

## **Garden District Civic Association Board Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, September 22, 2020

7:00 PM

Virtual Google Meeting

**In Attendance:** Claire Pittman, Ted Magee, Mike Schexnayder, Michael Helms, Joy Couvillion, Liz Spaulding, Willie and Mary Fontenot

### **Welcome by Claire**

**Drainage Update by Tom Douthat:** The Garden District has localized depressions, which create smaller basins, such as Cherokee St. that fill up and flood houses and swamp cars. They drain in about thirty minutes, but this raises the question of why our drainage system is so unequipped to handle Louisiana's predictably heavy rains, which will strengthen in the coming decades.

Another neighbor, Hank Harper has long tried to inform the city about problems in the area near his Cherokee St. home. Mr. Harper has collected maps and inspected the area visually. To do this he had to use his skills as an engineer, and go to the Parish archives to find maps of the area, because the city has not managed an inventory of its stormwater infrastructure. Nobody knew exactly where water from the Garden District Drained, so the problem has persisted.

In July, Tom and other neighbors had a meeting with the Mayor and Fred Raiford, Director of Drainage, who supplied the group with background and updates. They explained to the residents that recent developments under the Stormwater Masterplan have begun to collect data, but the parish still does not have a working model of the Garden District's drainage.

The meeting also clarified that there are several possible explanations for Garden District flooding. The first is that our water is supposed to drain into Dawson's Creek and into the rivers, but there is more water in rivers than there used to be. It is possible that our water can't get to Dawson's Creek because it is backed up from all the downstream urban runoff. This could be a function of stronger rain events, or that downstream development that has increased impervious surface, so water rushes faster into the streams, causing flooding. The meeting also led to another possibility, which is that culverts under the Broussard St. and Hundred Oaks St. bridges have been working as dams. There are plans for fixing the culverts on Broussard and Hundred Oaks, but these plans are contingent on the parish obtaining Federal matching funds.

Dawson Creek backups represent only one possible explanation. Another plausible explanation is that the pipes in the Garden District's drainage system aren't large enough. This should be an easy question to answer via a hydrological model, but the Parish lacks data on the drainage pipe networks (e.g., width and location). We know most areas north of Tulip drain to Government St, while areas south of Myrtle St. go via McGrath and other paths.

As part of the Stormwater Masterplan, our neighborhood drain pipes (separate from the sewer pipes) should be mapped and classified. If localized pipe capacity is an issue, there may be solutions diverting water more directly into the large pipes under Government St., or starting to plan for long needed upgrades to antiquated smaller-diameter pipes.

The Mayor and Parish Transportation and Drainage Director have committed to hiring an engineer to study these issues in the Garden District, and explore alternatives. However, that person has not yet

been contracted, and the GDCA will be following up on this in the next month. This is a crucial step, because as long as the problem remains undefined, it will never be solved.

The Board agreed to keep in monthly contact with Mr. Raiford concerning Drainage, so the Garden District will not be forgotten.

Tom was asked to consider joining the board to become the Chairman of the Drainage Committee, since he is already doing that job. He would not need to take on any other duties and would have the backing of the civic association.

**Government St. Road Diet:** Claire: What is the plan for bus stops? Is there money for benches or covers? Landscaping and planters were in the plan, but is there money for them? She can talk with neighbors and neighboring associations about paying for plants.

Tom: Tires can be recycled by cutting narrower and using them as planters.

Mid City Redevelopment Alliance is having a meeting this Thursday evening, which she cannot attend. Ted offered to attend in her place.

Tom: The sidewalks are too narrow to fully meet the needs of pedestrians. The bike lanes are not up to the current national standards. This needs to be put on the agenda of the Mayor.

**Board Meetings Dates & Locations Update:** Claire is planning to host the Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and was looking for a host for Oct. 20<sup>th</sup>. Eric may have committed his yard. If not, Mary and Willie will host Oct. in their patio or driveway, depending upon how many attend.

**Financials:** Ted showed his worksheet on the screen and explained that the GDCA brought in less money, but also spent less money. There is a surplus in the budget, which in the past, the board had decided could be used to trim and shape more of the median oak trees. Ted spoke with the arborist who had given us a very good price in the past and asked about increasing the number of trees. He said he would give us the same price if he could do it during his off-season, which is winter. The arborist can pick out more trees that are in greatest need. The board agreed to this strategy.

Claire recommended that the Board hire a graphic artist who could design a brand that could be used in many ways to reference the tree project. This is something that the board has been wanting, but couldn't find a volunteer with the time to do it. She said she could find an artist who could do the job for \$250. Mary made a motion that the board hire her. Ted seconded it. The motion carried, unanimously.

**Membership:** The membership is down, especially in the number of people who pay by check. Michael offered to help John with membership duties. He is familiar with the software that is used. He'll ask John for a list of previous members who have not renewed in the past year and generate a letter to send to them.

**Alleys:** Mike sent another email to Kyle Huffstickler, Director of Maintenance, today, again asking what is expected of the neighbors and what DPW will do. Mike sends a message on Nextdoor.com every so often to neighbors asking for block captains for the alley project. He gets a few responses from people. October is designated as the Clean up your alley month. It is hoped that the block captains will organize group activities for their alleys on Saturdays in in October. Neighbors are encouraged to do this all year, however.

**Events:** Claire: We have missed getting the neighborhood together for the usual events of the year. She asked how the Board feels about a re-invented Fall Picnic, Croquet Brunch and Champagne Stroll. Ideas about a stroll along the sidewalk with the possibility of live music coming from some of the houses was discussed for November. This way, people could practice social distancing. Older, more vulnerable neighbors would probably not attend. It was decided to wait and see what the pandemic brings after school gets into full swing.

The Board Christmas Party is planned for Ted's house.

Holiday Lighting Contest: Mary offered to help with that.

**Website, Communications & Marketing:**

Claire: A local restaurant contacted Claire to advertise their discount and delivery. The Board decided that they would need to be a sponsor.

The local schools are needing help with recruitment. Should they be spotlighted in the newsletter? Mike suggested that there could be a place on our website about schools. People in the Garden District could be interviewed about their school or their children's school and then a little information about it could be given. There would be some boundaries set up so it would include the schools closer to the Garden District rather than all over the parish. Liz and Mary will make a list of schools. There is a Baton Rouge Garden District Facebook page that is not sponsored by the civic association. Schools can be directed to that.

**Dog Bag Stations:** Some are in need of bags. Ted will contact Ari.

**Newsletter:** Claire plans to put together a newsletter this week. Board members need to get articles to her.

**To Do List:**

**Claire:** newsletter (& President's message) & ask graphic artist to start branding design

**Michael:** speak to John about membership

**Ted:** Speak to arborist about trees project & Ari about replacing doggie bags. Attend Mid City meeting Thursday night.

**Liz & Mary:** Make school list

**Mike:** Plan & contact block captains about October clean-up campaign. Advertise it on Nextdoor