

MPNA News

The Melrose Park Neighbors Association

Volume 2 – Number 38

From MPNA President – Andy Rudin

Wednesday, October 23, 2007

Report on the Melrose Park Neighbors Meeting

About 20 people participated in the MPNA meeting on Monday evening, October 22, 2007. These are the questions *in italics* that were submitted by Melrose Park neighbors to candidates Tom Carboni (R) and Mike Swavola (D) for the Ward 5 commissioner for Cheltenham Township, and, in part and summary, their responses. Many of the submitted questions and issues were related to outstanding subjects that Mike Swavola, as an incumbent, obviously had more intimate knowledge of and therefore, he could provide better insight and clarification. Tom Carboni



could not offer specific solutions to problems that he didn't know about. Nonetheless, the questions raised were important outstanding issues that the Commissioner of Ward 5 will need to address, regardless of who is the Commissioner. Overall, it was an interesting discussion:

1. Can the Melrose Park Neighbors Association receive a list of voters in Wards 2 and 3 from both the local Democratic Party and Republican Party? This will help us increase membership.

Both candidates said that the lists are easily available. The day after the discussion, Tom Carboni emailed me a list of all voters in Ward 5. Thanks, Tom.

2. Can the Township acquire the Widner Estate through eminent domain? How do you feel about doing so?

This turns out to be a very complicated, hot issue. Both candidates discussed the technicalities and difficulties of eminent domain. Mike explained that the owner of the property, who is in New York City, increases the price when interest in the property is expressed. The asking price is now around \$20 million. An additional, huge amount of money would have to be invested in the facilities. Developers may not be interested in the property as a whole. There seemed to be a general consensus that the Widner Estate would be a great place to have a neighborhood party.

3. What recommendations do you have to better integrate your Korean and constituents into Cheltenham Township activities?

Mike described the complaints the Township receives about not being able to read the signs advertising Korean businesses. Tom suggested that the Asian Market on the corner of Old York Road and Cheltenham could open a remote market at the location of the former Ashbourne Market.

4. In June 2006 the Board of Commissioners adopted [Ordinance 2110-06](#) (pdf), which incorporates the 2006 International Property Maintenance Code with a few modifications into the Township's Municipal Code. The ordinance contains laws and fines concerning property maintenance. Do you think this ordinance should be enforced? If so, how?

Mike explained that the Township was writing the actual Maintenance Code, or at least major parts of it, into the Township codes so that citizens would not have to pay the \$35 for a copy. Both candidates agreed that Melrose Park neighbors should send to the Ward 5 Commissioner written descriptions of properties in ill-repair or with waste stored in public view. Mike explained that such complaints are handled anonymously and effectively. Several participants in the meeting expressed their complaints of the conditions of neighboring properties.

5. The businesses on and near Cheltenham Avenue contribute significant litter in our neighborhood. Do you have any suggestions for ways to reduce this problem? Also, can the improvements to our commercial district, which is on Cheltenham Avenue between and Coventry, could be bumped up from the last of the five districts to be attended to?

Tom, who lived in northeast Philadelphia before moving to the corner of Valley and Shapeless, explained that Philadelphia has the Mayor's Action Committee which acts on such problems. Tom also described how development on Cheltenham Avenue would have to involve the state, Philadelphia and Cheltenham Township, which makes such development cumbersome. Mike described the cooperation with Philadelphia with the section of Cheltenham Avenue near Penrose. One neighbor suggested a clean up of the block between Oak Lane Road and Oak Avenue, perhaps on or near Earth Day.

After the meeting, Tom emailed me, "The MPNA should organize a trash pick-up day to clean the sidewalks/gutters in front of the business and properties in question. Before and after photos should be taken as well. Give each business/property owner in the area a letter stating that the condition of their property is in violation of the Township's Property Maintenance Code (stated code section(s)) and that the MPNA's courtesy clean-up is an example of the level of cleanliness required by the Township codes and that they are responsible to maintain this level of cleanliness. The letter should also state that the MPNA will periodically monitor the area in the future and notify the Township of any violations for which they will be subject to fines. I obviously will make myself available for the clean-up effort."

