

News from Cam Gordon
Council Member, Second Ward
March 2009

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/ward2/>

March Roundtable Discussion. Please join me, along with Park Commissioners Annie Young and Scott Vreeland and School Board Members Carla Bates, Pam Costain and Jill Davis for a **Roundtable Discussion: “Our Parks, Our Schools, Our City”** on **March 11, 7-8:30pm** at **Pratt School**, 66 Malcolm Ave SE. The future of our city depends on world class parks and schools. How can the independent elected boards and the City work better together? Please come and share your ideas.

Heritage Preservation Public Meeting. Responding to concerns from neighborhood organizations, I pushed Planning staff to hold two public meetings (on in Ward 2 at Matthews Park) on their proposed changes to the Heritage Preservation ordinance. There are many good changes in the proposal and there may be ways we can still improve it. To learn more and give me your feedback, you can read the staff report online at http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/2009-meetings/20090327/Docs/HPC_Chapter599Revisions.pdf or contact Brian Schaffer at 673-2670 or brian.schaffer@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

2009 Budget. Mayor Rybak has presented a revised 2009 budget to the Council. I am mostly supportive of his proposals, and I share his relief that the Obama Administration’s stimulus package will help us fund 57 police officers this year. However, I have some concerns about some specific proposals that the Mayor has brought forward. The Mayor proposes enacting a street lighting fee that was also voted down by the Council in the past few years. The proposed budget would also completely cut Civil Rights investigations, relying instead on the State for this service. I have heard from the Civil Rights Commission that they strongly oppose this idea. I have not decided to support any of these proposals, and I would welcome your input.

Commercial Building Registration Program. 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. I thank Council Members Gary Schiff and Sandy Colvin Roy for joining me in voting no. I will monitor the program as it is implemented to see if it can be improved or eliminated next year when it comes up for review.

Cradle to Prison Pipeline Study Session. I am convening a special City Council Study session on March 13 on The Cradle to Prison Pipeline. Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund and Judge Pamela Alexander, director of the MN Council on Crime and Justice will address Council Members and Mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul as well as Minneapolis School Board Members and Park Board Members and share strategies for how we can better develop policies that can change the patterns that drive too many of our poorer youth

towards violence, crime and incarceration. The session will be recorded and broadcast live at 10 am on the 13th.

State/City Financial Relationship. 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.

Non-Motorized Transportation. This week, Transit for Livable Communities decided to award federal non-motorized transportation dollars to two projects that are very important to Ward 2. First, they allocated \$1.75 million to the Bicycle Sharing program I have written about in the past, which will include the West Bank and University area. 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. Transit for Livable Communities will announce the most recent recipients of funding able 11:30am, Tuesday, March 10, at the U of M Oak Street Parking Ramp, Oak & Delaware Streets. The event will feature Lea Schuster, Executive Director of Transit for Livable Communities, Robert Bruininks, President of the University of Minnesota and Mayor Rybak. I also plan to attend.

University Master Plan. 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. You can read the full comments here: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/2009-meetings/20090220/IGR20090217agenda.asp>.

Crown Hydro. 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 also strongly support the principle of local, democratic control, and I voted for this legislative agenda change.

Climate Change Grants. The Mayor's amended 2009 budget proposal keeps funding for the 2009 round of climate change grants. These grants have been quite successful in mobilizing citizens to take measurable actions to reduce their carbon emissions, and I'm very supportive of funding them again this year. Staff hopes to send out the Requests for Proposals by mid-March.

Transfers of Animals. 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 AC&C 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.

Beekeeping. Council Member Scott Benson has introduced an ordinance establishing new regulations to allow people to keep bees in the city. I am supportive of this idea. 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.

Binge Drinking. I am supporting a recommendation by the City's Public Health Advisory Committee to create a task force to study what role the City can play in reducing binge drinking. Despite what has been reported on WCCO, City Pages and elsewhere, there is no proposal to "ban happy hour" in Minneapolis. If there was, I would not support it. I am interested in exploring effective ways we could reduce the negative health effects of binge drinking.

