

LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS™ OAK PARK / RIVER FOREST



Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees February 17, 2009

Cathy Sweitzer, Observer

The meeting began shortly after 7:30 p.m. with all members of the Board, as well as the Village Clerk, Manager and Attorney present.

Police Chief Rick Tanksley gave a brief overview of the state of crime in the village. He began with the good news: the last four calendar years have seen the lowest crime rate in Oak Park in almost half a century. 2008 recorded the 4th lowest crime rate in 47 years. But Chief Tanksley acknowledged that anyone who was a victim of a crime is not likely to be comforted by those statistics. The bad news is that 2008 witnessed an increase in crime (4%) over the previous year. Eighty-five percent of serious crimes last year involved burglary or theft. Robberies increased from 114 in 2007 to 167 in 2008. The Chief offered a number of suggestions and observations, among them hopes for the restoration of the Whistle Stop program; plans for the installation of surveillance cameras at the Blue and Green Line el stops; and the importance of residents being “eyes and ears” on the street. He urged villagers to contact the police should they see anything suspicious, noting that calls may be anonymous. A more complete report is in the works.

The Board passed an increase in the fee for inspection of rental units from \$5-\$20. It was previously reported that most of this increase would cover the expense of doing the inspections, but any overrun would go toward housing related projects. Unfortunately, it has since been determined that the money needed to cover expenses (\$24/unit) actually exceeds the amount of the increase.

The Board approved the sale of bread at the Farmer’s Market.

Several residents expressed concerns and opinions about a number of local issues. Among these were the observation that in all likelihood more than one person knew of the over-budget PeopleSoft consultant payments, given the social nature of the workplace; a plea for leadership and accountability from the Board and a warning against relying on the advice and opinion of so-called “experts;” a question as to why the Village is calling so many special meetings; another question as to why new construction has been given permission to raise the height of buildings from 80 to 125 feet; and finally a question as to why an extension has been given to the developers of 1113 Lake Street.

A representative from Clark Street Development, currently the “preferred developer,” for the vacated site at Lake and Forest, affirmed the group’s intention of proposing a plan for the corner property. Avalon Bay, Clark Street’s residential-side partner, has recently gone out of business. Consequently, Clark Street is seeking a new alliance. The Clark Street representative expressed a “passion for downtown Oak Park,” and his hopes for a quick resolution to the search.

Board members addressed a number of other issues. Trustee Colleen Lueck and Tammy Grossman of the Housing Program are proposing a day-long workshop on housing in Oak Park to address the impact of the national crisis locally. Trustee Jan Pate announced the Rain Barrel project, noting the League's sponsorship and urging local participation on Earth Day. Reacting to a letter from the Cook County Commissioner Roberto Maldonado read to the Board by villager Daniel Fore, prompted Trustee Ray Johnson to suggest that President David Pope contact Commissioner Maldonado regarding any misunderstanding he and his office may harbor regarding the eviction of the tenants at 1113 Lake Street (Los Calzadores Restaurant). President Pope reported that he would be attending a meeting of mayors on Friday, February 20, in Washington, D.C. with President Barack Obama. Pope promises to advocate for Oak Park's rightful share of recovery funds and capital bill funds on the state level.

Observer's Opinion: The longest part of this meeting of the Board was spent on refining the terms, language and organization of an amendment to the Planned Development Sections of the Zoning Ordinance. Although the issues at stake are important -- LEED certification, mandatory vs. voluntary meetings of developers and neighbors, encouragement of public art -- and have apparently been the subject of months (if not years) of study, the discussion was difficult for this observer to appreciate in its level of detail. It raises the question of whether the Village Board Meeting is the right setting in which to debate the fine points of such an ordinance. Although transparency and public participation remain critical to the process of policy-making, might everyone have been better served if some of this conversation had taken place in prior working sessions?

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

(online minutes: www.oak-park.us/about_our_village/board_minutes_2008.htm)