

LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS™ OAK PARK / RIVER FOREST



Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees June 1, 2009

Cathy Sweitzer, Observer

The meeting began at 7:35 p.m. All members of the Board attended, including the newest trustee Glen Brewer and the new Village Clerk, Teresa Powell. Village Manager Tom Barwin and Village Attorney Ray Heise were also present.

President David Pope proclaimed June “Pride and Passion” Baseball History month, in recognition of the role of African Americans in the history of the sport. The Oak Park Public Library is hosting a traveling exhibit on this theme until July 3. A collection of photographs from Stephen Green, the official photographer of the Cubs, and a selection of films and speakers on the subject are also featured.

Forty-six junior high school students were honored for their role in fostering diversity and sensitivity among their peers. They represented Percy Julian, Gwendolyn Brooks, St. Edmunds, St. Giles and Ascension schools. President Pope noted that they served as an example of how we should all act. The meeting adjourned for about a quarter of an hour to allow trustees and the public to attend a reception honoring the students.

When the meeting resumed, a citizen voiced concern that raising the parking meters to \$0.50/hour at the commuter lot at Forest and North Blvd. would discourage use of the facility. The same citizen, a member of the fire pension board, also raised a number of issues related to the hiring and pension of firefighters. These issues included a warning that hiring a chief from outside the system could mean higher pension costs, a call for discussion of actuarial figures at play in determining a tax levy, a request for a discussion of possible investment plans for pension funds, and a warning that when the Village encourages early retirement, it assumes more of the pension burden.

Village Manager Barwin reported that Oak Park would be part of Com Ed’s new “Smart Meter” program, an effort to pinpoint problems on the power grid and correct them before they become widespread. In response to the Board’s decision last month to light the high school stadium, Manager Barwin noted that a citizens’ stadium advisory committee is being formed. Eight to ten “neighbors” from all sides of the stadium will convene for a first meeting on June 9 at the high school.

The Board had hoped the president would assign members to newly formed ad hoc committees including Finance, Personnel, Economic Development, Reinventing Local Government, and Intergovernmental Affairs/Legislative. President Pope was aware of responses from only three Board members and recommended that assignments be postponed until the protocol meeting next week. Issues noted for further discussion included: clarification of the titles, purpose and scope of committees, the reporting process, and the equitable sharing of the additional time burden on trustees.

All items on the consent agenda were approved without comment, except for one. A citizen representing the Madison Street Coalition and Neighborhood groups enumerated several traffic and landscaping options that his groups hoped would insure that the new Walgreens at 801-811 Madison would be a safe and good neighbor. President Pope assured him that all his considerations had been taken into account.

Trustee Colette Lueck expressed a hope that two flats would be included in the revised ordinance requirements recently passed for three flats. She noted that the same safety issues exist for two-flats, and that they should be inspected with the same regularity.

President Pope urged citizens to shop locally, especially to support local grocers. The importance of this was borne home to him during a recent trip to France where merchants expressed concern about the shopping habits of Brits who settle there and persist in driving long distances to supermarkets instead of frequenting local shops.

Trustee Brewer congratulated the Math Academy on its continuing role of encouraging high achievement in sports, math and science and its success in increasing the number of AP and honor students among African Americans at OPRF.

Trustee Jan Pate raised a concern about the safety hazard posed by bike riders on sidewalks. She herself had recently experienced two "near misses" in the Lake and Oak Park Avenue area. She encouraged ticketing of sidewalk cyclists. Attorney Heise pointed out that police are no longer enforcing the sidewalk bike-riding ban. Neither he nor Manager Barwin could say whether it was still on the books as a law.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m. to allow members to meet in Executive Session.

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