

WEST HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
MINUTES FOR THE MEETING OF OCTOBER 9, 2018

ATTENDANCE

Neighbors: Steve Bieri, Paul Bundy (Community Assembly Representative), Karen Carlberg (Chair), Andre Dove, Mike Gifford, Annie Iishi, Karen Jurasin (Communications Director), Ron Kelling, Judy Kelsch, Stephanie Klein, Kathy Lang, Jim Maguire, Linda Maguire, Susan Mensching, Julieanne Morse, Lyle Morse, Laurie O'Riley
City staff: Nathan Gwinn
Guests: Breean Beggs (City Council), Lunell Haught, Tim Ottmar (Police)

MINUTES

Minutes were approved for the meeting of August 14, 2018.

NEW WEST HILLS STAFF LIAISON

Nathan Gwinn was introduced as our new staff liaison with the Office of Neighborhood Services, replacing Katie Myers. Nathan has been an Assistant Planner with the City of Spokane for about five years. He had four announcements:

1. The city still has free trees to give away for planting in yards. See <https://my.spokanecity.org/news/stories/2018/09/17/free-trees-now-available-from-city-of-spokane-urban-forestry/>
2. Workshops are available for the Community Development Block Grants. (West Hills is not eligible.)
3. Community engagement grants will be available for next year. Abbey Martin is in charge.
4. Nathan always will be happy to answer our questions.

COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY REPORT, Paul Bundy, WH CA Representative

Paul was unable to attend the September CA meeting, but he reported the following from the October CA meeting: More members are needed for the CA budget committee; please volunteer. Each neighborhood is allotted \$7500 per year for cleanups (Mike said we will have spent almost all of our allotment this year). The CA voted against giving the CA plan commission liaison voting privileges (Kathy questioned this because, as CA liaison to the design review board, she does have voting privileges. The answer had to do with neighborhood bias.)

HANGMAN CREEK LATAH CORRIDOR UPDATE

Lunell reviewed the nature trail which is being proposed along Hangman Creek, from its mouth at the Spokane River to the intersection of Hatch and Highway 195. She has presented these ideas to us at previous meetings. West Hills is one of seven neighborhoods that border or are adjacent to the proposed trail. Considerable planning has been invested in the trail by a large number of experts, parks department officials, and trail enthusiasts. Now progress on the trail seems to have been stalled, and Lunell is going to the adjacent neighborhoods to ask for support for continued work on the trail by the parks department. Breean said that the process has been slowed down due to objections from some residents in the Latah/Hangman

neighborhood due to potential invasion of yards, homeless camps, gentrification, and loss of farming. These objections can be mitigated, and the city council is in favor of the trail. Lunell asked that our neighborhood send a letter to the parks department supporting continuation of work on the trail. Karen C and Karen J will compose a letter, then post the letter and a vote on Nextdoor. If there is a majority yes vote, then the letter will be forwarded to the parks department.

HOMELESS CAMPERS

Breean Beggs (City Council) and Tim Ottmar (our neighborhood police liaison) were invited to the meeting to lead a discussion on homeless camps in and near our neighborhood. Two of our neighbors, Laurie O'Riley, who works with the homeless as an employee of Catholic Charities, and Pastor Andre Dove, of Restoration Church, provided considerable input, expertise, and perspective. This is a summary of a very long discussion:

Homelessness has increased substantially nationwide in recent years, due in part to increased housing costs and the opioid crisis. Tim said that homeless camps used to take a fraction of his time; now they take the majority of his time. Breean said that Seattle has 10 times as many homeless people as Spokane. Breean also said that the majority of homeless people in Spokane are from the Spokane County area, not elsewhere.

Breean explained the process for evicting camps from public property. A 48 hr notice is required, then they act as quickly as they can. The city can send outreach workers. Tim said that the police are constantly cleaning up camps, but they just pop up elsewhere. The police are frustrated because laws and court decisions limit what they can do. Homeless people cannot be arrested for camping if there is no shelter space available for them. Currently Spokane has enough shelter space for women and families, but not for single men. Breean said that the city could create more shelter space but needs political will.

Breean said a new shelter is planned for next summer. In the meantime, we need additional beds. Everyone agrees that shelters should be spread out around the city, rather than concentrated in one area. (After the meeting we decided that we will compose a letter to the mayor, requesting more shelter space, post the letter and a vote on Nextdoor, and send the letter if there is a majority yes vote.)

The federal and state governments are not dealing with homelessness, so it is left to city and other local governments. Cities are swamped.

Frustrations and concerns expressed by neighbors: Sometimes it is hard to get anyone to do anything about a homeless camp, especially if it is on private property and the property owner is absent or unwilling to do anything. (Tim said that Code Enforcement can send letters to property owners, but action depends on the owners. Breean said that property owners can be held liable if there are damages.) Some neighbors have cleaned up camps and debris themselves, either on their own property or railroad property adjacent to their homes. Theft

appears to be a problem, especially bicycles (please record your bike's serial number; otherwise the police cannot trace the bike to you). Fire is a potential problem (police can arrest people for starting a fire). One neighbor has had rocks thrown at her by homeless people.

Laurie said that many homeless people don't know how to live or work normally. They need training on how to transition to a normal life. Breean said that unfortunately most services don't fulfill these needs; they could with enough funding.

Citizens can do these: Call 311 to report homeless camps or criminal behavior. Do not give cash to panhandlers because they will not spend it wisely; give money to charities instead (panhandling IS legal). Give homeless people a smile and some respect. Remember that any of us could end up in that position ourselves, and be thankful that we are not.

WHO IS RESTORATION CHURCH?

Pastor Andre Dove told us about Restoration Church, located at Sunset Boulevard and Government Way. It was established 5 yr ago and has a small but active and healthy congregation. They want to be part of our community, and part of the solution to problems in our neighborhood. They have a vision of buying properties adjacent to their church and using them for serving the needs of homeless people and others who need help. They want to be involved with rehabilitation and reintroduction to society. Julieann welcomed their efforts, and noted that when a halfway house was established at the kitty-corner intersection neighbors were concerned, but it has been a success.