

Super Neighborhood Alliance
Minutes from Meeting held October 8, 2018



Guests

Marvette Hunter, Mayor's Chief of Staff
Kimberly Hatter, Mayor's Office
Teresa Geisheker, Planning & Dev. Dept.
Christa Stoneham, Planning & Dev. Dept.
Eric Dargan, Public Works Dept.
Alyce Coffey, Solid Waste Mgmt. Dept.
Rene Ruiz, Department of Neighborhoods
Ellary Makuch, Housing & Com. Development
Rodney West, HFD
Larry Satterwhite, HPD
Margaret Dunlap, METRO
DeAnna Roberts, Harris Co. Sheriff's Office
Jacqueline Smith, FEMA
Gladys House-El, Freedman's Town
Charonda Johnson, Freedman's Town
Marty Lancton, HFF Union
Raj Solhotra
Sharon Hamilton

Super Neighborhood Representatives

Ricky Miller, SNC 05

Mark Klein, SNC 12
Pedro Ayarzagotia, SNC 15
Judson Bryant, SNC 18
Michael Huffmaster, SNA Chairman, SNC 18
Jane West, SNA Secretary, SNC 22
Mike Van Dusen, SNC 22
Kay Warhol, SNC 24
Doug Smith, SNC 25
Sandra Rodriguez, SNC 27
Terry Cominsky, SNC 31
Jeff Peters, SNC 38
Linda Scurlock, SNC 39/40
Bessie Mansfield, SNC 39/40
Juan Sorto, SNC 49/50
Joetta Stevenson, SNC 55
Cynthia Aceves-Lewis, SNC 62
Michael Lewis, SNC 62
Jessica Hulsey, SNC 63
Amy Dinn, SNC 64/88
Kathleen O'Reilly, SNC 66
Tomaro Bell, SNC 83
Scott Cubbler, SNC 84

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.

I. Introductions and Approval of Minutes for August 13, 2018 (September meeting was cancelled due to threat of flooding): Tomaro Bell moved and Mike Van Dusen seconded approval of August 13, 2018, meeting minutes; **motion carried.**

II. Announcements:

A. Recovery Houston: No update. Contact Kimberly.Hatter@houstontx.gov for information, and follow updates at www.houstonrecovers.org.

B. I-45 Coalition: No update.

C. Complete Communities: No update. See www.houstontx.gov/planning for news and updates.

D. Calendar: Chairman Huffmaster shared a list of meetings that SNA representatives have attended. He reported that the Housing Working Group has formed a steering committee to advise the COH's Housing and Community Development Department on housing policy that will include SNA Vice-Chairman Juan Sorto. He said that the following two items from the September meeting agenda will be addressed next month: (1) the Hurricane Harvey Registry being managed by Rice University; and (2) the "market parking" initiative for Mid-Town and EADO. A presentation on the parking initiative will be distributed via email.

III. Proposition A - ReBuild Houston ReBallot:

Eric Dargan, Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer, COH Public Works Department

Mr. Dargan discussed Proposition A on the November ballot, i.e., a “re-do” for Rebuild Houston, the city’s pay-go funding program for street and drainage infrastructure. The “re-do” election was mandated by a lawsuit that challenged the ReBuild Houston referendum held in 2010. The original initiative was intended to create a fund to be used (1) to pay off old debt first, and (2) to make more funding available for new projects by saving the cost of debt service. New projects were to be selected based on a prioritization of needs. Prior to Rebuild Houston, the COH allowed neighborhoods to provide input and now new Capital Improvement Projects (“CIP”) projects are prioritized based on data using a worst - first framework. But Rebuild Houston is not just for new projects, it is also for maintaining existing infrastructure. Rebuild Houston consists of the following four funding sources (the first two of which were in place before the 2010 vote): (1) ad valorem or property taxes; (2) third party funds; (3) a “drainage fee,” i.e., a drainage utility charge added to city water bills based on a property’s amount of impervious cover; and (4) a developer impact fee charged for tying into the existing infrastructure. Mr. Dargan said that since 2010 the city has paid off approximately \$1.1B in debt, and that approximately \$1.3B of outstanding debt still needs to be paid off. Many question why more money has not been spent on projects, the answer is that funds are being used to pay down existing debt. Following voter approval of Rebuild Houston, the city stopped incurring new debt for street and drainage projects and is, instead, paying for those projects as they are undertaken.

