

## Ward 5 Update

- 1) Approximately 35 residents attended a Ward 5 meeting on April 28th at the Kittredge Center from 6-8PM.
- 2) The agenda included a reservoir tree update by Dave Conti, Manager, Holyoke Water Works. John Barrett, Chairman of the Holyoke Water Works Commission also attended to hear input from the residents near the reservoir. Dave updated the residents on the tree removal at Ashley Reservoir to date and proposed to take down trees on Sunset in 40 feet from the road and plant white pines as a buffer. Q&A followed and residents from Lower Westfield Road and Sunset spoke of specific tree situations and their concerns about safety and the messy condition of the fallen trees. Dave Conti explained the limitations of the department, but also offered to look at the situations described to see what could be done in a couple of the circumstances. Linda thanked John and Dave for attending and meeting with us.
- 3) Bill Fuqua then gave an update to the original design for traffic improvements on Homestead Ave. that had been presented approximately one year ago. He brought detailed charts of the improvements and reviewed each approach and change with the rationale for them. He noted that a bus bay is slated to be built at the Pediatric Center and a sidewalk is planned there also. A Q&A session followed and Bill let us know that the design is available for further review if anyone is interested.
- 4) Francesca Maltese from O'Connell Development Inc. joined our meeting to give an update on the Atlas Copco site. She let the group know that they are seeking a zone change for retail at the site as they did two years ago. In contrast the first proposal, where the anchor tenant could not be identified, Francesca was pleased to announce that her anchor tenant was in attendance tonight. Francesca then introduced Frank Horacek, Vice President Real Estate & Development for Big Y, their anchor store for the project. Her introduction generated spontaneous applause from the audience. Mr. Horacek gave a brief history of the D'Amour family, that they were originally Holyoker's and attended school here and have 60 stores in MA and CT. They have a long history as a local business and a good neighbor where they do business. Mr. Horacek described the project as a store geared to the neighborhood, less than 50,000 sq. feet (as a reference, the Wilbraham store is 63,000) that would employ 150-175 people with 25% full time. They will be investing approximately 12M in the site, would plan to begin construction in 2012 and open in late 2012 or early 2013. A question was raised as to how large the entire project would be. Francesca noted that the current building is 140,000 sq. feet. The new project while not exactly known at this time is estimated to be up to 100,000 sq. ft. Linda noted that it was great that the residents were receiving early notice of the intentions before it hit the press. She complimented Francesca Maltese and Frank Horacek for being forthcoming with their proposal and thanked them for attending the Ward 5 meeting.
- 5) Linda gave updates on the HCC road, Charter Commission and Geriatric Authority.  
Re: HCC road, per Jeff Hayden they hope to begin construction in the fall. They plan to have a light at Sunset and the new road at 202. Some in attendance questioned the need for an additional light at all and felt it would increase the number of cars cutting through on Sunset and Ashley. Linda let the group know that Jeff Hayden is happy to attend our next meeting to discuss the project in more detail.  
Re: Charter Commission: Linda let the group know that the commission had their last meeting this week and that she encouraged the charter to treat all authorities and groups the same in their

recommendations. Sheryl Quinn, a member of the Charter Commission stated they are voting on the final report on Monday May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Re: Geriatric Authority, Linda reviewed her order to declare the land purchased from the GA by the city, surplus so that it can be sold and hopefully developed for market rate housing. Linda stated her position is that each authority needs to be self supporting and that tax payers have the right to know what they are paying for. Members of the Geriatric Authority Steve Kravetz and Sheryl Quinn were in attendance and began a discussion on the economics and questions about the total monies owed. Linda stated that the meeting agenda was not set to discuss that level of detail tonight, but will add it to the next agenda. It was noted that the GA has a reputation for good care and good caregivers, but that the economic problems have been going on for 20 years with 3.2M written off for pensions 10 years ago and now (although debated by the GA) a total approaching 3M (if the cost of the land purchased for 1.2M valued between 240,000-300,000) is included in the total. It was agreed that attendees will bring documentation to support positions to the next meeting for a more detailed discussion.

- 6) Linda then gave a brief overview of the Holyoke City Budget process including how the tax levy limit is set, how the budget is developed and approved and how the tax rates can be affected (growth, spending cuts, consolidation, and renegotiation of benefits (as is being debated in the state budget). A pie chart was provided illustrating the main categories of expenses of the city paid by the taxpayers. The main point is that once the budget is set, all of the rest is math....figuring out in the end how much each of us will pay. With slow growth in the city, any amount of increase in the budget for the city results in tax increases for all tax payers. Linda stated that she believes in accountability for all city departments and is pro growth for the city so the tax burden can be shared. If all of the available approaches are not utilized, then the result will be layoffs as the services/costs become unaffordable for the taxpayers. The main point made is that if residents want to have a say about how much their taxes should or should not increase, NOW is the time, BEFORE the budget is approved. Calls need to be made to the Mayor and City Councilors about the budget during the month of May.

In summary, this was a well-attended, lively meeting with many questions, ideas and answers put forth. While guest speakers were questioned, sometime intensely, they were also applauded for attending and providing information. During the meeting, agenda items identified for the next meeting include:

Atlas Copco/Big Y Update

HCC Road Update (invite Jeff Hayden)

Geriatric Authority discussion/financial review

**THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THIS MEETING! YOUR TIME, INTEREST AND IDEAS  
ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED!**

Linda Vacon, Your Ward 5 City Councilor

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