

SMILE General Meeting minutes

Wednesday, September 1, 2021

Via ZOOM, online

Main Website

www.SellwoodMoreland.org

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Procedural

www.SMILErecords.org

OFFICERS PRESENT: Simon Fulford, President; Ayomide Nikzi, Vice President; Pat Hainley, Treasurer; Eric Norberg, Secretary

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Elaine O'Keefe, Emily Pitts, Sarah Bunger; Neal Spinler, Zack Duffly, Jim Friscia

SMILE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: David Grigsby, Vikki DeGaa, Lisa Hamilton, Sheila Stachan, Duncan Anderson, Jeannie Botelho, Mark Wilson, Ellen Burr, Dustin Payne, Donna Arasin, Andrew and Kelly Holtz, Cynthia Barrett, Jules McNicholas, Sue ("Board Member 20 years ago"), R. Corless, Amrita Vatsal, Robert Drummey, Doug Bridge, Clare Wilkinson, Lance Goldberg, Randy Koch, David Schoellhamer, Dorie Roth, David Dickson, Brenda Scotton

OTHER GUESTS: Jan McManus, Exec. Dir. WeShine Initiative; Tom Hickey, Bridgeton Neighborhood Assn., and Shelter Now; Matt Lembo, Sunnyside Neighborhood Assn., and Beacon Village; Shaynna Hobson, Transition Projects

President Simon Fulford called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. He began by reviewing, for those attending, the protocols for SMILE's ZOOM meetings, as well as presenting the evening's agenda, and reviewing the minutes of the August 7 SMILE General Meeting. With a quorum present, Simon asked for a motion to approve the August 7 SMILE General Meeting minutes, and Pat Hainley made a motion for "approval as submitted"; Ayomide Nikzi seconded; and President Fulford determined that the motion had passed unanimously.

First on the agenda was a discussion by representatives of our own local Multnomah County "Willamette Center" shelter in Westmoreland, at 5120 S.E. Milwaukie Avenue, at the corner of Mitchell Street. The shelter is run for the county by Transition Projects, and Duncan Anderson, the Manager of that shelter – as well as Shaynna Hobson of Transition Projects – were present. They revealed that the shelter had hosted a total of 317 clients in 2020; 41 were put in permanent housing. Strict rules apply to the clients at the shelter, but they can stay as long as they follow the rules and are actively seeking solutions to their situation; job assistance is included. COVID-19 required reduction of the number of clients by 50%, there and at all other shelters, for safety; outside volunteers were put on hold for months, but the shelter is starting to accept meals and services from volunteers again.

"The population served [at the Willamette Shelter] is getting older; the majority are over 45, and many are over 55," reported Duncan Anderson. Transition Projects also runs the Banfield Shelter in Northeast Portland, which is a former motel; those most at risk from the coronavirus (due to age and/or health) were moved there because there they live in individual units, and thus are less likely to be exposed to the virus. The pair commented that their observations about the older trend in clients at Transition Projects shelters might be at odds with the observations by "Youth Services", which serves the homeless under age 26. A lengthy question and answer period followed.

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to “neighborhood solutions” to the homeless problem, with four guests present: David Dickson, of the Downtown Neighborhood Association; Matt Lembo, of the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association, and “Beacon Village”; Tom Hickey of the Bridgeton Neighborhood Association, and “Shelter Now”; and Janet McManus of the “We Shine Initiative” nonprofit organization.

Tom Hickey started the presentation. He explained that the Bridgeton neighborhood is in North Portland, near Delta Park; he commented, “the city needs to do more to service unsupported homeless camps”. He said he has testified on the matter before the City Council. “Community support of ‘small villages’ is critical to their success,” he remarked. “Neighborhood associations, banding together, can accomplish change.” Some Q and A.

David Dickson said that the Downtown Neighborhood Association has a specific “Homelessness Committee”, since that is the #1 problem downtown. “The committee engages in education, advocacy, and community building.” There are 143 tents and 181 homeless people recorded in the census done downtown – both figures are up 25% since that was done, he said. The Downtown Neighborhood Association is “delivering survival items and building friendships downtown.” Some Q and A followed.

Matt Lembo revealed that the much-publicized homeless problem at Laurelhurst Park has not yet been solved. “40 to 50 homeless forced out of Laurelhurst Park move to Sunnyside Park, and when they are forced out of there, they go back to Laurelhurst Park. This has been going on for years.” The Sunnyside Neighborhood Association has sought to help; it has cleaned up campsites and “gotten acquainted with these people”. Southeast Uplift, Southeast’s nonprofit neighborhood association service coalition, is “on board with the idea of sanctioned homeless camps distributed throughout Southeast Portland”. Matt told of the origin of a small sanctioned homeless camp, “Beacon Village”, being built as ten small housing units on the parking lot of a church in the Montavilla neighborhood; being built are small prefabricated housing units from “Pallet Homes”. Some Q and A followed.

Janet McManus, of the newly formed 501c3 nonprofit “We Shine Initiative”, said she has been a social worker for 40 years. What “We Shine” is doing is similar to what Matt just reported on – establishing, building, and maintaining “micro-villages”, ten small housing units apiece in size. They will provide not only hygiene and other basics, but actual support services, to be distributed all across the area. The plan for these micro-villages is for them all to be on leased private property. They are negotiating to lease their first property at 33rd and N.E. Broadway, but they are still waiting for funding they have applied for before they can proceed. Their vision for the small number of residents of each micro-village is to provide transitional service and assistance finding jobs and permanent homes in the same manner as Transition Projects is doing at their larger shelters. Some Q and A followed.

Simon observed that the time scheduled for the end of the meeting was only a few minutes away, but that he’d found the evening’s focused discussion “intense and valuable”. He promised that there will be further discussion at the upcoming SMILE Board Meeting on September 15, which is always open to the public – and there will be further discussion on this at the next General Meeting on October 6. “Thanks to all who participated tonight.” President Simon Fulford then adjourned the meeting at 9:03 p.m.