Ghent Neighborhood League Minutes
May 17, 2018

Next Meeting: June 21, 2018, 6:30 PM, The Williams School

I. Call to order and introductions

President Mike Spencer called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm. After welcoming the membership, those in attendance introduced themselves.

Board members present: JR Montalvo, Catherine Kilduff, Nat McCormick, George Kello, Emily Birknes, Paige Rose, Larry Brett, Dan Ross-Li, Ben Crumpler

Absent: Tyler Sherwin

The Board approved the April minutes.

II. Safety Report – Community Resources Officer (CRO) Samantha Perez

a. Report – Very good, zero violent crime since last month. We had double-digit commercial robberies, and both serial robbers were apprehended a few weeks ago. It’s been quiet since then. Larcenies: six since last meeting date, all are reported in unlocked cars but one, and that one shows no forced entry. One stolen car and the keys were in the center console.

b. Don’t leave the keys in the car.

c. Two reports of missing rear license plates. Be cognizant that you are not missing a tag.

d. One car stolen from West Ghent and one Glock stolen from a car in West Ghent, both cars were unlocked.

e. The Department has a summer camp for underserved children. If you want an application, please email her.

III. Guest Speakers

- Taylor Gould, President, Fairmount Park. He provided two handouts, one a picture of the app for Adopt-a-drain, including a map. There was also an article from wavy.com about the program. Fairmount Park is the second largest civic league in the city. Taylor has been president since 2007. He is a landscape architect and urban planner.

  o For the past 14 years they have been rebuilding their infrastructure – gutters, pipes, etc. They have also done parks, trails and wetlands with the city.
Mainly they experience flooding during really big rain events. They are on the Lafayette River, and have areas and intersections that flood, but generally are high (10+ feet above sea level).

They were approached last year by the resiliency office to ask residents to take ownership of a storm drain as a pilot project. They have 125 storm drains in the area and 50 have been adopted.

The program is entirely app-based. You are given instructions and asked to clean about 10 feet on either side of the drain twice a month. Best to check the drains before the storm and off-cycle with the street sweeper. Then you check in on your phone and report that you cleaned the drain.

They are working on adding extra information to the app, such as amount of debris removed and other improvements. The City didn’t create the app themselves, but is working with CodeAmerica.

This builds resilience by getting residents to understand that this is where the water goes. To make sure it doesn’t flood, you need to take ownership. This complements the “retain your rain” program that GNL heard about last month. Both help deal with problems of old, dense neighborhoods, like too-small pipes for too much impervious surfaces (roofs, pavement).

If something seems blocking the storm drain, you have to call the City with a service request.

The impact they have seen is that people understand more that things go into the storm drain. In grass-mowing season, people understand that the grass can go into the drain and clog it. Even professional lawn care companies do this.

Norfolk is the only city in Hampton Roads that street sweeps on a regular basis. Downtown they might sweep once a day. Virginia Beach has street sweepers, but only use them occasionally.

- **Mark Stephens, Eggleston, Urban Garden Report**: Their mission is to employ people with disabilities and create jobs for them.

  - Urban Farm: They sell plants and Christmas trees that their employees grow. He will set up a day where he invites folks to tour the greenhouses (behind 7 Eleven on 38th Street).
They also have a landscaping business. They can do spartina and grasses if you have areas that flood. They work with the Elizabeth River Project on some projects.

Have vegetables for sale from the urban farm. They also offer a CSA – you can subscribe and get deliveries of vegetables.

Can help with retain your rain, drip irrigation.

IV. President’s Report:

- At pre-meeting the Board discussed the letter to the City regarding the study of Maury High School.

- Ghent Task Force meeting last week (includes West Ghent, Ghent, Chelsea, and Ghent Business Association). A representative of Economic Development was there to talk and has been invited to talk next month at the GNL meeting.

- GNL is going through an audit to facilitate the transition to a new Treasurer. The Board set up an audit committee: Emily Birknes, JR Montalvo, and Tyler Sherwin.

