

Council Member Cam Gordon's Report to the West Bank, 3-19-09

Cam's next West Bank Office Hours:
Tuesday April 7, 9:30-11:00am
Hard Times Café, 1821 Riverside Ave

Items:

- 1) April Roundtable: Supporting our Small Businesses
 - 2) Dania Hall Lot
 - 3) University Ordinance Making Authority
 - 4) Relative Homestead Rental Licenses
 - 5) Climate Change Grants
 - 6) Trees Available for \$25
 - 7) Earth Hour
 - 8) Commercial Building Inspection Programs
 - 9) City/State Financial Relationship
 - 10) Non-motorized Transportation Funding
 - 11) City Comments on U Master Plan
 - 12) Crown Hydro
 - 13) Transfers of Animals
 - 14) Beekeeping
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- 1) Please join me on April 23rd, from 7-9pm, for a roundtable discussion on small businesses: how can the City support and strengthen the small businesses that create most of our jobs and make our communities livable? What policies does the City have in place that make it harder for small businesses to be successful? Location is to be determined, and will be posted on the Second Ward website: www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/ward2.
 - 2) Community Planning and Economic Development staff are continuing to work towards a Request for Proposals for the Dania Hall lot. You can find more information about the process, including notes from the community meeting on February 27th, here: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/dania_hall_site.asp. My office is helping coordinate City resources for a possible community garden for the site that will be an interim use until redevelopment occurs. I have also been asked to meet with City staff and the Dania Partners.
 - 3) The University has gotten a bill introduced at the Legislature (House File 1536) that would give them the power to make ordinances on any subject, covering all University owned and controlled land. The U's contention is that this will make it easier for them to craft consistent policies (with real consequences) for tailgating on U-owned parking lots, including some on the West Bank. City staff and I have some significant concerns about this proposal, and will be working with the University to see if there is any way to narrow either the geographic or subject matter scope of the proposed powers in order to win the City's support. Tailgating will be allowed in the lots around the softball field on 19th Ave and the lot on Riverside just east of the Barker Center for Dance. You can read a University policy on tailgating here: policy.umn.edu/groups/ppd/documents/policy/tailgating_pol.cfm.
 - 4) Responding to a new statute, the City's Regulatory Services department has put in place a new policy that will require all single family dwellings that are relative homesteaded to obtain a rental license. Affected property owners are being provided with a rental license application and instructions for how to submit the application and fee to Housing Inspection Services. Fully homesteaded single family dwellings will not be required to have a rental license. The effected properties are **not** subject to the \$1,000 fee for transfer of a property from owner-occupied to rental. I am very supportive of this move, as relative homesteaded properties have been highlighted as a major issue for many U-area neighborhoods. Because these houses have been rented without a license, they have been significantly harder to control.
 - 5) Based on the success of the last two years, the City has funded another round of climate change grants. These grants have been quite successful in mobilizing citizens to take measurable actions to reduce their carbon emissions. I encourage WBCC to apply for this funding. See here for more information: www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/sustainability/ClimateChangeGrants2009.asp.
 - 6) The City has also partnered again with Tree Trust to offer trees to residents for only \$25. If you're interested, you should visit www.treetrust.org/orderhere as soon as possible – there are only 1,000 trees being offered, and last year they went very quickly.

- 7) The City of Minneapolis is again participating in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund in Earth Hour, a global statement of concern about climate change and of our commitment to finding solutions. We will turn off the lights on the Stone Arch Bridge and the external lights on City Hall. Several downtown buildings will also go dark. I encourage everyone in the Ward to participate by turning your lights out on **Saturday, March 28th, from 8:30-9:30pm.**
- 8) Over my objections and dissenting vote, the Council has voted to put in place the Commercial Building Inspections Program and associated fee that many Second Ward business owners have contacted me to oppose. The program will now charge businesses from \$50 - \$910 every year for a comprehensive fire inspection once every five years. This passed the Council in large part because the revenue it is expected to raise – approximately \$950,000 every year – will prevent laying off about 21 firefighters. While I support finding funding to retain all of our firefighters, I have opposed this program since it first came to the Council, for three main reasons. First, no one has been able to make a convincing case that this program is necessary to prevent fires. This makes it very clear that the program is being put in place simply to fill an existing budget hole, and I do not believe this is responsible or fair. Second, I am opposed to the increasing reliance of government on fees and fines for our revenue, rather than relying on progressive taxation. Third, and most importantly, the fee structure passed by the Council puts a much, much larger burden on small businesses than large ones. In fact, the smallest building owners will pay almost **40 times** as much per square foot as the largest building owners. Even if the fees will be less than \$100 a year for the smaller businesses, this is simply the wrong time and the wrong way to add to the costs of doing business in Minneapolis.
- 9) As directed, City staff has produced a good report on the changing nature of the City's financial relationship with the State of Minnesota. The State continues to take a larger and larger amount of money from property and sales taxes in Minneapolis while reducing the amount they return to the City in Local Government Aid. To learn more, see here: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/2009-meetings/20090306/Docs/State_Fiscal_Relations_Staff_Dir.pdf.
- 10) Transit for Livable Communities has decided to award federal non-motorized transportation dollars to two projects that are very important to Ward 2. They allocated \$1.75 million to the Bicycle Sharing program, which will include the West Bank. Second, they gave the University of Minnesota \$525,000 for a bike center in the Oak Street Parking Ramp, as well as a Radio Frequency Identification program to validate bicycle commuters. I'm thrilled that both of these great projects are moving forward, and hope to see them up and running soon.
- 11) The City submitted some strong comments to the University's Draft Master Plan. We asked the U to be more specific in their commitments to better community engagement, advocated against demolition of historic buildings, asked the U to put more emphasis on Granary Road, and strongly urged the U to develop a clearer communication of their present and proposed future boundaries.
- 12) The Council has voted to formally oppose, through our legislative agenda, the attempt by supporters of Crown Hydro to circumvent the local control of the City and Park Board over the use of public lands for the proposed small hydropower facility. While I am generally supportive of small hydro, I have concerns about this specific project and strongly support the principle of local, democratic control, so I voted for this legislative agenda change.
- 13) Animal Care and Control staff proposed an ordinance change that would have prevented all transfers of all dogs declared either dangerous or potentially dangerous. I was concerned that this went too far, having known of animals whose behavior improves after a positive change to their environment. I pushed through an amendment that allows staff to control whether a transfer is granted, along with a staff direction requiring them to report back in a year on how many people have applied for transfers, whether the transfer was allowed and what happened to the dog in question.
- 14) Council Member Scott Benson has introduced an ordinance establishing new regulations to allow people to keep bees in the city. I believe that the regulations will be similar to the current ordinance on chickens in the city, which require that a large majority of neighbors agree to having this activity nearby. Allowing bees could bring two main benefits to the city: locally-produced honey, and an increase in pollination, which can help increase the yields of gardens.