6. Would you explore the possibility installing more stop signs or traffic controls on various little-used, maddening, intersections? (for example, Valley & Mountain. and Valley and Coventry.)

Mike said that Coventry and Valley was considered a serious problem and that the four-way stop sign should be installed within a month or so. Montgomery and Union was also brought up, and Mike said that was a problem with a property owner keeping bushes cut back. He said he would once again approach the owner to get the visibility improved at that intersection. Both candidates pointed out that speed bumps are not practical because of liability issues from possible resulting accidents, snow plows hitting them and emergency vehicles having to bump over them.

7. The commissioners are presently in the process of drafting a substantial amendment to the zoning code to facilitate the development of large (80+ unit apartment buildings) subsidized housing for seniors. This amendment is designed to bypass the current zoning ordinances and effectively shut out the community voice on the design and size of these projects. Do you support such development projects?

Mike's answers to this caused quite a stir. Initially, he said the question was not relevant, but the author of the question, Chris Kytzidis of 7708 Chapel Road, was participating in the discussion. The issue involves "text amendments," which allow developers to skirt the zoning regulations. Chris explained that he and his

neighbors, had studied this issue for over a year, talked to numerous land use attorneys and other real estate experts, and they all consistently called a text amendment a bypass of the zoning rules (and the public input process).

In an email to me the day after the MPNA meeting, Chris wrote that Mike “stated correctly that if the code is rewritten (as being considered now) a developer will be granted the ‘use,’ i.e. multi-housing structures like apartment buildings in a residentially-zoned neighborhood, if he meets certain criteria set forth in the code (new code being considered now). After the ‘use’ is granted the developer will have to apply for building permits and go through the land use development committee (and other committees), where public comment is permitted (this is also true). In this process the discussion will include the size of the building, the materials etc.

“However, because the ‘use’ will already have been granted, the public/community will have no leverage. For example, the community can object to the height, but the developer has no incentive to reduce the size because he has already received the ‘use’ permit. I was pleased to hear that the township is no longer moving towards a text amendment (which affectively is spot zoning, as described by Commissioner Swavola - he said that the amendment was meant for one or two properties). I (and all my neighbors) are waiting to see the new draft amendment which may codify (permit by right) the construction of large structures right in our neighborhood.”

8. Three years ago Crest Avenue residents were required to apply for permit parking. The situation has lead to animosity between residents on the 7200 block of Oak Street and Crest Ave. Crest rarely has a shortage of parking spaces. Few neighbors have applied for these permits. The Township sent out a questionnaire to residents about this situation, and we were supposed to be notified about the results over a year ago. Has there been a feasibility study about the need for permits? In questioning neighbor s, few have the permits, yet neighbors can call the police department when they choose to site a driver. Why is this requirement necessary?

Mike explained that the parking permits were originally designed to keep car repair shops from parking on Crest Avenue. Such parked cars were usually insured, inspected and registered, making their parking legal. Since many spaces were being taken this way, the permits were established, and the problem disappeared. Mike further explained that few people had objected to the permits in response to the poll, and that

9. Can we get attractive signs to welcome visitors to Melrose or Elkins Park?

Tom clearly asked how much MPNA would be willing to pay for such attractive signs, citing the MPNA sign in our plantings at the Melrose Park SEPTA station as an example of a past-purchased, attractive sign. Mike said he would look into getting some signs.

10. Even though it is not in our neighborhood, one neighbor brought up the mega-church being proposed near the Elkins Park Post Office on Ashbourne Road.

Mike described how the church pulled a kind of bait and switch, promising a much more modest facility and payments of property taxes in return for no opposition from the Township. He said that deal was no longer valid.

If any participants in Monday night’s meeting have comments or suggestions about my summary, please contact me at andrewrudin@earthlink.net

As a reminder, the next election will be held on Tuesday, November 6, 2007. Melrose Park consists of Precincts 2 and 3 of Ward 5 in Cheltenham Township. Our voting place is in the temporary classrooms at Elkins Park School.