V. Reports of Officers and Standing Committees


b. Membership Report – The website will be live by next meeting. It needs board approval. Improvements include that it will direct visitors to city website to allow finding more information. At the end of 2017, we had about 240 members. Roughly 85 had dropped out between last year and this year, and a lot of that had to do with a blip during the microbrewery discussion. We’re still ahead of where we were, but still disappointed to lose the members we did. How do we bring greater value to our members? The website, the newsletter, etc. – pass the word, get neighbors involved.

c. Project Review – It has been quiet this spring. Next week there is a single project, an ongoing porch restoration at Karen Reynes’ home. Little Dog Diner’s requested changes were approved. Reinvention of the New Belmont – 2100 block of Colonial, in the line of shops where Yorgo Bagels is – “Bourbon Smokehouse.” It will have a pinball/arcade/gaming area. Ghent Business association had the opportunity to hear that, ask questions and is recommending approval. The new zoning ordinance is coming up on the Project Review Board.

Guest speakers: Project is a proposed renovation of garage to be used as an accessory dwelling unit. The property is in Ghent, outside historic
district, and these uses would not be permitted in the historic district. In this instance, the owner has to get a conditional use permit.

i. **Susan Pollack, City.** This is a use that would be allowed in a single-family home. Someone would have to meet these criteria to apply. Depending on the size of the lot and the zoning designation, you might be allowed to do this outright. The owner must meet with the Ghent Neighborhood League before it will be put on the Board’s agenda. [If this is something that the GNL would want to see, then the City could add the ability to allow a conditional use in the historic district.]

ii. **Erik Lappinen, Owner, 720 Maury Ave.** Adding a bathroom with a shower to the garage to allow a live-in nanny to live there for childcare purposes. The bathroom and shower pushed them into the category of needing a conditional use permit.

iii. The Board moved to approve forwarding the application to the City.

**d. Community Improvement** – Neglected properties down to three: 616 Graydon Ave (owners are renovating the apartment building and have no open violations); 426 Mowbray Arch is being sold, will close in July; 815 Westover, no open violations and court date in July. 715 Redgate Ave. was added to the list for window and porch violations. Owners’ architect met with the city and are going forward with seeking historic tax credit.

i. Clean the Bay Day is June 2. You can register on line.

ii. July 4th Bike Parade, inviting the dogs this year. Will reach out to the Dog Park.

**e. Ghent Business Association, Karen Reynes –**

i. May is bike month. Neon district will host a “glow ride” at 8 pm Friday, May 18 night.

ii. Norfolk Southern has changed its morning train from 6:59 am to 6:00 am to facilitate commuter traffic.

iii. John Stevenson, the urban traffic planner that came to GNL recently will be at Ghent Business general membership meeting, June 7, 8:30 am, Christ & St. Luke’s

**VI. Reports of Special Committees**
a. **Dog Park** – Second lime application last week, about 800 pounds. Significant grass growth, some patches reseeded in shady spots. Planning to reopen on May 31, coinciding with a membership drive. Follow-up meeting for Monday at The Williams School.

b. **Flood mitigation report, Nat McCormick.** Karen and Nat attended a UVA ongoing education seminar at Portsmouth on rising tides and ongoing flood mitigation. The takeaway is that this area is tackling a problem with a pro-active approach. Individuals is working on specific projects funded by grants. All the professors had ideas about staffing projects if we have ideas.

c. **Tree report** – Steven Traylor is our new City forester; he started Monday. What data points do we need to collect when surveying the trees?

d. **Emily Birknes, Leadership Committee** – The nominations committee received all ballots back, had a 42% response rate. Officers (1-year position): President: Mr. Michael Spencer; First VP: Karen REynes; Second VP: Nat McCormick; Secretary: Catherine Kilduff; Treasurer: Larry Brett. At Large: Sarah Petroske, George Kello, JR Montalvo (2-year positions each)
   
   i. City and Next Door need updates with new Board’s names.

   ii. Maybe next year the elections will be done by SurveyMonkey if the by-laws are changed. A concern was raised that it goes to the junk email.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 pm**