

## St Vincent de Paul Parish Council Meeting Minutes

March 10, 2015

**In attendance.** Fr. Richard Lawrence, *Pastor*; Chris McCullough, *Pastoral Associate*, Audrey Rogers, *President, 9:30 Mass Rep*; Bethany Gregg, *Vice President, 9:30 Mass Rep* Peter La Count, *Secretary, 9:30 Mass Rep*; Denise Hamilton, *11:45 Mass Rep*; Joe Yingling, *9:30 Mass Rep*; John Kober, *7:15 Mass Rep*; Peggy Meyer, *Co-Chair, Social Action Committee*; Peggy Shouse, *Chair, Education and Enrichment Committee*; Bob Betta, *Chair, Facilities Committee* and Dan Rolandelli; *Valerie Rolandelli, Chair, Liturgy Committee*; Graham Yearley, *Corporator*; Kieran Ruppert, *Jesuit Volunteer Corps*;

**Absent.** Anne Freeburger, *Corporator*; Mark Palmer, *Chair, Finance Committee*, Michael Keating, *Chair, Outreach and Engagement Committee*.

Meeting began in prayer at 7:38 pm

### **Pastor's report**

Fr. Dick discussed the Archdiocese Cluster designations with other Catholic churches in our geographical area. There will be an upcoming meeting about this; however, he is unsure of the exact agenda. It may take years to work out the final cluster blocks of churches.

### **Pastor Associate's report**

The Outreach and Engagement Committee has completed the banner to be displayed on the outside of the church facing the JFX. The banner will read "Be Open and Surprised **by** God." Chris reminds us that all parishioners are evangelizers as there will be corresponding car magnets with the banner statement available to all who would like one (or more).

Chris updated the council on the Accessibility Project. The contractor had been predisposed and is ready to complete the project beginning in March.

Chris also reminded all about the Shield the Vulnerable training web site.

### **Finance Report** (Mark Palmer away Fr. Dick reported)

Fr. Dick noted some highlights during the meeting. He noted that the offertory has been down \$1,000 to date. Donations during this period were \$12,000; however, \$10,000 of those was from an estate donation. Tuition for James and John school is not budgeted as no tuition monies have been received. There will

be a meeting in March at Archbishop Curley for all City Catholic schools (not about any school closings); however, capital information will be discussed.

Fr. Dick noted that utilities costs have been about doubled expected amount for February. There was a suggestion that the thermostats in the church might be locked to maintain a constant temperature. [Peggy Meyer stated that the thermostat in the hallway for the three bathrooms in the basement is usually running on emergency heat \(since it is so cold down there\) when she gets there on Friday night. She suggests we might want to lock it.](#) This will be a Facilities Committee issue.

Suggestion was made to put into the Bulletin, as a reminder, that electronic donations to the church directly from bank account is an option for parishioners.

## **Old Business**

### **Revised Charter: Park Working Group**

The committee looked at the proposal to revise the charter for the park working group. The Council viewed the additional recommendations regarding mission, duties/responsibilities, managing public use and engagement of the congregation. There was no discussion. Motion was made to accept and was approved.

### **Ad Hoc Committee Report**

Ad Hoc Committee Recommendation #2 (Park Homeless Structure Feasibility Study)

Audrey noted that the Ad Hoc Committee volunteered a great deal of time and the parish recognized the time and energy that went into their work. She also noted that approximately 12-13% of St. V parishioners made comments. There were also one town meeting and one open microphone session for parishioners to offer opinions on Recommendation #2. There were a number of visitors to the Parish Council meeting. Audrey offered a time for visitors to address the council. Two guests spoke and offered their opinions on the Ad Hoc Committee Recommendation – one in favor and one against.

After comments were made by visitors Audrey asked comments be restricted to members of the Parish Council. Audrey asked for personal opinions (for or against) from each council member regarding Recommendation #2. Each Council member was given an opportunity going counter-clockwise around the table.

Personal opinions of each council member:

- Dan Rolandelli (against) He stated that we should take advantage of boarded up row homes in the City rather than build in the park. Suggested we create bathroom facilities and create stalls for showers on the property
- Fr. Dick (against) He stated that he worries about the future success or failure of such a facility built on church grounds. If it fails sometime in the future, what do we do then? We would have to close the building and let it sit. We would be running the homeless out of the area that they currently use.
- John Kober (against) He stated that he shared similar views as Fr. Dick. He asked what can we do under current parameters (without a building) that will help the homeless in the park.
- Peggy Meyer (in favor) She said that the park is not safe and released prisoners know there are easy prey in the park needs the 24/7 presence that a facility would provide. The feasibility report would give us the knowledge that we don't have now and that "knowledge is powerful" and might provide us with other options as well. She would love to have the bathrooms and showers with a 24/7 presence. Urinating against the building does not help one's dignity.
- Bob Betta (in favor) He stated that the feasibility study would connect us to other agencies and give an opportunity to see what could be developed. He felt there was much to gain from the information from the feasibility study.
- Denise Hamilton (in favor) She felt the feasibility study was a good idea for planning and coming together and getting new ideas. She is not necessarily partial to the structure, but the feasibility study would be good to help the park situation.
- Valerie Rolandelli (against) She agrees with Fr. Dick in that she feels the feasibility study, and the way things are worded that building the structure is already decided. She thinks we should put the time and energy into the services that we already have going now.
- Joe Yingling (against) He feels as though the feasibility study may take up to 3-4 years and will pull energy from other resources. Joe stated that it was important to honor the Land Use Agreement signed by the Archdiocese with the City that the area would remain a park because it demonstrated our trustworthiness as a faith community. He also stated that nothing reported by the Ad Hoc Committee addresses the environmental impact of constructing a building in the park. He believes that we have a commitment to sustain the Earth. There was no expert on the ad hoc committee to examine the environmental impact of a proposed building. Many people at St. V travel a great distance to get to church and the cutting down of trees will destroy the oxygen producing trees that counter acts the pollution created by cars. He also submitted that the level and passion with which some parishioners opposed the building was an indicator that such an effort should not go forward. He also noted that

- although he himself had little interaction with anyone staying overnight in the park, he believed their voices were missing from the discussion.
- Chris McCullough (in favor) He feels that a building proposal could be made that meets needs and creates something very intentional for the homeless. In respect to what Joe stated, we could impart a green building. Chris also noted that he has learned that the shoes thrown into the trees and wires on church grounds represent the kinds of drugs that are available. He feels that having a 24/7 presence would help make the park safer and the current situation threatens the sanctuary of the park
  - Bethany Gregg (in favor) She has engaged many parishioners and can see both sides of the arguments. However, she feels there is momentum now about doing something about the park. She says that we should look into the feasibility of such a building.
  - Peter La Count (in favor) He stated that there is a personal safety issue in the park. He also feels that this would be a message to other parishes, (if feasible) that if they have a property they too can have a true mission to serve God, a place of worship and a place to serve other people.
  - Graham Yearley (in favor) He feels that the park is currently an assault on human dignity in the way that people live. He feels that the park, as is, does not stand up the ideals of Christian charity.
  - Peggy Shouse (against)- She stated that she is against building in the park. She believes there are additional solutions that can help the group who use the park. She would like some of these energies go into other pursuits. She does not see that having a building would solve any of the issues in the park.
  - Audrey Rogers (in favor) She believes that there is a lot of misunderstanding about the proposal and that has paralyzed the parish and this is why we have not heard from 80% of the parish on this issue. She asked Fr. Dick if, when meeting before the Archdiocese on building a facility in the park and since he is against the feasibility study, how would he respond to this question? Fr. Dick responded that he would state that he supports doing the study if it is the Council's decision. Audrey stated that for the sake of the community that, although she is in favor of the feasibility study, she feels that the feasibility study has no realistic future and she chose to step aside.

Audrey asked the group since they have heard all opinions, does anyone choose to change his/her opinion on the matter. No council member wanted to change his/her opinion. The opinions were 8 in favor (one stepping side) and 6 opposed to the Ad Hoc Committee's Recommendation #2.

Audrey stated that we have four avenues going forward tonight:

- These four avenues are:
  - I don't agree but can live with other side
  - I can not support but will step aside

- Majority favor a position but will not take action in deference to minority opinion
- Continue to table this decision

The council agreed not to table the decision but to try to come to some resolution tonight. Council members then discussed the specific concerns that had been voiced. In responding to the call to honor our commitment to keep the area a park and maintain our trustworthiness, Audrey pointed out that the city does not believe we have been trustworthy with the state the park is in and in fact threatened to bring suit against us in 2009 for its condition. Further it was agreed by all that environmental concerns were an issue for our community although it was noted that the health of the existing trees is in question. Finally the mistrust expressed that this recommendation was simply a study (and not a foregone conclusion to inevitably build) was noted. What emerged from council discussion was the plan to pre-specify feasibility criteria under which a newly-appointed committee would determine if building permanent supportive housing for the most vulnerable homeless while maintaining open park space is even a viable option for the future. Pre-specified criteria will make the determination more objective and transparent. Environmental concerns will also be included in the feasibility criteria.