What does rebuild fund? Storm ditches, basic repair of existing infrastructure; rehabilitation, i.e., projects that are larger than ordinary maintenance but smaller than a complete rebuild; and rebuilding of existing infrastructure and new construction. Approximately \$818M has been spent on new projects. Mr. Dargan displayed a map showing completed projects, the location of projects being considered for future funding, and areas where flooding has occurred. He emphasized that data drives the selection of future projects.

Proposition A, if passed, will create and maintain the Rebuild Houston “lock box,” i.e., the requirement that Rebuild Houston funds be used for street and drainage projects. The vote will not change the drainage fee. The city will continue to collect the drainage fee regardless of whether Proposition A succeeds or fails. At issue is whether there will be a dedicated funding source for street and drainage projects. Before Rebuild Houston, the Public Works Department had to compete with other departments for funding for street and drainage projects. Rebuild Houston eliminated the need for Public Works to compete with other departments because it established a dedicated revenue stream for streets and drainage. The ballot language identifies the four funding sources. Mr. Dargan ended by stating that the power point presentation he shared is available on the Public Works website.

Questions: Gladys House observed that the colored areas on the map skip over Freedman’s Town and that streets there have not been paved for 50 years. She asked what black communities could expect from the vote on Proposition A? Mr. Dargan responded that future projects will be selected from data, i.e., 311 calls, flooding, and a street rating system pursuant to which Freedman’s Town was evaluated two years ago.

Doug Smith asked Mr. Dargan to say more about how Rebuild Houston funds have been spent, and Scott Cubbler asked if they have been used to pay city employees. Mr. Dargan responded that before Rebuild Houston, the city employed crews who maintained storm ditches and were paid with third party funding; he said that practice still exists. At issue is how the city is using funds collected via the drainage fee.

Terry Cominski asked if she correctly understood him to say that the vote would not do anything to change the drainage fee, and Mr. Dargan agreed that was correct; the vote will have no impact on the drainage fee.

Amy Dinn observed that the drainage fee won’t go away, but if Proposition A fails, the city will be able to spend the funds collected on things other than street and drainage projects.

Albert Coleman and Jessica Hulsey both observed that streets and drainage in their areas haven’t been touched in years even though the need is great and the condition of the streets and drainage systems is poor. They have needs that are not being addressed. Mr. Dargan responded that as debt is paid down, the number of projects will increase.

Juan Sorto asked if the map he showed reflected flooding from Hurricane Harvey, to which Mr. Dargan responded, “no.”

Linda Scurlock asked for more information about how drainage fee funds are being used, and observed that in her area of town drainage fees and developer impact fees are being used to fund new projects. Mr. Dargan agreed.

Jane West ask Mr. Dargan to comment on the cost-benefit analysis that the COH uses to decide which projects to fund, and to explain how that analysis all but insures that streets in the areas about which people were asking are unlikely to receive Rebuild Houston funds. Mr. Dargan explained that the COH uses a cost-benefit analysis to select projects to fund to insure that the funds are spent on projects that will benefit large numbers of people/trips, and that while streets in neighborhoods and industrial areas may be in poor condition, they are not likely to receive Rebuild Houston funds because the number of vehicles using them on a regular basis is likely to be relatively low.

Chairman Huffmaster thanked Mr. Dargan for his presentation and commented that the SNA would like to explore the COH's use of a cost-benefit analysis in greater depth at the next quarterly meeting between representatives the Public Work Department and the SNA.

IV-V. Proposition B - HFD Pay Parity:

A. Marvette Hunter, Mayor's Chief of Staff; Rodney West, HFD Executive Assistant Fire Chief; Larry Satterwhite, HPD Assistant Chief for Homeland Security

Ms. Hunter opened the presentation by stating that Mayor Turner was not in attendance because he was at a town hall meeting in District F which was the eighth of eleven such meetings that he is holding in each council district in an effort to let citizens know how this issue will impact the city. She said that Proposition B is on the ballot as a result of the petition circulated and submitted by the firefighters' union seeking parity of compensation between the firefighters and police officers. She said that the initiative involves base and incentive pay, but not retirement, education and training. She said while the media advertisements and the discussions could lead one to believe that the mayor is against the firefighters, that's not true. The administration values firefighters and believes that they deserve a raise. At issue is what the city can afford to pay. Passage of Proposition B will be financially devastating to the COH. She said that she's not a politician, just an administrator. But the financial implications will require laying off almost 1,000 employees all of whom need their jobs.

