

Passyunk Square Civic Association
General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, February 4, 2020

President Sarah Anton began the General Membership Meeting of the Passyunk Square Civic Association (PSCA) at 6:35 PM on February 4, 2020 in the South Philadelphia Older Adult Center. Board members in attendance included Sarah Anton, Suzanne Tavani, Theresa Rose, Bill Gross and Jeff Brown. Absent were: Monica Montiel, Andrew Stober, Christine Knapp, Alysea McDonald, Liz Moselle, Henry Sullivan and Patrick Pasquariello.

Sarah introduced Vikki from the Philadelphia Department of Revenue. Vikki reported on City real estate tax and water assistance programs. She said that these programs may benefit residents or someone they may know and urged neighbors to inform others about them. The first was the Homestead Exemption. This is the quickest and easiest way to save on real estate taxes. Residents can reduce their real estate tax bill by up to \$629 each year. They must own their house and live in it. If you have an abatement you will not qualify for the Homestead Exemption. However, once the abatement ends you will qualify. Next is the Low Income Senior Citizen Real Estate Tax Freeze Program. To qualify a homeowner must be 65 years old or older and, if single, make less than \$27,000 per year or, if married, less than \$35,500. The year you apply and get accepted your taxes are frozen at that rate and won't increase as long as you live in the house. Owners can be eligible for both the Homestead Exemption and Low Income Senior Citizen Real Estate Tax Freeze Programs. There is also an Owner-Occupied Real Estate Payment Agreement Program for homeowners who owe back taxes. Such owners would make monthly payments on their back taxes and thereby avoid their homes from going up for Sheriff Sale.

Vikki explained that there are two Water Departments. The Philadelphia Water Department handles quality of water, the service and meters. The Water Revenue Bureau collects the revenue. She mentioned when you receive your water bill you should check the following: 1- that the bill did not go through the roof compared with prior months. If it did you should immediately call since that is either caused by a meter malfunction or a leak. 2- if the bill is an estimate. If so, call to have someone read the meter so that you will not have back payments to make. 3- if there is a charge for usage and storm water. Vikki indicated programs to assist low income residents obtain a water bill discount. There is also a Help Loan for pipes outside of the home and into the street. The City will do repairs and bill the homeowner monthly over five years. The City also supports insurance to cover the underground pipes with American Water Resources. It costs about \$95 per year.

Katie from Rep. Fiedler's office mentioned a state program. It is a property tax and rent rebate for people 65 years or older, widows and widowers 50 years old or older, or persons on disability. Homeowners who make \$35,000 or less a year and renters who make \$18,000 or less are eligible. She said to call the office at 215-271-9190 for more information.

Sarah turned the meeting over to Police Department representatives from PSA 3 for a police report. The sergeant reported on police activity over the past month. One homicide and one arrest. Two shootings with one arrest. Ten robberies with three arrests. Two aggravated assaults with a firearm with one suspect. Twenty five thefts from auto with one arrest. The sergeant stated that the car thieves are getting more brazen. They are knocking out car windows. She reiterated

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that residents should not leave any valuables in their car or in sight. There is an on-going narcotics investigation involving three gangs and one arrest has been made. Three violations of the uniform firearms act have occurred and one gun has been taken off the streets. In response to a question, the sergeant explained that PSA 3 goes from Broad to 7th Streets, from Washington Avenue to the Stadiums. A question was asked if anything can be done for graffiti and tagging. Ace Delgado said to call 311. If there is a tag call 911 as well. The police will check to see if it is gang related. They have information on gang tags. Question is it worth it to get a ring doorbell. Ace replied yes. The City may get some funding from the new casino and people are trying to be able to use it for ring doorbells.

Suzanne gave the Zoning Committee report. She stated that the Zoning Committee meets the second Tuesday of each month at St. Maron's Hall. The February 11 meeting will hear only one case; 1501 S. 12th Street. That is a conversion of a single family house into three units. She mentioned that before a person buys a property they should find out what they can do with it.

In the absence of Monica, Sarah reported that PSCA has a cleaning contract to sweep neighborhood streets every other Friday so that it can be monitored. All the numbered streets are cleaned. PARC has a contract that cleans the east west streets. The next street cleaning is due on Friday, February 7. Sarah asked neighbors to let PSCA know how the contractor is doing by contacting cleanstreets@passyunk.org. The next cleaning after that is Friday, February 21. In response to a question whether other streets could be cleaned, Sarah replied that PSCA is looking for a person to be a fundraiser so it can, among other things, get additional funds to pay for the cleaning of other streets.

Sarah indicated that PSCA has a Step of the Month contest to choose the most attractive house front. However, she did not know what step had been chosen this month.

Sarah stated that residents should be aware that the Philadelphia School District will be evaluating school capacity this spring and summer.

There are four parks in PSCA, Sarah reported. Columbus and Gold Star are under renovation. A meeting is scheduled on February 20 to discuss the Rebuild Program for Capitolo. Someone asked the progress of the Columbus renovation and Sarah replied that she is trying to get a report on all of the parks.

Lynne stated that there was a successful Happy Hour at Devil's Den on Tuesday, January 21 in which PSCA partnered with EPX. A raffle was held and over \$200 was raised. The next Happy Hour is scheduled for the third Wednesday of March.

