges of the next 20 years. It will serve as both a vision for transit through 2040, as well as an implementable roadmap to achieve that vision. Basic goals of METRONext are to improve mobility, enhance connectivity, support vibrant communities, and improve return on investment. The draft plan calls for direct connection to both airports; light rail to Hobby Airport and Bus Rapid Transit ("BRT") to Intercontinental. The METRONext plan calls for 75 miles of BRT from downtown, including to the High Speed Rail station, on most highway corridors. Busses will remain the backbone of the transit service. High frequency routes will be given signal priority when traffic demands; an example is the #82 Westheimer route which is the single best performing route in the city. All of Houston's diversity is on that bus. The plan calls for improved park and ride service, and extensions to areas that are outside the METRO service area as long as the service recipients pay the full cost. Will we ever get rid of traffic and congestion in Houston? No. But METRO is trying to future-proof the plan, by helping to ease congestion for all. The plan is also expected to have a substantial impact on the region's carbon footprint, and has been developed to save time and improve the travel experience for all. Funding will be a combination of bonds and federal funds. This plan allows use of the General Mobility funds for sidewalks etc. through 2040. All of this information and more is available on-line at [www.MetroNext.org](http://www.MetroNext.org). Please plan to attend a community meeting, look at the plan and maps on-line, and make a comment. METRO needs comments and the region needs improved transit options to attract new talent and allow the economy to grow.

C. Chapman (SNC 37) asked how much funding will be federal and how much local? Ram responded that METRO is looking for a quick start so some improvements will be funded only w/ local funds.

J. Peters (SNC 38) asked, “What is a boost corridor”? Ram responded that “boost” refers to signal preference for buses to give them priority to move forward. He also said that METRO is studying how best to strategically position bus stops so that local commuters can get to them faster.

M. Williams (SNC 36) commented that if busses have fewer stops won’t the distances that passengers have to travel when they get off increase? Ram responded that depending on the service there will be limited stops, e.g., the #82 bus now stops every few hundred yards, but that boost service on that route would be comparable to express service. He emphasized that METRO is challenged to make riding the bus easier, and that the METRONext plan is not intended to take away any existing service but, to augment it.

Ram was asked to comment on METRO’s commitment to making sure that the increase in train service won’t also increase the rate of collisions. Ram responded that safety is METRO’s first priority, but acknowledged that METRO still had work to decide how the rail corridors should look.

T. Bell (SNC 83) asked about federal funds, and commented that when the train lines were last expanded the tracks were laid through parts of the Third Ward known as “the Bottoms,” but that even though the population there is largely transit dependent the train does not stop there. Ms. Bell encouraged METRO to expand and improve the services it provides in areas with largely transit dependent populations.

J. West (SNC 22) asked Ram to comment on what steps METRO was taking to insure that new development is accompanied by bus stops that are accessible to people of all abilities. Acknowledging that poses a challenge for METRO, Ram said that METRO needs to be able to inspect projects prior to completion. CM David Robinson said this issue will be addressed at a future meeting of City Councils Transportation, Technology, and Infrastructure committee which he chairs. He said that he would give the SNA advance notice of the meeting to provide SNA representatives an opportunity not only to attend but also to bring comments and pose questions.

P. Ayaragoitia (SNC 15) commented that METRO says it intends to bring more transit to more places, but asked if METRO was bringing transit that people want, and commented that the types of transit and the places to which it is being brought matter.

H. German-Wilson (SNC 48) remarked that her area of town, Trinity Houston Gardens, has historically been ignored by METRO. She asked: “What questions were asked and who answered them?” Observing that new development should entail the construction of new sidewalks and new bus stops, she said that she is forced to stand in a weed patch to catch a bus. Ram responded that METRO has 9,000 bus stops and a study showing which ones need a pad and a sidewalk; but that if the nearest sidewalk is a long distance away from an existing sidewalk, connecting the bus stop to a sidewalk is difficult. He said that METRO is trying to coordinate with the city to improve the infrastructure for transit riders. He said that METRO did not ask leading questions, and he emphasized that the METRONext plan is still in draft form and can and should be expected to change before being finally adopted by the METRO Board. He said that if METRO hears more comments, they’ll incorporate those comments into the final plan.