Ms. Hunter said that in 2014 the firefighters received a 3% raise, and that in 2015 they received a one time uniform allowance but they rejected a 4.4% raise, and this year they rejected 9.5% pay raise. She acknowledged that the firefighters' rejection of pay raises has caused them to fall behind in compensation.

The petition underlying Proposition B was validated in May. If Proposition B is approved by voters, the firefighters will be entitled to an immediate raise of at least 25%. The city has recently negotiated a 9.5% raise for police officers over three years. Pay parity would require a similar raise for firefighters that would mean they would receive about a 29% raise this year alone. If possible, it would be done. Mayor Turner has offered firefighters a 9.5% raise consistent with that offered to police and municipal workers, but the firefighters have rejected that offer.

Executive Assistant Fire Chief Rodney West opened his remarks by stating that firefighting is a calling, not a job. Firefighters run in when others run out. HFD has over 4,000 classified employees. This year's operating budget is approximately \$503M and it's been about the same for years despite rising costs. The lion's share of HFD's annual budget is personnel costs with only about \$21M per year available for equipment for the entire department. If Proposition B passes, measures will have to be taken to absorb the financial blow. Cost saving measures being considered include having civilians conduct fire inspections, dispatch, and EMS services, moves that would eliminate approximately 840 classified jobs, but would require more civilian employees because civilians cannot work shifts as long as those worked by firefighters.

Assistant HPD Chief Larry Satterwhite thanked attendees for working with their homeowners associations and with HPD. He said that Chief Acevedo was in Florida at a national conference. He said that he was not here to suggest how to vote, just to describe the potential impacts. HPD is required to police approximately 640 sq. miles with a population 2.3-2.5M people with only 5,216 police officers. He said that the City of Chicago has a similar population of ca. 2.7M, but less than half the area, and a police force of ca. 13,000 officers. He said that HPD is stretched as thin as possible. A study completed in 2014 concluded that HPD needed 1,500 more officers. What do these numbers mean to residents? They mean the COH has fewer and fewer officers to respond to calls for service,

including Code 1 calls for life threatening situations in progress. Last year HPD ran 1.1 million calls and they're on pace to do so again this year. Most are run by one officer because HPD does not have enough officers to have more than one per car. HPD's job is to serve the city and to take care of each other. To maximize scarce resources HPD has implemented "patrol leveling" based on call volume. If the city has to pay firefighters an additional \$100M per year, layoffs will be required. One means to reduce costs being discussed is to reduce the number of training classes for new officers. Each class represents 3.43% of HPD's annual budget or approximately \$30M. Each class is also 280 cadets no longer in the academy and that many new officers not on the street.. Such a loss would be catastrophic.

Questions: Pedro Ayarzagoitia asked if the HFD and HPD speakers live in the city. Executive Assistant Fire Chief West does not; Assistant HPD Chief Satterwhite does. Mr. Ayarzagoitia said that he's heard lots of people say that the city needs more police officers but he's not heard anyone say the city needs more firefighters.

Jim Honey commented that there's nothing common about firefighter and police officer jobs and that nationwide there's about a \$10k pay gap. Assistant Chief West responded that firefighter pay needs to be competitive, and that no one wants to need a firefighter and not have one available.

