

OBSERVER REPORT, CITY COUNCIL, MAY 8, 2023

Observer: Betty Hayford

Council members present: Initially seven in chambers, Suffredin on line, Burns absent. Burns came in late in the meeting. Suffredin dropped out at some point.

Meeting began: 7:30

Meeting ended: 10:50

(SP1) Administration of Oaths to Council Members. The Mayor changed the order of the agenda to begin the meeting with the swearing of oaths to newly elected council members Harris and Geracaris. Pastor Michael Nabors began the ceremony with a prayer, including a hope for a new day of mutual cooperation. The Mayor first administered the Athenian Oath of Citizenship and Oath of Office to Council Member Harris. She was accompanied by numerous family members and gave substantive remarks thanking people and describing the importance of Council engagement. Then the Mayor administered the oaths to Council Member Geracaris who was accompanied by fewer family members and made briefer remarks.

Announcements. The Mayor announced that this is Older American Month, and the City Manager announced that May 7-13 is Public Service Week. Thanks to all the hard working city staff. The City Clerk announced that this week the Covid Emergency will end and participants should attend all meetings in person. Absences are allowed for limited reasons and must be reported to the Clerk.

Public comment. 40 comments. 28, including service agency representatives and neighbors, supported Connections and the Margarita Inn. 5 opposed the Margarita Inn, primarily because Connections is not providing adequate support. 3 asked that landscapers be exempted from Fair Work scheduling requirements because of weather restrictions; 2 opposed the Fifth Ward school plans as too big; 1 supported the Evanston Thrives plan to help small businesses; 1 opposed the Ryan Field consultant.

(SP2) Approval of the Evanston Thrives Retail District Action Plan. The proposal asked that Council 1) adopt and place on file the Evanston Thrives Report; 2) Allocate \$3 million in ARPA funds for initial implementation; and 3) Authorize the City Manager to hire an additional employee in the Economic Development Division. Two consultants presented the plan, highlighting the inclusion of six commercial districts and urging Evanston to fulfill its potential as the city for the North Shore.

CM Reid praised the plan and urged moving forward. He said more funds are needed and he will propose a tax on non-resident employees of large employers. Nieuwsma expressed support and asked for more information about total costs, specific measures in the next five years and the potential return from investments. Kelly expressed support and urged more funds for small businesses.

The item was approved, 8-0.

(SP3) Special Use for a Rooming House in the R6 District at 1566 Oak Avenue for the Margarita Inn. CM Revelle began the discussion by acknowledging contributions to Connections and asking City Counsel if there was a conflict of interest. Legal Counsel said there was no conflict. Nieuwsma spoke to the issue at length, saying that Evanston and the nation have a problem with homelessness and the Margarita Inn is a step towards addressing it. Some Evanstonians oppose this location, but there is no perfect location and this option has been identified and put to use. It is important that Connections and the City “do it right,” and the City has worked to develop and enforce standards of operation. The City should continue

to enforce standards and the City and Connections should work to communicate with neighbors. He moved to amend the ordinance to include 17 conditions of Special Use.

CM Reid explained that he has received rental assistance from Connections. He went on at some length to assert that low income or homeless people should not be excluded from public service. He said there is no reason for him to abstain from voting.

The motion to amend passed, 6-2. Kelly and Suffredin voted no.

Kelly declared that the agreement did not include sufficient safety measures and mentioned several concerns. She proposed to hold the motion until the agreement was strengthened. Nieuwsma sharply contradicted her and said her assertion was not true. She had said 90% of the consultant's recommendations were omitted. Nieuwsma said they were included, sometimes in different language. He asked Betty Boggs, Director of Connections, to describe some of the safety regulations. Revelle pointed out that Connections has made numerous changes to operations to respond to these criticisms, learned from experience, and improved relations with neighbors and the police.

The motion passed for Introduction, 6-2. Kelly and Suffredin voted no.

Consent agenda. Items taken off were A2, A7, A16, P1, P2, P3, HS2, HS3, HS4, HS5, ED2.

A2, Approval of BMO Harris Amazon Credit Card Activity. Passed 7-0, Suffredin abstained.

A7. Approval of Contract for an Independent Ryan Field Rebuild Economic Impact Study. \$78,500 allocated for the Economic Impact Study. Passed 6-2, Kelly and Suffredin voted no.

A16. Increase Class D Liquor Licenses from 70 to 71 for Evanston Games & Café, DBA Bitter Blossom, 1707 Maple Avenue. Vote to suspend Rules for Introduction and Action. Passed 8-0. Moved and passed 8-0.

P1. Special Use for an Apartment Hotel in the R6 District at 1555 Oak Avenue, the Museum Residence on Oak Avenue. This had been amended in Committee. It passed, as amended, 7-0. Suffredin did not vote.

P2. Special Use for a Cannabis Dispensary and a Special Use for a Type 2 Restaurant in the B3 Business District at 100 Chicago Avenue. It was moved to suspend the Rules for Introduction and Action. There is some time pressure because of State requirements. The move to suspend passed 8-0. Reid called upon business owners to express his support for the operation. The motion to approve for Introduction and Action passed 6-0. Suffredin did not vote and Harris was out of the room.

P3. Major Variations for a K-8 Education Institution at 2000 Simpson Street. It had been amended in committee to reduce curb cuts that required removing trees. The amendment was modified and the modified amendment passed 7-0. Suffredin did not vote. Nieuwsma offered another amendment encouraging the school district to explore LEED certification and meeting Bird Friendly requirements. The amendment passed 7-0. Burns is now present and Suffredin has dropped out. The motion, as amended, passed for Introduction, 7-0.

HS2. Amending City Code on "Retail Single Use Bag Tax and Plastic Bag Ban." For Introduction. Reid expressed his support and appreciation for the hard work of Cara Pratt. He would have preferred a 15 cent tax to support more resident education. The motion passed 8-0 for Introduction. Burns is still present and Suffredin is not.

HS3. Establishing Evanston's Fair Workweek Ordinance. For Introduction. Reid expressed support and said it required extensive work. They heard from many employers and made modifications of the original version. He acknowledged the public comments from landscape companies concerned with weather conditions and said he had proposed amendments allowing exemptions for weather conditions. Revelle said she was concerned about landscapers and would confer with some before the final vote. The weather amendment passed 8-0. Kelly said more discussion is needed to talk with businesses. She moved to hold. The motion to hold failed for lack of a second. The motion passed 6-2, for Introduction. Kelly and someone else voted no. *(Neither Evanston Now nor I heard who else voted no.)*

HS4. Amending City Code on "City Beaches and Boat Ramps. It was moved to suspend the Rules for Introduction and Action. The impending summer season requires immediate work. The motion to suspend the Rules passed 8-0. The motion for Introduction and Action passed 8-0.

HS5. Amending City Code on Leaf Blowers to revise hours. It was moved to suspend the Rules for Introduction and Action because the Leaf Blower season is underway. Kelly expressed concern about imposing costs on landscapers. Director Ogbo explained there are grants to assist Evanston landscape companies. Revelle pointed out that this ordinance does not impose restrictions on leaf blowers. That has already been done. This ordinance only relates to permissible hours. The motion to suspend the Rules passed 8-0. The motion passed 8-0.

Call of the wards. Various meetings were announced. Condolences were offered for the death of former Alderman Steve Engelman.

The meeting was adjourned to Executive Session to discuss matters of personnel, purchase of property, and litigation at 10:50.