Central Corridor Summit. I invite interested persons and organizations to participate in the Central Corridor Community Summit on March 7th and 8th, at the Central Corridor Resource Center, 1080 University Avenue W in Saint Paul. The goals of the Summit are to gather community members, small businesses and organizations to share visions, issues, and solutions so we can speak with a unified voice about the future of our neighborhoods and business communities in the Central Corridor. They also hope to develop a Community Statement, which could be the basis for a written agreement among governmental entities, community members, businesses and organizations that coordinates efforts and holds everyone accountable. For more information and an event schedule, contact Carol Swenson, District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, 651-249-6877 or carol@dcc-stpaul-mpls.org.

Alliance Report. The Council has recommitted to help move the University District Partnership Alliance's work forward. The City's legislative agenda continues to support the goals and strategies of the Alliance. Additionally, the Community Planning and Economic Development Department has appropriated \$50,000 to support the Alliance's Homebuyer Incentive Program.

Earth Hour. 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. See here for more: <http://www.earthhourus.org>.

Taxi Fares. The automatic taxi fare formula that the Council put in place to ensure that fares would keep pace with inflation has had an unforeseen consequence: on March 1st fares were decrease by about 15%. Responding to concerns of taxi drivers – many of whom live in the ward – I worked with Licensing staff to come up with an ordinance change to delay the fare change until March of next year, to give staff and the industry time to work on an amended fare formula. Unfortunately, Council Member Ostrow blocked me from even introducing the subject matter today, delaying any action by the City for three weeks.

Grants to Second Ward Businesses. The Council has passed along grants from other levels of government to several businesses in the Ward. Digigraphics has received \$22,400 in Metro Council Livable Communities Tax Base Revitalization Awards. Minnesota DEED Contamination Cleanup Awards have gone to Digigraphics (\$259,099) and Sydney Hall (\$414,760). Hennepin County Environmental Remediation Funds have gone to 2600 Minnehaha (\$31,000), Digigraphics (\$22,455), and Sydney Hall (\$80,033).

West River Parkway. The Park Board will hold a public hearing to take comments on construction plans for the West River Parkway trail improvements on **Wednesday, March 18**, at 6pm at the MPRB Headquarters, 2117 West River Road, on the second floor.

South Mpls Housing Fair. On Saturday, March 28th, from 10am-3pm, the South Minneapolis Housing & Home Improvement Fair will take place at South High School, 3131 19th Ave S. The Fair is free and open to the public, and promotes home improvement, project financing, city living, and local neighborhood involvement. An updated list of Housing Fair seminars and presenters for 2009 can be found at www.housingfair.org.

Grants to Seniors Organizations. Southeast Seniors, Longfellow Seward Healthy Seniors and Nokomis Healthy Seniors, are receiving a \$67,500 Community Development Block Grants through the City, to continue their good work on fostering elder-friendly communities.

University Ave Streetscape Meeting. The Central Corridor Project Office is scheduling a meeting for March 30 to discuss the options for the University Avenue streetscape as it relates to the Central Corridor LRT project, from 29th Ave SE to Emerald.

Reward Offered in Joe Sodd Homicide. The Minneapolis Police Department has offered a reward of \$1,000 for information leading to an arrest in the murder of Joe Sodd III, which occurred this past summer on the West Bank. Please help the police get this information out there.

North Country Coop Site. African Development Center (ADC) has applied for a Great Streets Gap Financing Loan of \$200,000 to purchase and rehab the old North Country Coop building at 1929 South 5th Street. Sources of funding, besides the Great Streets gap financing, include private financing together with New Markets Tax Credits, a City 2% loan and a Great Streets façade grant. I expect that the Community Development Committee, on which I sit, will approve this loan application on March 31.

Midwest Mountaineering Land Sale. The City plans to sell Midwest Mountaineering a sliver of land they have used and leased for more than a decade. This land sale was postponed until the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan was complete. The land is being sold at Fair Market Value, and West Bank business and resident organizations were supportive of this land sale when it was first proposed in 2004. The Planning Commission will review this land sale, and staff anticipates public hearing at the Community Development Committee on April 14.

Demolition on 15th Ave S. Fine Associates has begun taking down the decrepit industrial buildings on 15th Ave S, across the street from the Brian Coyle Center.

Openings on City Boards and Commissions. There are openings on the Latino Advisory Committee (closes 3/13). To apply, call (612) 673-3358 or email cityclerk@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

Yours, in peace and cooperation,

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