Karyn gave the report on the Planning Committee. She indicated that the committee has been slow in getting started but the recent meeting was successful. It focused on a neighborhood assessment, demographics and historic preservation. The committee meets every other month on the third Monday and if anyone wants to join they should let Karyn know.

The bi-annual Art Auction will be held on March 28, Sinaz stated. It will be held in Theatre Exile. Tickets are available for \$10 on-line currently but will go up to \$15 on February 14.

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Artists are donating and selling their pieces. There will be food at the Art Auction and raffles for gift baskets.

Sarah stated that Theatre Exile is a local business at 13th and Reed Streets and has a new play beginning February 13.

Sarah reported on the Municipal Complex at 1100 Wharton Street. She indicated that Councilman Squilla is taking comments about it from members of the community and told residents to send any comments to him by February 14. A question was raised about the timeline for the development. Sarah replied that it depends on the updated proposal and traffic study. Question, will there be any other community meetings? Suzanne replied that would be up to the Councilman. Sarah mentioned that there will definitely be a City Council Public Hearing that community members can attend. Question will PSCA ask the Councilman for another community meeting? Sarah replied that we will have to see.

Sarah reported on the January 29 meeting about the tragic fire on 8th Street. Representatives of the City and various departments conducted a community meeting. She mentioned that they reported many resources available including some to deal with trauma. If residents want to learn about specific resources they should email PSCA. Question, at the City meeting a City representative said that if any resident thinks there is a problem with their house caused by the explosion they should contact 311. When neighbors replied that that will take a while the representative said he would provide a specific number to call. The question asked if Sarah had received that number yet. Sarah answered that she hadn't. Frank stated that no number has been given. Sarah mentioned that Donald Carlton is the City point person so he is the one who can be contacted. Frank stated that he heard from PGW today that it will begin work on the gas main replacement on February 17 and be complete by May 13. After the gas is done the Water Department will begin its work. The vacant lot will receive top soil, grass and a fence. It is five separate properties and litigation is involved with them. Question, does anyone know the cause? Sarah stated that an investigation was on-going; there is no update yet. Question, the PUC told a neighbor that they will not investigate. Sarah stated that PSCA recorded the community meeting and sent it to the PUC. They will investigate. Frank spoke to the PUC and they are still conducting an investigation. However, there is not always a definitive cause of a gas main break. Suzanne asked if there was anyway the City could determine if there's a possibility of a rupture in advance or must we wait for one to occur? Sarah replied that we can organize to pressure the City to be more transparent. Frank stated that PGW has representatives on 8th, Wilder and Franklin Streets testing for gas every day.

Sarah referred neighbors to the agenda and dates of note at the bottom.

The next speaker was Beth Goldstein-Huxen regarding National Popular Vote. Beth distributed information regarding the National Popular Vote and stated that she is a Committee person in the first ward and a voting rights activist. She has done work around gerrymandering. Now Beth is here to deal with the Electoral College. She explained that Americans don't vote directly for president but vote for electors who vote for a president. This is in the Constitution. The Founding Fathers were not so committed to democracy. They were afraid of mob rule with direct

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democracy. They left it up to the states to determine how they would award their electoral votes. The Electoral College used to be by district and while that was not proportional it more closely resembles the will of the majority. Forty eight states award all their electors on a winner take all basis. The system makes it possible for there to be a minority president; one who wins the Electoral College but loses the popular vote. The current system also provides unequal attention to certain states, such as the swing states. They receive the bulk of the campaign events and presidential attention. Voters in some states count more than those in other states but every vote should count the same. The solution, Beth said, is the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. That is an agreement between the states to ensure that their electoral votes go to the winner of the popular vote. States would agree to give their electors to whichever candidate receives the most votes, regardless of who wins their state. The compact only kicks in when states with 270 Electoral College votes approve it. We are already 70% there Beth said because states with 196 Electoral College votes have already agreed. Representative Fiedler is committed to sponsoring a bill for this compact in the Pennsylvania legislature. In 2017 one was introduced but didn't go anywhere. Voters should contact other people and their legislators to support it. Question, wouldn't it be fairer to try for proportional representation. Beth replied that would require a Constitutional Amendment but the compact won't.

Jean Herman from the Charles Santore library was introduced. She explained that at the end of February the City will be doing away with fines for books overdue at the library. If a book is lost or stolen a person still has to pay but there will be no fines for books that are overdue.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:42 PM.

Dates of Note:

February 6 – GRASP State Senate-1st District, Q&A and Meet and Greet with voters

February 11 – PSCA Zoning Meeting, 7 PM, St. Maron's Church

February 14 – Comment round ending for 1100 Wharton

February 20 – Capitolo Playground Rebuild Design Input Meeting, 7:00 PM

February 20 – Language Exchange

February 24 – Brian Sims Town Hall

February 24 – Friends of South Philly Library Monthly Meeting

February 25 – 3rd District Captain's Town Hall Meeting

February 13 – March 8 – Theatre Exile Babel

March 28 – PSCA Art Auction at Theatre Exile

Submitted by Jeff Brown