More Mega Church information

The following was sent to us by email. The MPNA Board has not taken a position on this because it is not within Melrose Park boundaries. It may, however, be of some interest to Melrose Park neighbors.

“There will be a ‘Rally for Public Safety’ on Saturday, November 3, 10:30 a.m. at the site of the proposed mega-church on Ashbourne Road next to the Elkins Park Post Office. The issue at hand is how a Mega-Church will effect the normal flow of traffic in the township. Ashbourne Road is a narrow winding road without shoulders from Old York Road to Washington Lane . Currently, just 15 cars going to the post office can cause a mini-traffic jam at the Penrose Avenue intersection. Imagine the effect of 500 cars arriving and departing from a mega-church next door. The result will be chaos. Total gridlock will overflow to block Washington Lane , Old York Road , Penrose Avenue , and Spring Avenue.

- Neighborhood residents will be trapped in their driveways
- Senior Citizens living at Park View will have no way out
- Post Office patrons will be delayed
- School board meetings will be affected
- Swim Club members will have to wait
- Public safety will be at great risk.
- Ambulances will be delayed
- Fire fighters will have difficulty getting their equipment to an emergency
- Police will be hindered

Demonstrate the future. Show the township what to expect every Sunday for 2 services, Saturdays for weddings, and other days for special events. Drive by the church's Ashbourne Road property next to the Elkins Park Post Office at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, November 3, 2007. Drive all your cars. Ask all your friends to participate. Expect traffic delays! Be careful! Drive safely! To have an idea of the number of participants, please send an email indicating you will be joining the rally to: mega.church@yahoo.com”

The 2008 Entertainment Book is here

Support the Friends of the Elkins Park Free Library! Buy your 2008 Entertainment savings book!

Everybody knows the ENTERTAINMENT BOOK - full of 50% and 2-for-1 discounts on restaurants, movies, sporting events and more. Books are super easy to use - people enjoy saving money while supporting a good cause! Fundraiser supporters can purchase the Entertainment book at \$5 less than regular retail price.

- Cost -- \$25 (Checks payable to Friends of EP Free Library)
- Can be used immediately
- Available at the circulation desk in the library
- Dine...Shop...Travel....SAVE up to 50%
- Quickly pays for itself with hundreds of exclusive offers.
- Available for cities all over the USA – send them as gifts
- Get One Free when you sell 5 Entertainment books online
 - Our group’s number is 876487
 - Log on to the Seller’s Section at fundraising.entertainment.com

For questions or orders, contact Norma (215-635-1771, pm) or by email at mrotman2@comcast

Donations Needed for Used Book Sales at the EP Library

Pickup Available – Just call 215-635-5000.

WANTED - CD's Video Tapes, Audio Tapes, Vintage Magazines, Comic Books, Software, LP Phonograph Records & ALL KINDS OF BOOKS.

NOT WANTED - Reader's Digest Condensed Books, Old Textbooks & Law Books, Scratched Phonograph Records, Older Encyclopedias, Underlined or Highlighted Books, Partial Sets of Reference Books, Moldy, Water-damaged Books.

All donations of books, videos & CDs are tax-deductible. The dates for the coming book sales are:

October 26-28, 2007

November 30 - December 2, 2007

January 18-20, 2008

February 22-24, 2008

March 28-30, 2008
April 25-27, 2008
May 30-31, 2008
June 13-26, 2008 (liquidation sales)

This Newsletter

If you have any suggestions for items for this newsletter, feel free to email them to me at andrewrudin@earthlink.net

MPNA memberships

Membership in MPNA helps pay for plantings, signage, and many other things. Annual dues are \$10 per individual, \$20 per household. Send your contribution to MPNA Board member Jim Muldoon, 106 Parkview Road, Cheltenham, PA 19012. The membership cycle is the calendar year.

MPNA Board

Members of the MPNA Board are Andrew Rudin, Phil Kates, Gene Silver, Michael Shectman, Jim Muldoon and Albert Fried-Cassorla. If you are interested in helping out with MPNA, please email me at andrewrudin@earthlink.net. This newsletter is available or will be soon, maybe with photos, on our website – www.melroseparkneighbors.org

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