

HHIA Neighborhood Meeting May 23, 2010

Members Present: Paul Sager, Tara Ohler-Jenney, Kate Hastings, Stacy Ross, Beth Murphy

President Paul Sager recognized Bridget Flood of Carondelet Pottery who has created an original clay tile depicting the Carondelet Park Boathouse as a fundraiser for HHIA. The tiles can be purchased for \$25.

Mayor Slay was introduced. He recognized elected officials, Fred Wessels and Jake Hummel. The mayor made his case for local control of the police department, an issue that was brought up in the state legislature in the session just ended.

We think we can save up to \$4 million if we consolidated the services (of the city with the police department) – purchasing, hiring etc. We came as far as we've ever come. It was narrowly defeated in the House. Came out of committee in Senate but never got a vote.

The Mayor discussed the city's \$45 million budget shortfall this year. We have to either find savings or revenue enhancements to close the gap.

- A plan is being developed to charge residents for trash service.
- “One of the problems with our budget situation is our pensions. Pensions have gone up 1200 percent. Let me repeat that. 1200 percent.”
- \$6.4 million when Clarence Harmon was Mayor. This year we will put about \$75 million in the 3 pension systems.
- Fiscal year 2011, firefighters, benefits are 80% of salary, the following year, more than 100% - in other words, for every dollar in salary, we will be paying more than a dollar in benefits.
- Police dept. benefits are 70-something percent of salary. This year we gave the police a \$1 million cut in budget – they have \$3.9 million shortfall they have to make up without lowering staffing levels because of federal grant that requires level staffing
- “I don't want control over the money, I just want to be able to modify the benefits.”

The Mayor discussed Crime statistics:

- 43% of crime in city is car-related – car thefts, stealing stuff out of cars, car cloutings. Talked to the chief – unified effort to deal with car-related crime. Beefing up efforts, more visibility, more surveillance, intelligence.
- Crime overall is down in the city.

The Mayor took questions:

Q: You're asking your hourly employees to take a 3.5% pay cut – what about the pencil pushers?

A: They are getting a pay cut. I'm taking a pay cut. Some employees will now have to pay for parking. Elected officials – voluntary pay cut. I'm taking a pay cut.

Q: City earnings tax – where do we stand with this?

A: Rex Sinquefeld got the signatures – not certified yet but we expect they will be – it will be on the ballot statewide to decide if St. Louis and Kansas City can vote on whether to keep the earnings tax – if that happens, next April it will be on the ballot.

I trust the people of St. Louis. It would devastate the budget. The earnings tax is about one-third of the city budget.

I think the whole idea of the earnings tax is worthy of debate, but it's irresponsible to get rid of it without knowing how it will be replaced. To replace it would have to go to state legislature it would take time. To do it without having something to replace it is irresponsible. I trust the people of St. Louis.

If people vote to keep the earnings tax – it goes on the ballot 5 years from now. If they vote to get rid of it, it would phase out over 10 years. We could not afford that.

I do believe the earnings tax is an impediment. If you go across Skinker there's no earnings tax. It's not as big as an impediment as Rex Sinquefield believes it is, but having said that we can't do without it without having something to replace it.

Q: Are you working with KC to get them have control of their police Dept?

A: KC, for whatever reason, isn't interested in it. I don't want to get my hands on the pension money. Just be responsible stewards of the money. Do one of two things – either pay for the cost or fix it. The state didn't even fix their own pension problems.

Q: Is problem with pensions because of state control or does all cities of our size have that problem?

A: Problem is because of the stock market but the state won't do anything about it. In '90s with increase in stock market, pensions were increased. Now that the stock market is down, it's costing us. Pension costs are sucking up a lot of the money. City controls fire dept, but state law says state is in charge of pensions. I suggest to state legislature – either fix it yourself and make it affordable or give it to us.

Q: What's the status of Ballpark Village?

A: It's on hold. I refused to do two things – they wanted us to put in direct money like KC did and they wanted us to back the bonds. They finally realized I was telling the truth and I wouldn't do it. It's heavily retail and in a market like this you're not going to get financing for a project like this. What I will tell you is that property is very valuable. The Cardinals own it. They are a reputable organization and I have faith in them. They want something to happen too. It doesn't look like anything's going to happen anytime soon.

Q: Who will be charged for trash – property owner or resident?

A: Tried to get it put on property tax bill, legislature wouldn't agree to it. Now either separate bill or on water bill. Collection rate won't be as high as it would be if it were on tax bill.

Q: I want to recognize park employees for keeping up the park on a limited budget.

A: There's a lot of good city employees. Seventy people will lose their jobs. Since I've been in office we've eliminated 700-800 jobs. I try to lead by example. We have 30% fewer people in the mayor's office. My budget has gone down – and that's not even taking into account inflation. These are tough times but we're going to be leaner we're going to be stronger. I'm still having fun. We've got a lot of good people.

Q: Status of a city/county merger?

A: Nothing going on. I'd like to see the city reenter the county as another municipality. Doesn't want it politicized during county executive race. We could save a lot of money. We could merge our economic development, our health depts., our public safety training. We don't have to merge the police depts. But we could merge the training. It's going to benefit the city and the county or it's not going to work.

President Sager noted that HHIA meeting minutes are posted on the web site and HHIA financial statements are available at the front table.

