

**BOARD OF MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

March 23, 2009
7:30 p.m.

MINUTES

Members Present: Ed Rieker, Mayor
Sandra Varian, Mayor Pro tem
David Milliron, Commissioner
Michael Payne, Commissioner

Members Absent: Lyda Steadman, Commissioner

Staff Present: Clai Brown, City Manager
Juliette Sims, City Clerk

Item No. 1 Meeting called to order by Mayor Ed Rieker at 7:30 p.m.

Item No. 2 Welcome extended to residents, guests and members of the media
Mayor Rieker welcomed guests, residents and members of the media.

Item No. 3 Invocation (Commissioner Milliron)

Item No. 4 Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Item No. 5 Recognition of Special Guests

Item No. 6 Introduction of City Officials and Employees – Mayor Rieker
Mayor Rieker introduced City Officials and City Staff.

Item No. 7 **STATE OF THE CITY – 2009**

Mayor Rieker presented the State of the City Address for 2009.

Welcome to the 2009 State of the City Meeting. It is a distinct pleasure and honor for me to be able to spend a few minutes to highlight several items of importance regarding our city to you.

One of the most unique and enduring hallmarks of our city is the willingness of its citizens to render their time and expertise in the service of their city and its residents. The entire board and committee structure that governs this city is provided by citizen volunteers. There are upwards of forty citizen volunteers that donate thousands of hours of service to the city on an annual basis and at no cost to the city.

Many of these volunteers have been contributing to the city for years and I know this board, the city staff and the residents of our city deeply appreciate all of our volunteers who serve with honesty and integrity in their continued commitment and service to the city.

I would especially like to take a minute to personally thank my fellow board members, Mayor pro Tem Varian, Commissioner Steadman, Commissioner Milliron and Commissioner Payne for their dedication, efforts and willingness to work together on behalf of the city and its citizens. I look forward to another year of working together to move the city forward for the benefit of all. Thank you.

There are many boards and committees that are working on behalf of the city and its residents and I would like to highlight some of their accomplishments during the past year.

The Downtown Development Authority, chaired by Jill Joyner Bush has been instrumental in restarting and reinvigorating our local Avondale Business Association under the leadership of Bonnie Kallenberg. A key focus of this board in 2009 will be providing assistance in shaping how the city might become more “business friendly” and attract more businesses and development to our downtown area. The DDA has provided important direction and fresh ideas regarding annexation, development and the promotion of the city.

The Planning and Zoning Board, chaired by Kevin Woolf, along with the DDA and city staff assisted the Board of Mayor and Commissioners to finalize and pass into law a comprehensive overhaul of our city’s zoning ordinance. This overhaul was the result of a process that was started by the previous Board and many hundreds of hours of review by citizens, staff and consultants. I know this board on behalf of the city would like to thank the previous members of the BOMC; Mayor McCumber, Commissioner LaRocco, Commissioner Jones and the past Chair of the Planning and Zoning Board, Stacie Bearden and current Planning and Zoning member Julie Feely for their hard work and efforts on this important project.

The Environmental Committee, chaired by Camille Harvey is in the process of exploring several options to help our city and its citizens become a greener place. Later this year this committee will recommend options to the BOMC regarding the adoption of LEED zoning which will assist in providing a suite of standards for environmentally responsible development in our city.

The Lake Board, chaired by Sandra Neuse was able to formulate and present a Master Plan for Lake Avondale which was approved and adopted by the Board of Mayor and Commissioners last year. In the future we all look forward to seeing this master plan become a reality as it is gradually phased in over time and as resources permit.

The Tree Board, chaired by Stephany Cross recently completed a wonderful community project involving roughly fifty residents who planted seventy new trees along Clarendon Ave and a few other city streets. This is the first of several mass tree plantings that will restore and replace our aging tree canopy and help to insure that our city streets will remain picturesque for the next generation of residents.

I am happy to report that our city finances are on solid ground and we expect that to continue during this fiscal year. In 2008 the city budget was roughly three million dollars with revenue and expenses in balance. Unlike many other cities last year it was not necessary for us to dip into our reserve funds to balance our expenses nor do we expect this to occur this year. This board has continued the tradition of maintaining a conservative fiscal approach to city finances which has allowed the city to operate without any debt except the bonds issued by the DDA years ago for the investment in the Juvenile Justice Building leased by the state.

Our Finance Director, Ken Turner has been instrumental in finding ways for the city to enhance and improve its financial position and has brought a wealth of experience to our finance department.

Last year one of the very first challenges that confronted this city and this new Board of Mayor and Commissioners was the hiring of a new City Manager. This board was fortunate to fill this position with a gentleman who has brought unbridled enthusiasm, personal integrity and a deep appreciation for this city, its history and its residents. Clai Brown. City Manager Brown has used his considerable work ethic and management skills to oversee the day-to-day operations of the city and to vastly improve the operations of our city. I know this board stands together in thanking City Manger Brown in his continued efforts and contributions to our city and we all looking forward to his continued good works.