B. Houston Firefighters Union: Marty Lancton, President

Mr. Lancton said he wanted to explain what Proposition B is and to provide some background. He said that he is a 19-year firefighter and not a politician, and that firefighters are only asking to be treated fairly and equally. They've gone to collective bargaining four times and spent their own funds on experts in an effort to reach a solution, but since 2011 they've received only a 3% pay raise. He said that the city has 1,200 fewer firefighters than police officers, but their call volume continues to rise. Firefighters are committed to a long term solution, and he wanted to dispel myths. For example he said (1) passage of Proposition B will not cost the city \$98M per year as the mayor says. There are no agreed upon numbers for the cost of the proposition, the COH initially estimated the total cost of Proposition B would be \$60M, but the city's estimate continues to rise. (2) Houston firefighters' pay is about 30% behind pay for firefighters in other comparable other cities. (3) Firefighters have never been offered a 9.5% raise; the offer on the table from the city is a 2% raise. (4) Firefighters have proposed that the city provide them a 1% raise for two years together with return of lost pension benefits, but the administration has refused. (5) HPD's budget far exceeds HFD's budget. (6) Three independent reports all say that HFD is understaffed and under resourced. (7) Firefighters have tried to reach a resolution with the city but have not been able to do so because the city has refused to negotiate. (8) Firefighters' collective bargaining process is covered by state law and subject to the open meetings act. Firefighters have audio and video recordings of their meetings with the city. After collective bargaining failed, state law allowed the firefighters to ask for a neutral arbitrator which they did, but the COH refused. Had the administration agreed to a neutral arbitrator this issue would have been resolved in 2017. The only other way for the firefighters to have the issue resolved by a neutral third-party was for them to file a lawsuit to have a court decide the issue. That's what they have done. But in an effort to block that type of resolution the city, In November 2017, filed a motion in the lawsuit seeking to have the firefighters' collective bargaining rights declared unconstitutional. In response firefighters set a state record gathering signatures for the petition that put Proposition B on the ballot. But they had to go to court and get a judge to order the COH to verify the signatures on their petition, and put the proposition on the ballot. Firefighters are asking for fair and equal treatment, firefighters have supported Mayor Turner for his entire legislative career, and revenue generated by firefighters exceeds revenue generated by police activities, but the city is telling firefighters that providing them fair and equal treatment will bankrupt the city.

Questions: When asked about the pension bill passed last year, Mr. Lancton said that it caused benefit cuts valued at \$1.2B to firefighters, but that he couldn't answer questions about that as he is not a pension specialist. When asked where funds raised a few years ago pursuant to passage of Proposition H to lift the property tax revenue cap for public safety, Mr. Lancton said that HFD's budget has been flat since 2011.

Scott Cubbler said he agreed firefighters deserve a raise, but he did not understand the pay parity issue. He said that while New York City, Chicago, and other cities have pay parity, Houston had pay parity until 2001. Stating that he is a retired marine, Mr. Cubbler said that in the military there's special pay, but not pay parity, and since the job duties and responsibilities of firefighters and police officers are different, he asked Mr. Lancton to explain how parity should be equated. Mr. Lancton acknowledged that there are many different pay parity situations for different areas, but said that he did know how to answer the question.

Doug Smith asked why firefighters were seeking pay parity with HPD and not with other competing fire departments since HFD was losing firefighters to fire departments in other cities. Mr. Lancton said that his union had tried to do that, but that the city refused to negotiate, and nothing materialized from the effort.

Amy Dinn commented that at the District I town hall meeting, Mayor Turner said that a 9.5% pay raise had been offered to firefighters and that offer is still on the table. Ms. Dinn asked if the firefighters were considering that offer? Mr. Lancton said that the Local Government Code governs what they can do. He said that the 9.5% referenced by the mayor would be negated by deductions in other articles of their contract which contains 18 different articles on which there is no agreement; and that the firefighters cannot accept resolution on just one article.

Doug Smith shared the following table summarizing arguments being presented for and against Proposition B:

VOTE YES ON PROPOSITION B	VOTE NO ON PROPOSITION B
Until 2001 pay parity was in place for both departments and was cancelled when Lee Brown, former Police Chief, became Mayor. If it worked then, why not now?	Fire department rejected a 4% pay raise in 2014 and a 9% raise over 3 years in 2018. The City has been able to successfully negotiate salary increases with its two other unions. Is it reasonable for Fire to ask for a 25% raise, which is what passage of Prop B would cause?
Starting salaries for Houston firefighters are 18% below Dallas and 25% below San Antonio.	Parity should be based on comparisons to other fire departments, not the police since job responsibilities and educational requirements vary substantially between Police and Fire.
In the past 3 years, Fire has lost 375 employees who have resigned to take jobs with other departments. Cost to replace and train new employees is over \$30 million.	It is not good policy to ask citizens to approve salary increases, as Prop B does, since citizens do not have a competent understanding of the financial impact of such changes. The City does not dispute the fact that Fire employees deserve raises, but a charter change is not the way to implement it.
Fire has offered to phase in the increase over several years so the City claim of an immediate hit of \$80-100 million annually is not correct.	Passage of Prop B will cost the City an additional \$80-100 million annually and lead to severe cutbacks in ALL City Departments.
Identifying potential cost savings in current expenditures of City departments could reduce economic effect.	If Fire has a good case for citizens to vote YES, why are they not outside (since they have not been invited inside) of the Mayor's community meetings throughout the City, to present their case to the voters.