After discussion, three (3) of those against the Ad Hoc Committee's proposal agreed to step aside, making the opinions 7 – 3 in favor of the Ad Hoc Committee's proposal. Our Parish Council constitution states that consensus does not require unanimity only 'near-unanimity' and therefore the Council believed, in conclusion, that consensus had been reached in favor of the Ad Hoc Committee's Recommendation #2.

Meeting was adjourned with prayer at 9:45 pm.

Committee Reports

### **Education & Enrichment Committee**

The Education & Enrichment Committee has not met since the last Parish Council. Our next meeting will be March 19 at 7 pm.

Fifty-three people attended the mini-retreat held on February 28 to hear Dr. Robert Wicks. (Ten others were signed up but couldn't come at the last minute.) Dr. Wicks spoke of Lent as a time of pruning and urged everyone to have a "protocol of self-care" to help reduce stress while in service to others.

The meeting with Gerry Fialkowski to establish the theme and content of the parish retreat in May was cancelled twice due to bad weather, but has been rescheduled—AGAIN.

The date for the Cape May Enrichment Weekend is October 16-18.

Submitted by Peggy Shouse

### **Report of the Park Working Group to the St. Vincent Parish Council**

1. Clothing. We are now regularly taking clothes dumped in the park after they have been picked over by people to Helping Up Mission [HUM] a couple blocks away on Baltimore Street. HUM can do what we don't have staffing for (there are 500 residents at HUM) and physical space to do: clean the clothes, sort them, and distribute them to women's and family shelters, Salvation Army, Good Will etc. after taking what they need for their all male residents recovering from various forms of addiction.

2. The Working Group: growing. Three new volunteers have emerged from parish without any recruitment on my part. So the Park Working Group has suddenly gone from two people (Sarah Kelley and myself) to five, a good trajectory, but a long way to go. One newcomer, Jack Schmidt, has been working with me on Sunday mornings to learn the ropes. And Mary Lynn Myers will be pursuing a project to educate our parish on homelessness, its causes and cures and strategies to address it. The most notable new parishioner volunteer is Peter Asquino (thanks to Mary Lynn who introduced us) living at, and well advanced in the, superb HUM program who attends 9:30 mass. He is experienced at managing homeless people, worked at one time at the Weinberg Center of Catholic Charities, and appears to be an alumnus of various addiction programs. He has volunteered to cover 7 to 9 AM Saturday mornings, subject to some conflicts he has in his responsibilities at HUM. He wants to schedule this week to week, through text messaging between him and me. We'll see how this goes.

3. Dealing with problems in the park on Sunday mornings. Father Lawrence's letter implementing the parish council's request that feeders in the park on Sundays confine their activity to after 1:00 PM has not been widely circulated as yet because feeders have not been present during the last three weeks due to our snowy, icy weather. I've personally approached only two groups asking for their help in addressing the Sunday chaos. I've received interesting counter offers that I think we should pursue:

- The guy, who grills on the front street sidewalk, wants to borrow two of our undercroft tables and will put them back wherever we want when he is through. (He has actually been doing this for the last several months) He will start setting up at 12:30, aiming to begin feeding at 1:00. Next week should be a test of this since he only comes the third Sunday of the month.
- The River Christian Fellowship is the largest, most consistent, and best organized of the feeding groups. They generally bring about a dozen people to the park to go one on one with folks drawn to the park. They

said they would be willing to help us cut down on the chaos outside the fence, the double parking and circus-like atmosphere along Front Street, and the crowded steps Sunday during our services. They also asked if they could help clean up the park. I said yes, and expect I will steer them to Saturday and initially one mid-week clean ups since I think they feed Wednesdays. (Weekends generally pose our biggest problem in terms of dumped clothing and food and a real mess in the park.) We haven't finalized anything, but the assumption is that we, over the next few Sundays, will outline responsibilities to test their actions to help organize and control the Sunday morning crowd.

4. Restoring the benches. The committee led by Bob Batta is still reviewing types of plastic lumber and the appropriate hardware (hex head lag screws), whether stainless steel or galvanized for a project in better weather to replace several of the benches in the park. After an initial set of restored benches, we will see how things go and plan doing most of the rest of the 11 benches (99 2 x 3 boards).

5. Self-help in the Park. Residents in the park shoveled paths to all the benches during the snows and now do a decent first cleaning the park, so that upon arrival in the park at 7 AM Sundays there are maybe 4 to 5 barrels with trash out on the curb. Additional cleaning may add 3 to 4 more. One man, Chris, sleeping in the park, with landscaping experience, has inquired about planting a few of the concrete-curb-bound square areas now filled with leaves raked up by the residents; He thinks getting something green and durable in these confined areas would brighten things up a bit—like a Swedish ivy. We'll have to see what might be a practical test of whether this might be worth doing.

