

Northampton Civic League Minutes 06/07/2005

The June meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by NHCL President Bernice Jackson. There were 7 people present.

The President opened with a pledge to the flag.

Secretary Matt Asay read the minutes for the May meeting. The minutes were approved with no corrections.

The President presented the Treasurer's report. Our current balance as of 03/01/05 (after 1 renewal and 1 new member) was \$98.74.

The Secretary reported on a request from a group opposed to Hampton's plans to build apartments on an open field near Buckroe Beach. A motion was made to invite groups from both sides to speak at our next meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Last month's NHCL-sponsored Community Yard Sale was discussed. Some photos from the event were shared with the group. The league will prepare thank-you notes to the families that participated. The group agreed that if we hold a yard sale again next year we need to plan and prepare much earlier and to have much more publicity (including newspaper ads) to get the word out.

Matt reported that he had not, as he had intended, brought the issue of what constituted "fund raising" for a Neighborhood Month event before the Neighborhood Commission. The May commission meeting was a joint meeting with the Planning Commission and he felt the venue was inappropriate for the discussion. He pledged to raise the issue at the June meeting and report back to the league on the response.

Matt also reported that Sheila Williams, who is the Neighborhood Office liaison for District 1 was on medical leave for a quintuple bypass operation. Several members know Sheila and the league wished her a speedy recovery.

Bernice presented information she had received from Butch Heath on a petition to keep Hampton School for the Deaf, Blind and Mult-Disabled open. It is threatened with possible closure as a cost-cutting measure. Delegate Mamyé BaCote, who attended our meeting, also serves on the committee fighting the closure. She provided information on the history of the school and efforts being made to keep it. There will be a hearing on July 31st before the state Board of Education. Matt offered to forward the information and petition to the rest of the members of the civic league. Ms. BaCote emphasized the need to return the signed petitions by the 15th in order to have them organized and assembled for the hearing.

The next topic discussed was Hampton's geographic database. Selvin Walker expressed his concern, after reviewing the information that could be accessed, that the data on the property owners might somehow be used for identity theft. For our next meeting Matt will try to get a speaker from the Planning Department to talk about the database and its purpose and discuss the possible concerns.

It was mentioned that fliers highlighting the topics might be useful in publicizing the meeting and attracting more participants.

Matt provided a briefing on the Walmart rezoning hearing before the Newport News Planning Commission on June 1st. A parade of people from the surrounding area in both Newport News and Hampton spoke against the project. Some of their concerns were:

- Traffic - Many people said that traffic on a number of the streets in the area was already very bad during the morning and evening commute times. They did not believe the Planning Department's statement that the Walmart would not significantly impact area traffic.
- Congestion - Others cited promises that had been made back when the city approved the expressway that it would be a limited access road and speed traffic through the area. Now plans called for a new stoplight and three lanes of traffic entering the property.
- Noise and Light Pollution - People living in the adjacent housing developments expressed concerns about the disruption a 24-hour store would cause both in their neighborhoods and in Sandy

Bottom park on the other side of the store.

- Wildlife - Another issue raised was that the clearing of the woods would drive snakes and other animals into their backyards.
- Flooding - The loss of wetlands would increase the runoff and flooding in the area.
- Safety - Having to cross a new busy intersection would present a safety hazard for walkers, bikers and joggers using the sidewalk along the expressway to exercise or get to and from the park.
- Unnecessary - A number of speakers indicated that, while they liked Walmart and shopped there, that this location was not the right one for another store. Also many felt that with 3 Walmarts in the area another one just wasn't needed.

After a discussion of these points and other issues a motion was made and approved unanimously for the league to oppose the Walmart rezoning. The Secretary will formalize the wording and submit the draft for a consensus approval by those who attended before it is presented to the Newport News Planning Commission and the City Council. We will also contact the other civic groups in the area (Farmington and Hampton Woods) as well as the Hampton residents who spoke at the meeting, seeking to coordinate our presentations.

Finally the league discussed the possibility of having new elections for officers. It was decided to postpone elections while we built up our membership. The following motion was proposed and adopted unanimously:

It is moved that we amend the Northampton Civic League Bylaws Article 5, Item 5 to maintain the current officers until there is sufficient membership in attendance to hold elections. This issue will be revisited by the league in October of 2005.

The meeting was adjourned at about 8:50 pm. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, July 5th.

Matt Asay, NHCL Secretary