VI. Old Business: Annual Report, Survey: No update.

VII. New Business:

A. Nomination Committee

Chairman Huffmaster announced that elections need to be held for next year's Chairman and Vice-Chairman. He stated that this would be his last year as chairman as the bylaws only allow an individual to serve two one-year terms as chairman and this is his second year in the position. He announced that Kathleen O'Reilly had agreed to chair the nominating committee. Doug Smith and Tomaro Bell volunteered to serve on the committee. Mike Van Dusen moved and Pedro Ayarzagoitia seconded approval of the nominating committee consisting of Kathleen O'Reilly, chair; Doug Smith; and Tomaro Bell; **motion carried.** Chairman Huffmaster said that he would distribute Ms. O'Reilly's email address so that representatives could send nominations to her.

B. SN 51 - Chapter 42 / Minimum Lot Size Variance

Chairman Huffmaster reported that developers seeking to replat property known as White Oak Crossing in the Near Northside (SNC 51) have filed an application for a variance to an existing minimum lot size area and that the variance application is scheduled to be heard by the Planning Commission on Thursday, October 11th. Chairman Huffmaster stated that under Chapter 42 of the City Code minimum lot size areas are subject both to the variance process and to a process for rescinding the minimum lot size designation. He presented a slide with language that he said would be distributed before the next SNA meeting in an effort to develop a resolution favoring amendment of Chapter 42 to limit or eliminate the Planning Commission's ability to grant such variances.

Mike Van Dusen reviewed the process pursuant to which minimum lot size areas can be created, and explained that the process was adopted by the city as a means of preserving the character of single family residential neighborhoods. He said that the city has about 20,000 homes in such areas, and that the variance being sought for White Oak Crossing sought to conduct commercial activity in the protected area.

SNC 51 President Jeff Trevino reviewed the issue explaining that it took many months of community activism to put the minimum lot size protection in place, and that the variance process allowed all that work to be undone in less than two weeks. He detailed the work that he and his community have undertaken to combat the variance.

Jane West moved, and Tomaro Bell seconded that the SNA stand in support of SN51's opposition to the variance at the Planning Commission hearing; **motion carried.**

VIII. Committee Reports:

A. Standing Committees: No updates received.

B. Advisory Committees: Chairman Huffmaster shared the following four "take aways" from the annual meeting the Houston Coalition for Complete Streets:

1. Primary emphasis was attention to dangerous intersections and how to gauge impact of Complete Streets. Fatality data should show reductions, but is difficult to use since, thankfully, there are not enough fatalities to have statistically significant trends.
2. The key message from the COH team is: We need to foster more civic engagement with our City Council Members individually and collectively to insure that Complete Streets initiatives are worked.
3. The Planning and Public Works folks promised to continue work on the Complete Streets Metrics proposed last year and earlier this year.
4. Public Works say they are working to restore/improve functionality to the Rebuild Houston website.

IX. Open Comments (5 minutes)

Doug Smith shared a list of locations for city-approved alternative housing. He explained that the list reflected approved applications for conversions of use and facilities for group homes, care facilities, and half way houses. Most deed restrictions require single family homes. Mike Van Dusen said that some of the alternative housing on Doug's list could be inside minimum lot size areas.

Juan Sorto suggested that the SNA invite someone from the COH Housing and Community Development Department to discuss the city's efforts to develop and/or convert land into community land trusts held by the Land Assemblage and Redevelopment Authority (LARA).

X. Adjournment: 8:15 p.m.

Next meeting will be Monday, Nov. 12, 2018, speaker will be Michael J. Moore, Regional Vice-President, Texas Central Partners (high speed rail developer).