We feel safe in our homes and streets because of the dedication and efforts of Chief Broden and the team of police officers who are committed to protect and serve the citizens of our City. Last year we added a full-time investigator to the force bringing the total number on our police force including the Chief to twelve. Last year the Public Safety Department assisted our residents in developing and implementing a very successful Neighborhood Watch program that is helping to provide a safer city for us all.

We know that our Public Works team headed by Bryan Armstead, Director of Public Works, is dedicated to providing the best service possible to the city and its citizens often going the extra mile to provide needed services to the city.

At the end of last year this board approved a development agreement to allow the Publix grocery store and related commercial buildings to be created in our downtown area. As you all know the conditions that currently exist in the real estate marketplace and our economy are hindering the developers' access to

funding for this and many other projects. The delay in this project is in no way related to any constraints placed on the developer by the city or a desire by the developer not to complete this project in our city. It is strictly a matter of finances. This is affecting most commercial development in almost every city in our country.

This board, the Downtown Development Authority and our City Manger are actively seeking ways we can support this new development, as well as other new development, and we will be meeting with high-level representatives from the developer on a quarterly basis for the foreseeable future to maintain communications and to strengthen our business partnership so that we may all experience a quality, completed development as soon as possible.

Despite the delay in the large Publix development our downtown area is experiencing a smaller, quieter renaissance with the addition of a new informal arts district developing along Franklin Street where many world class artists have chosen Avondale Estates as a place to create their art. Bob Means and Bart Webb have been instrumental in the creation of a series of unique art focused events that are bringing thousands of art patrons into our city to enjoy the art and to experience our city.

Our State Representative Stephanie Stuckey Benfield has been working closely with this Board and the City Manager to assist the city at the state level in expanding the boundaries of our city via the annexation of commercial properties along East College Avenue to Sam's Crossing to meet the proposed new city limits of Decatur. We greatly appreciate her tireless efforts to assist the City of Avondale Estates and for her continued support. Unfortunately we were unable to get the required ten signatures on the bill before the deadline for this year's session. This bill will be able to be revived during next year's session. There is one final important community effort that I would like to touch on.

Like any community the future of this city is in its children. There is no better reflection of this than how we serve our children by offering them the best possible educational opportunities we can afford from the resources available to our community.

There is a most electrifying and energizing community effort afoot within our city and surrounding community. This effort started with a small core of dedicated citizens who dared to dream big and hope that others would join them in that dream. Quickly this dream caught fire and now represents a movement among our city that involves over a 120 volunteers and families who have invested thousands of dollars and hundreds of volunteer hours in service to make this dream a reality for our children and the future of this city.

I am speaking of the Avondale Estates Education Association Charter School Initiative to create The Museum School of Avondale Estates. This effort is chaired by Laura Leckband and Sasha Webb.

This unique new charter school will yield a tremendous return on our investment of time, treasure and effort. It offers parents in Avondale Estates and surrounding communities another quality choice for their children's education. Having this school in our city will have an immediate positive impact on residential property values and help reverse the trend of young families moving out of our city who are seeking quality educational opportunities for their children.

I know this Board of Mayor and Commissioners unanimously supports and encourages this community based effort and is actively seeking ways to support this important initiative so that we can assist in bringing this dream to reality.

There is nothing more lasting or more important to a community than the creation of a new school for the betterment and the education of its youngest residents. I urge all of us to actively seek ways to support this effort on all levels as it progresses forward. All of us have an opportunity and a responsibility to help in this endeavor.

In conclusion I would like to extend our thanks to the elected officials, special guests, city staff, the media and our citizens for continuing to support this special place with friendly people and picturesque winding streets that we all call home: Avondale Estates. The heart of our city is its people.

Item No. 8

AWARDS AND SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS – 2009

Staff Recognition: City Manager Brown

Gary Broden, Chief of Police
Bryan Armstead, Director of Public Works
Kenneth Turner, Director of Finance
Juliette Sims Owens, City Clerk
Hazel Baker, Clerk of Court
Karen Holmes, Administrative Assistant

Officer of the Year – Chief Broden

Corporal Thomas Gillis

Community Service Award for the Neighborhood Watch Program

Officer Phillip Findley

Businesses of the Year – Mayor Rieker

Pizza Cafe - Michael O'Keefe
Little Tree Properties - Bob Means

Residents of the Year - Mayor Rieker

Sherry Dickens, Neighborhood Watch Program
Gail Samford, Labor Day 2008
Julie Feely, Planning and Zoning Board

In Memoriam – Mayor Rieker
Betty Clayton

Charter School Recognition – Board of Mayor and Commissioners

Item No. 9

Announcements (Commissioner Milliron):

- a) Easter Egg Hunt, Saturday, April 11, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. at Willis Park
- b) Antique Car Parade, Sunday, April 12, 2009, time to be announced.

We regretfully announce the death of:

Russell Dieselberg, 1 Coventry Close

Item No. 10

Adjournment – Reception immediately following

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn at 8:11 p.m. was made by Commissioner Payne, seconded by Mayor Pro tem Varian, passed with all ayes (4-0).