A. Johnson (LINK Houston) commented that people would like better ways to move around places where there are high levels of activity, and that the METRONext planner should be looking at where the jobs are and where people live. He said that there’s also a heat map and a transit index based on where people live who need transit service. He commented that enhancements like sidewalks and bus shelters should be

added in those areas where they can be expected to increase ridership. While METRO could easily identify areas needing improvements, METRO needs to prioritize where and how to spend its scarce resources to get people where they need to be faster and more safely.

D. Smith (SNC 25) commented that METRONext will be an expensive program, \$7.5B, half of that amount from local funds and half from federal funds. Since METRO only gets about 10 cents on the dollar for service and has unfunded liabilities that have increased over the last several years, he asked if METRO shouldn't be addressing its financial issues before incurring more debt to implement a new plan? Ram responded that the plan could be bigger but that METRO was choosing not to over extend itself. He said that METRO's bond ratings have been increased to triple A; METRO is putting 10% into reserves; and another 10% into an emergency fund; so METRO's financial condition is better now than it's ever been. He also said that without improved transit, people won't be able to get around, and consequently the sales tax revenue would decrease because people will move away. He also said that the head of METRO's finance committee believes that the plan is feasible.

J. O'Connor (SNC 17) asked for the ratio of the passenger capacity and ridership on a single day. Ram acknowledged that METRO has excess capacity, but that the amount of excess depends on the route and the time of day. He said that there are no transit organizations that run on fares alone; otherwise it wouldn't be a public service. He said there is no magic; certain parts of the plan must come together for the greater public good. If it takes three hours to commute to and from work, transit must improve.

M. Huffmaster (SNC 18) asked if boost service was being planned for Northeast Houston? He commented that in light of Ms. German-Wilson's earlier question, any community seeking increased service should receive increased service. Ram responded that a boost line and a BRT line were planned for the east side of town along Lockwood. He added that METRO is still accepting comments and encouraged communities seeking service changes to make those suggestions to METRO.

M. Huffmaster (SNC 18) asked what, if any, plans METRO has for rail on Richmond and for grade separation on the rail lines? Ram responded that ideally every train line would be grade separated, but that the cost of doing that is very high. Regarding rail on Richmond, he said that would provide the missing link needed to connect the Galleria to downtown. METRONext calls for that connection to be made with BRT.

A commentator stated that the #96 bus provides excellent, carte blanche service, but that it only makes runs in a circle stopping at certain locations, but does not provide access to other bus routes. The commentator asked if METRO could reassess that route to make it more useful for riders to travel outside of the community. Ram responded that the planning team will look at that route and that there could be a reason for which it was established, but that reason could have changed over time. The commentator also said that they had just discovered by accident that they have a METRO representative who they've never met. Noting that the Houston Park Board has done a great job implementing the Bayou Greenways projects everywhere, the commentator asked why METRO couldn't do better everywhere. He said that he sees nice bus stops elsewhere, but not in NE Houston; NE Houston has been neglected. Ram responded that METRO has approached bus stops by the number of people boarding and deboarding buses. He said that a year and a half ago METRO began looking at other indicators. He acknowledged that sometimes there isn't much ridership because the facilities do not invite ridership, but observed that METRO could not improve all 9,000 of its bus stops at the same time. He said that approximately \$10M is budgeted for bus stop improvements this fiscal year, but even that amount is not enough to address the need. He said that the number of senior citizens in an area needing service is also an important indicator.

