

Buckingham Lake Neighborhood Association (BLNA)
Meeting Minutes
March 9, 2017

The meeting was held at the Albany Elks Lodge #49, 25 South Allen Street, Albany, New York on March 9, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was called to order by Dan Sleasman, President of the Buckingham Lake Neighborhood Association (BLNA), at 7:06 p.m.

D. Sleasman welcomed those in attendance and began the meeting with a request that everyone present please consider becoming a member of the BLNA.

Scott Jarzombek gave a Treasurer's report for 2016, stating that \$635 was made last year and \$330.25 was spent. Mr. Jarzombek explained that most of the money came from membership, and that the remaining funds will be spent on lawn signs to promote the BLNA meetings. Mr. Jarzombek also asked people to consider membership, and closed by stating that a copy of last year's finances are available for anyone who would like it. D. Sleasman explained that the money that was spent from last year was spent on costs incurred from the BLNA website, which is the agreed upon best use of resources for communication.

Old Business

1. Traffic issues - representatives from the police department spoke about the following: A. Tampa Avenue one-way is coming, but there is no confirmed date yet. B. Enforcement in the neighborhood has increased, with just under 50 tickets being issued on or near Buckingham Drive in a two-week period. C. Google Maps needs to be updated. This is an issue because the GPS information is outdated and is leading people down Friebel and soon Tampa in the wrong direction.
2. The following questions/statements from the floor were taken:
 1. New Scotland Avenue between Manning and Buckingham is a huge problem because people are using it as two lanes instead of one. D. Sleasman reminded those in attendance that we have proposed putting in a bike lane (if residents agree that there is no need for parking on New Scotland Avenue) and then it would be obvious that it's a one-lane road.
 2. South Manning between New Scotland Avenue and Western Avenue is a "speedway." People go way too fast and it is very dangerous. There was a request from the floor for more enforcement there. D. Sleasman stated that Patricia Fahey told us it might be possible to lower the speed limit to 25 miles per hour. Implementing this could be a "Pandora's Box" of issues, but it is a fact that traffic is moving too fast and this might be an answer.

3. Wasn't there a traffic study that was going to be done? D. Sleasman said yes, that Mayor Sheehan has said there is a commitment to this, but we don't know the parameters or timing of this. We will ask her at our next meeting.
4. An objection to the recent change to one-way streets (Friebel and Tampa) was raised from the floor. The objection made was that the change has put too much stress on residents making them go a longer way around to get to Buckingham, Milner, Davis Avenues and access to the Buckingham Pond Area.

D. Sleasman again asked those in attendance to sign up and become members of the BLNA if they have not already done so, stating that we need members and volunteers.

Presentations

I. Darius Shahinfar, Albany City Treasurer

Mr. Shahinfar handed out an overview of the 2017 proposed budget, stating that his office is responsible for taxes, billing and City of Albany funds.

Mr. Shahinfar reported that the City of Albany went to collections of unpaid traffic tickets last year to help get the City in a better financial situation. Mr. Shahinfar also stated that they have new tax billing software which has helped tremendously with tax bills.

Mr. Shahinfar reported that 63% of the property in the City of Albany is tax exempt. Mr. Shahinfar reported that Mayor Sheehan has been working with the State to try to get badly needed funds and he had no update on that as of the date of the meeting.

D. Sleasman stated that the residential tax base pays too much and it is unsustainable.

The following question from the floor was raised: How can we help you make the case for help? Mr. Shahinfar stated that if people visit the website www.fairshare4albany.org and help write letters and advocate, that would help. Political action is also important, i.e., write letters to your local representatives and attend lobby day events.

Mr. Shahinfar also handed out an information sheet detailing industrial projects in the city, stating that the City is currently doing a lot of apartment complexes and business buildings.

Questions from the floor:

1. Will we re-evaluate some of the non-profits that are actually making a profit? (Answer: yes, we do evaluate them)
2. How much has the City taken in for PILOTS (payment in lieu of taxes)? (Answer: \$3.6 million)

II. Zombie Homes (Speakers: Tom Zarenko, Adam McGee and Mike McLaughlin)

D. Sleasman briefly explained the process that “zombie” properties in Albany County go through, and then stated that we have two “zombie” properties in the BLNA area, 207 Euclid and 168 Milner. Mr. Sleasman stated that these properties are a huge problem for the neighborhood and the City and asked why this is allowed to happen, given that we have a process that should be working.

The speakers jointly responded to Mr. Sleasman’s statements, stating that most of the “zombie” properties in Albany County are in the downtown area. They stated that the County does not have any legal authority to “take over” properties before they become a problem, which is to protect citizens and give them every opportunity to pay their taxes. The speakers stated that they are working to “zero in” on at-risk properties in a way that doesn’t include unintended consequences to see if this will make a difference.

D. Sleasman asked, “What can the City do to enforce some of the issues these properties create?”

The speakers stated that the following can be done: 1. Code enforcement 2. Citations 3. Go to court to impose fines and 4. Cut off utilities.

D. Sleasman asked, “Can the owners be sued?”

The speakers stated that yes, but someone has to bring the lawsuit against the owners.

The speakers also discussed the Land Bank as a possible solution, explaining that when a property falls into tax delinquency, those properties are foreclosed and made available to the Land Bank. The Land Bank tries to get the properties back “online” by assessing and improving them and getting them back on the market.

Questions/statements from the floor:

1. I have tried to call the Land Bank numerous times and have not been able to get anyone to talk to me or return my call. The speakers responded by giving the person a business card and stating that they have a small staff and they need to get better at getting back to callers, but that they have recently hired a realtor and will work to get better at communication.
2. We need help for the properties that are empty in our neighborhood now. Does anyone go out to the properties to check them out? Who is responsible for their maintenance? The speakers answered that nothing can be done until the properties are taken away from the owners – these are the confines of the law. The only way to force someone to deal with their vacant/delinquent property is to take them to court.
3. Where does the money go? The speakers responded that the revenue they make goes to their operating costs because they are a non-profit.

The meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Margie A. Sheehan, Secretary of the BLNA, 2016 term.