Circuit Clerk Mariano Favazza: Discussed a new initiative. We're still the only circuit attorney's office that communicates warrants electronically, cutting off days in the amount of time it takes. A few weeks ago I realized I was only doing half the job. From now on, I'm going to put this information on the web site along with a picture of the person. Been asked why can't I put pictures of defendants with at-large warrants – I couldn't think of a reason so we're going to do that too. Information at www.stlcitycircuitcourt.com

Ward 11 Alderman Matt Villa:

- Aldermen Wessels and I did take a pay cut. It's optional for elected officials because there is no way to mandate it. It can't be increased while we're in office. Most of the aldermen have either scheduled a furlough or have taken a furlough – a pay decrease. And I will for the next budget year as well.
- Old funeral home on Grand – forestry cut the grass last week – it was really high. Tried to contact owner who bought funeral home when he thought he was going to buy the other building unfortunately his financing dried up. The funeral home is now up for sale. He will be billed for grass cutting – put on his property taxes, he is behind by two years, but we'll get that money if it ever sells. In pretty good condition inside – the outside looks worse. It is a building we'd like to save. We just need to find an owner who will take care of it. I thought we had an owner.
- The lots at Bates just east of Jack N the Box – had a developer – did not receive any calls of interest so right now city's LRA still owns it. It is available for sale.
- Commended Jake Hummel – one of few in the city delegation who voted against firefighter residency – it's pretty sad that out of 9 city state reps only 2 supported the city. Other was Jeanette Mott Oxford. It's clearly in our charter. The Mayor toured the state trying to get support. Drove around the state asking for support. People tell me we need more police. We don't even control it. It's not a priority for the Governor. He appoints the police board members. His members took over the president of the board and he didn't even know it until the next day, so I don't think it's a priority. He's the guy who has control over it, he needs to have his finger on the pulse.
- Brian Kolde is back as NSO temporarily – six positions eliminated in NSO office – will no longer be one per ward. If we can find money I'd like to add an NSO.
- Start widening Loughborough bridge in June

Ward 13 Alderman Fred Wessels - I too want to commend Jake Hummel. He's a freshman representative and it's not easy to take some of the positions he took. It takes some nerve.

- Every meeting I'm at the mayor says something nice about me. He's an honest guy.
- Budget problems – not anything that every other city isn't dealing with
- Anheuser Busch moved its world headquarters to Belgium but Griesedick Brothers are moving their world headquarters to s. 38th St. right here in the 13th ward. Raymond Griesedick trying to work out a deal – that will be their plant – it

won't be retail, they won't have a restaurant or anything and it will have a small amount of employees – like 5-6.

- Spring and Delor apartments at Itaska – grass is about this high with weeds – first of all, that's in the 25th ward. I emailed Shane Cohn and he's on it. He has \$25 million from some grant – federal money for flood prevention – \$2.6 million going into street improvements at Spring, Delor and Itaska and some of that money is going to go to renovating those apartments – the owners are going to put some money into it also. There's some issues with the current ownership I think that he (Shane Cohn) would like to get some different owners in there but that will take a while – 6-8 mos.
- St. Mary's purchased apts – leveled them and just about ready to complete the baseball field. That area is going to be better because we're getting rid of some problems.
- Furlough – if the rest of the city employees are doing it, we should too.
- Water park at Carondelet is going to be dedicated Thursday afternoon, open on Saturday. I think the kids are going to love it.
- Question from audience about comment in the YMCA newsletter from Dan Schulz frustration with City over problems at the Y. Wessels: I thought it was a CYA memo – Dan was blaming everything on the city. I thought it was inappropriate. We're supposed to be working together.

District 108 State Rep. Jake Hummel:

- Phone bill fees are going to go down over the next 10 years.
- Passed bill for insurance coverage for children with autism
- Bills that didn't pass – charge admission to zoos/museums – that bill was defeated
- Obviously local control of police department failed – I did vote for that. I'm sure we'll have it again. The KC delegation did vote with us for the most part but until we can get our own city delegation to vote with us, won't pass.
- Fire dept. residency that is a city charter issue that is supposed to be decided by a 60% vote of the people. There is not supposed to be any state interference.
- We worked all year – joint committee Republicans and Democrats – bipartisan bill passed out of committee – Ethics reform. They refused to bring it up on the house floor. The house floor leader refused to bring it up for debate. Republicans passed bill strictly on party lines, no limits on contributions, no closing of the revolving door for legislators. Senate fixed it as best it could. One member of the house has taken several hundred thousands dollars for a state rep race – I don't think that kind of money has any kind of place in a state rep race.
- State has huge budget problem as well – passed budget \$400 million out of balance – governor will have to make cuts.
- There's a state tax exemption for yacht owners – I don't think that's right. I filed two bills to try to put that money back in.
- Question from audience about status of state historic tax credits. Hummel: Governor is in favor of cut – I am not. Historic tax credits have revitalized St. Louis. We need those historic tax credits. We are number 1 in the country in the use of historic tax credits. No where have they had success like St. Louis. Didn't get voted on. We get back more than we put in by leaps and bounds. All those businesses downtown are paying taxes. I think there's room for reform. I don't

think those have been misused, they're just the biggest ones so they're easiest to take a shot at instead of doing the hard ones.

NSO Brian Kolde:

- Over in Ward 14 – Haly has been moved over to Citizen's Service Bureau, Kolde covering until July – also covering for TJ Minden tonight.
- Season for problem properties – we need police calls. If we don't have a lot of police calls we can't do a lot, if we have a lot of police calls we have a process.
- National night out – Tues. Aug. 3 Register for National night out – you get a free street closing permit – saves you 20 bucks.

HHIA board elections were held. Tara Ohler-Jenney was elected president. Paul Sager will stay on the board as Immediate Past President. Stacy Ross was elected Recording Secretary. Anna Baldwin was elected Member at Large. Kate Hastings and Dan Haag are leaving the board. They will be missed.

HHIA will be showing three movies in the park this summer and fall. The first one is July 23 "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs." The board is looking for advertisers to support the movies.

The meeting was adjourned.