

From: Larry Ames
To: elist@wgbackfence.net
Sent: 5/14/2011 8:12:16 A.M. Pacific Daylight Time
Subj: WGNA May General Meeting

Hi, all,

I want to thank everyone for their expression of support. After volunteering for twenty years on the Willow Glen Neighborhood Association Board, it hasn't been easy for me to ask you to give WGNA a vote of "no confidence". However, when a number of Boardmembers appoint themselves to be the Nominating Committee, then proceed to nominate themselves to various Officer positions and also position themselves as the next Nominating Committee, that's a conflict of interest. When they then splash my name across the newsletter, thanking me for my work on their committee and making it appear as if I were approving of their actions, that's just too much. No!

This past year, David Dearborn and the WGNA Board have produced a number of quite informative presentations. I, along with many from the community, have enjoyed the change in format and venue, and we've really enjoyed the talks by the various local experts. Excellent speakers all! Well done!

However, those meetings, while friendly, well-produced, and well-attended, have not served the community's needs that are normally fulfilled by a neighborhood association. For example:

- * When the City and a developer held a public meeting a few months back to discuss the hours of operation for Lou's Village, the nearby residents had to all speak on their own behalf.
- * When the Redistricting Commission held its meeting in Willow Glen last week, several hundred residents attended, but many seemed lost, trying to make sense of concepts like "transfer zones" and "census tracts".

In these and other cases, it is the role of a neighborhood association to inform and educate the residents beforehand, to coordinate with them to help arrive at a community consensus, and then to present that consensus at the public hearing. The eList is great for sharing information, but it doesn't speak on behalf of the community: it is "talk to your friends and neighbors over the back fence", and not "talk to City Hall as the representative of the community". It is the responsibility of a neighborhood association to provide its collective knowledge and expertise in dealing with elected officials, city staff, and project developers, and to shape the community's presentation to help give a voice to the many neighbors.

WGNA has not performed well in that role recently. We've been lucky that lately there have been few new developments proposed for the area, but this pause won't last.

Also, WGNA seems to be skirting too close to the edge of the rules:

- * The current Board changed the bylaws to create a seat for a Youth Commission representative. The bylaws specifically state that such an amendment requires a vote by the WGNA membership. They claim that this is only an "Addendum" to the bylaws

- * Without any public discussion, the Board granted free lifetime memberships to every resident of specific building complexes.

- * The official ballot does not include the past WGNA Presidents who had expressed in writing an interest in being on next year's Nominating Committee. The bylaws state that any qualified member who submits his or her name for inclusion on the ballot is to be listed.

- * WGNA's legal and financial affairs are apparently not being attended to. For example, the Attorney General's site gives WGNA's status as "delinquent."

There are too many errors in Jeff Senigaglia's recent post to address. A couple examples:

- * the Board at the end of the 2009-10 session had a lot more than "two standing" -- the Board included Ed Rast (President), Richard Zappelli, David Dearborn, John Kelly, and Bob Mulvany. (I was not on the Board then and I seldom attended the meetings.) The main contention was between two fine gentlemen, Ed and Richard, who interacted with one-another like water and sodium.

- * I was President the previous session (2008-09), with Hugh Graham, Joan Bohnett, Ed, Richard, Jim Carter, Nell Aiello, Harvey Darnell, and others on the Board. (Yes, Ed and Richard were at it even back then, and while someone suggested that my presence may have served as a catalyst, their subsequent behavior shows that that was not the case.) Hugh and I both left the Board at the end of 2008 in order to serve on the newly created San Jose Neighborhoods Commission.

BTW: the WGNA membership high of 1000 occurred around 1995, when I first was President: back then, the Association proactively undertook creative community projects -- graffiti paint-outs, community art projects, and our "Urban Stream Restoration Project of the Los Gatos Creek".

Read the article in yesterday's Willow Glen Resident, read your WGNA newsletter, read Suzy Phillip's long informative post, read past exchanges on the subject if you'd like at www.WGBackfence.net/observations.htm, and decide if you like the way the Association is headed.

Bring your ballot to the WGNA meeting this coming Wednesday at the WG High School.

And thank you all for your support.

~Larry Ames, elected WGNA Nominating Committee member, 2010-11.