Tanya McWashington of METRO said that she had worked on an effort to consolidate bus routes. She said that then METRO did not implement proposals to which communities objected. She said that METRO heard that in one particular area there was a disproportionate number of bus shelters as compared to the overall system and that METRO worked with the community in that area to identify where best to put 45 new shelters. Emphasizing that METRO's goal is to work with the community, she said comment cards were available for people to identify areas in need of more attention. She also said that ridership reports are on the website and reported monthly. Noting that many factors influence where to put a shelter, she observed that METRO often receives competing comments on that issue.

Chairwoman Chapman commented that while there is strong community interest in transit, there also seems to be a disconnect between what communities need and what METRO provides. She observed that in Westbury, where she lives, bus service was made less convenient during METRO's last effort to revise its service. She asked for clarification regarding the time line for making comments and for inviting speakers to community meetings. Ram responded that community members should provide comments early and often, and that comments can be made on-line. He said that METRO would have as many speakers as possible available to speak at community meetings. He emphasized that the draft plan would change. Ms. McWashington said that METRO hoped to have an on-line request for speakers available in the next week or so, and that everyone in the room should know their METRO public engagement liaison, and that anyone who did not know their engagement officer should ask her to provide their name and number.

Amy Dinn (SNC 64/88) asked what would be best way for her community to communicate to METRO it's desire for the Green Line to go to Hobby Airport.

### **C. Ellary Makuch and Candye Anderson, COH Housing and Community Development Department**

Ms. Makuch and Ms. Anderson reported that Housing Resource Centers are now open in the four quadrants of the city and that while they are intended to be conveniently located, acknowledged that there are some communities who need more. They said that they've been attending organized events to spread the word about the recovery centers, and that they are available to help organize events and to respond to invitations even to knock door to door in certain neighborhoods. She said that the Harvey Recovery Survey is the first step for anyone and everyone seeking recovery funds: [Recovery@Houston.gov](mailto:Recovery@Houston.gov); 832-393-0550. She acknowledged that there are many who still need help and the outreach that they are trying to provide.

M. Huffmaster (SNC 18) encouraged representatives from the Housing and Community Development Department to attend each of the upcoming District CIP meetings. Ms. Makuch said that they've been invited and plan to attend.

J. O'Connor (SNC 17) asked if they had a list of caseworkers so that people can know who the city recognizes and sanctions? Ms. Makuch said that the contractors are secured and approved by the city, they will be badged, and will have red shirts. She said that any who is unsure about someone should ask them to more thoroughly identify themselves.

## **V. Old Business 2018 Survey**

Chairwoman Chapman acknowledged Past Chairman Michael Huffmaster for working to collect and collate the surveys and urged representatives from all Super Neighborhood Councils to complete and submit a survey promptly.

## **VI. New Business**

**A. Workshops - Tentative Dates:** March 30, 2019, HPD Southwest Substation, 13097 Nitida Street, Houston, TX 77045. Other date TBD.

### **B. New Committee - Nominations:**

Chairwoman Chapman announced her intent to establish two new committees: Bylaws and Policies and Communication. Stacie Fairchild from SNC 22 volunteered to chair the Communications Committee.

## **VII. Committees Reports: Moving to WRITTEN Reports.**

### **A. Standing Committees**

- 1. Liveability, Transportation and Parks: S. Ashy**
- 2. Infrastructure: M. Klein**
- 3. Growth: J. Sorto**
- 4. Health and Public Safety: T. Bell**
- 5. Transition/Regulatory Affairs: J. West**
- 6. Environmental/I-45: K. O'Reilly**
- 7. Bicycle: M. Van Dusen**

### **B. Advisory Committees - Moving to WRITTEN Reports**

- 1. Houston Work Group: J. Sorto**
- 2. Walkable Places: M. Huffmaster/J. West**
- 3. Complete Communities: M. Huffmaster**
- 4. H-GAC Mobility: S. Ashy**

## **VIII. Open Comments (5 minutes)**

## **IX. Adjournment: 8:05 p.m.**

Next meeting - March 11, 2019 (second Monday, monthly) at 6:30 PM, City Hall Annex