6. Storage in the park. Although we've made a lot of progress, with the help of the city in getting rid of the huge amount of stored possessions along the fences, this is still an issue. Some of the most cooperative people in the park in terms of clean up are the biggest hoarders. They move all their stuff out on Sundays but we need a more consistent presence of someone in the park managing things from 7 until 9 every day. Stay tuned as we work to solve this problem, as well as the challenge of dealing people sleeping on the front steps and doors of the church.

Submitted by Michael Kelly

### **Facilities Committee Report to Parish Council**

We have not had a Facilities Committee meeting since our last Parish Council meeting so there is not much to report.

We are still waiting on BG&E to finalize the connections for our electrical upgrade. That should be done some time this month.

The accessibility project will be starting in March.

We submitted an application for a Baltimore Historic Area Small Cap Grant in the amount of \$15,000 for the restoration of the church. We also submitted an application for the Heritage Fund Grant in the amount of \$5000 also for the restoration of the church.

Submitted by Bob Betta

### **Liturgy Committee**

The Liturgy Committee has not met since the last report was provided. Lent is in process with the theme of "This is the time of fulfillment, the Kingdom of God is at hand. The banner was made by the high schoolers of the parish; they are also giving the prayers of the faithful at the 9:30 liturgy each Sunday of Lent. The schedule for Lenten liturgies has been distributed via the bulletins as well as posted on the church website and on a poster in the Gathering Space. Discipleship Cards have been distributed and are being read as the meditation after Communion. Jack Gohn is actively recruiting planners for the Easter Vigil and seems to have most of the hours filled. Jerome Bird has volunteered to produce the Vigil program again. The next Liturgy Committee is scheduled for Saturday, March 14, 2015 from 10 am to noon. We will be completing Easter/Post Easter planning as well as planning for the Summer Series.

Submitted by Valerie Rolandelli

### **Outreach and Engagement Committee**

The Outreach and Engagement Committee has not met since the last council meeting (our next meeting is March 16).

The outside banner is nearly completed and should be installed within the next week or so.

Nothing else new to report.

Submitted by Michael **Keating**

### **Social Action Committee**

Peace & Justice Committee: At the Social Ministry Convocation on Saturday, three parishioners received awards. Two received the Bishop P. Francis Murphy Social Ministry Awards; **Pat Frascati** for Service, particularly for her work for The Resource Exchange (TRE) helping furnish apartments of newly housed individuals, and **Chuck Frascati** for Advocacy, particularly for his work with our Peace & Justice Committee, Pax Christi and inter-faith groups. **Ray Bahr**



received the John Hook Award, a lifetime award for his career as an extraordinary cardiologist and founder of the Society of Cardiovascular Patient Care. He is credited with educating the public about early warning signs of a heart attack and over 20,000 people have completed his course and taken an oath to save a life. In addition to his professional career, he works with Beyond the Boundaries and serves on the Boards of St. James & John School and Friends of Olmsted's Parks. Please congratulate our parishioners!

Due to bad weather "The Throwaways", a documentary on racial justice was postponed so we will let you know when rescheduled. We will join Pax Christi for the Social Action Way of the Cross through town on Good Friday and ask you to join us. We distributed a Social Action Report for 2014.

On March 23, Dr. Rosann Catalano of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies will address a synagogue about our challenges 50 years after Vatican II. She and a Lutheran, Muslim and Rabbi will respond to questions. RSVP by 3/16, \$15 includes lunch. Please consider participating in the CRS Rice Bowl Lenten offering, supplies are in the gathering space.

Emergency Services: The food program gave groceries to 77 families in February and didn't spend anything. They closed for the holiday. The men's program gave clothing in February to 30 men on another cold day and spent \$330.

Friday Dinner: We had the guests wait inside this month since it was bitter cold. Numbers were lower because of it and we only served between 150 - 200 each week.

Jonestown Planning Council: Ronald McDonald House raised \$10 million and expect to break ground in fall at Aisquith and Fayette Streets. Dr. Rhonda Rochetta, Principal of City Springs Elementary/Middle School, still needs construction monies from the city and Councilman Stokes agreed to join her at a meeting to plead her case with the School Board. Joe Cronyn and Lindsay Thompson reported on progress in establishing Historic Jonestown, Inc. as a solid entity to take ownership of the Community Vision plan and implement it, to handle long-term community management issues. JPC will continue as the community organization for outreach and to offer a forum for discussing community issues.

The Resource Exchange: We supplied 8 Health Care for the Homeless clients with furniture and starter kits in February.

Helping Up Mission: HUM men are cleaning the park the first and third Saturdays of each month.

Submitted by Peggy Meyer