

Esplanade Ridge/Treme Civic Association Board Meeting

Minutes

July 1, 2009

ERTCA Board President Matt Norton called meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. at Bill Edwards's residence on Esplanade Avenue.

Board Members present included Marie Marcal, Marva Arceneaux, Matt Norton, L.T. Thomas, Bill Edwards, Rhodesia Douglas and Gregory Douglas. (Hilda Young was not present.)

Special Guest present included Eric L. Cager, Dr. Eugene Oppman representing the Historic Carver Theatre; and Mr. and Mrs. Braden.

Order of Business

1. Update: Carver Theatre- prompted by the City Planning Commission, Oppman returned before the board to seek a letter of support for the acquisition of three (3) properties, which he plans to deconstruct and use for additional parking spaces, up to 14. He mentioned that a squatter, who has rigged electricity to the house from a streetlight, currently occupies one of the properties. He was questioned by several members of the board about the level of his commitment to preserve one of these historically significant and sound structures by either moving them to a vacant location or donating to a church or nonprofit group. Oppman stated that he would only be willing to consider that alternative if the group assumed the cost of relocation. These board members urged him to strongly consider this option as New Orleans traditional architectural heritage is being greatly threatened. M. Marcal asked, "What are you looking for from us?" Oppman stated that he needed a zoning change for conditional use and that he needed to inform supporters of his new intentions for the additional new 14 parking spaces. B. Edwards motioned to support Oppman's request; seconded by M. Arceneaux. The vote was cast 5-2 with M. Marcel and R. Douglas refraining from support due to lack of written information and commitment to preservation of historical properties. After the vote, Cager and Oppman thanked the Board for its letter of support, announced plans for a tentative April 1, 2010 opening and departed.
2. Night Out Against Crime –M. Marcal recapped preparations for the August 4th event in Gayerre Park this year. She prepared 40 grab bags containing ERTCA membership applications, hot sheets, safety information and other goodies for kids. She read off her checklist of food, drinks, flyer distribution, etc.
3. Miscellaneous- M. Norton notified the Board of a list of upcoming meetings for the Entergy grant presentation to Gayerre Park restoration. The meeting then took up the main topic of the night, Bethany House which the Bradens came to participate and discuss.

4. Bethany House/Odyssey House/Unity Project –Mr. Norton announced to the Board that he is requesting himself in the matter as his firm has entered into a contractual relationship on another project with the group proposing a controversial move of an indigent housing facility (group home) on the prominent upscale avenue. Several board members were stunned. The Gulf Coast Housing Partnership consisting of Unity of Greater New Orleans, Common Ground and Odyssey House of Louisiana are moving to convert the former senior citizen’s facility Bethany Home at 2535 Esplanade Avenue into homeless housing. B. Edwards asked, “What’s up?” M. Arceneaux stated that she felt “totally confused.” “They want us to think they have all the pieces, while Midura claims not to know anything.” G. Douglas stated that he just didn’t believe them. M. Arceneaux concurred. B. Edwards digressed into the issue of the firehouse deal and how the provisos was completely ignored (parking, dumpster, etc.). M. Marcal redirected the discussion to the ERTCA general meeting on June 23rd, with Unity presenter Jessica Venegas. Based on the power point document, the intentions of the group are clear and undeniable that they would house ex-offenders, HIV/AIDS patients, and indigent residents for up to 84 people in 42 units. G. Douglas stated that it sounded like a group home as opposed to the multi-dwelling project Unity attempted to pass off to the community. Mr. Braden mused, “If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck.” He went on to further express his bewilderment over the councilwoman Midura’s failure to exercise jurisdiction in the matter as well as the planning commission. Mrs. Braden wanted to know “why the Esplanade Ridge property owners are bound by historical restrictions, yet entities such as the Unity Group are allowed to violate the rules and to destroy the value of our homes?” M. Arceneaux felt that the area, which disproportionately serves indigent groups, has done its part. M. Marcal recommended writing a letter to Unity and copy Midura’s office, zoning and neighborhood associations. R. Douglas agreed to write the letter(s) since board president M. Norton had requested himself.

Meeting adjourned 8:05 p.m.