

**East Forest Park Civic Association
Minutes for October 8, 2008 Meeting**

Attendance (board members in bold): Richard & Darlene Acchione, Clodo & Teresa Concepcion, Maureen Craig, Ron & Martha Duquette, Elizabeth Eisold, Maria Fatima, Jacque Forsman, **Linda Gallagher**, Jodi Manning, Jeanie Marsh, Antonette Pepe, Melissa Richter (PeoplesBank), Jane Robitaille, Richard Samay, **Shawn Sheehan**, Sandra Shooshan, Seamus Warwick (Rep. Puppolo's Office)

General Session: New Business

Shawn Sheehan, Co-President, administered the meeting. The meeting was called to order at 7:10 pm and announced our guest speakers: School Committee member Antonette Pepe and Sixteen Acres Civic Association President Clodo Concepcion. Not enough board members were present to vote on accepting the September 10th minutes.

Ms. Antonette Pepe spoke and gave a brief introduction and told us that she was a paraprofessional at all levels within the school system for thirteen years. She was the President of the Paraprofessional Union for twelve years. Disgusted with the condition of the schools and the lack of response from Superintendent Burke she decided to run for school committee in 2004.

Ms. Pepe did extensive research on a uniform policy and initially approached the school committee but received no support. She ended up speaking with Dr. Mahoney of the Renaissance School who willingly adopted the policy. Other principals saw its success in this pilot school and were receptive about adopting it. Five years later Ms. Pepe approached the School Committee and they ended up being receptive to the policy. Dr. Ingram quickly communicated the uniform policy to the community through Channel 15 and by the electronic messaging service which called every registered home in the city.

The uniform policy has been accepted by the school community because out of 26,000 students that the district serves, only 30 complaints have been registered. Boys want to add neck ties to their uniform while the girls have been a bit more resistant towards the uniform. Dr. Ingram has even reported that teachers are looking at the students differently as no judgments are being made on dress or appearance. Kids are walking with their heads up high and they also feel like they are a part of something. Ms. Pepe though has had to warn principals about students wearing wrist bands or beads as that may be gang paraphernalia. A Volunteer School Uniform fund was set up for the 700 homeless kids in the school district. Phil Pucia secured 1,000 book bags, pencils, and notebooks for these students; the supplies were distributed by administrators privately.

Ms. Pepe also informed us of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Kensington Avenue Magnet School, Van Sickle Middle School, and Commerce High School. The IB program provides students with a challenging curriculum that is recognized by big name universities and colleges. IB students who successfully complete the program are eligible for scholarships to help pay for schooling. Teachers are also provided with professional development opportunities to be trained to teach the IB curriculum. Ms. Pepe emphasized that not many schools have an IB program because of the extensive requirements and we almost lost this program under Burke.

When a question was asked about truancy, Ms. Pepe informed us that about 700 students are either absent or are late to school per day. To combat this problem, the superintendent is reaching out to church leaders since the police have no power picking up students and transporting them to school. In fact there was an incident at the McDonalds on Allen Street, where Kiley Middle School Administrators were called to disperse students who were skipping school. The administrators had to order the students to walk back to school as they could not directly transport them. Ms. Pepe has said that the Twilight Program no longer exists at Putnam and Central because it was causing large class sizes at these two schools.

Ms. Pepe also reported that more qualified teachers are working in the school district because of Human Resource Director, Mr. James Allfrey, who is insuring that teachers who are on a continual voucher cycle are replaced by qualified, certified personnel.

The District Administrative Office or Central Office has eliminated two assistant superintendents and has begun to streamline and realign positions so that the office better serves the school community. Dr. Ingram has also started a Mentoring Kids program where school staff is paired up with students to act as mentors. The superintendent is also a mentor as well.

Ms. Pepe also talked about Educlean's performance. Before school opened this year, Ms. Pepe toured Brunton School and was absolutely appalled by the cleanliness of a bathroom and ordered it to be shut down. She also toured other schools like Lincoln and Baillet School. She reported that dirt in some schools was swept underneath a rug. Ms. Pepe questions the savings since laid off custodians had to be re-hired to oversee Educlean's staff in cleaning the schools. Ms. Pepe also informed us that the district's cafeteria staff was privatized as well. It is important to note that 97% of the paras, cafeteria workers, and custodians live in Springfield.

The association was notified about the demolition of a portable classroom at Walsh School that was making students and staff sick. Student enrollments were adjusted at other elementary schools to accommodate displaced students.

Ms. Pepe said that there is a new class of minorities in the Springfield Public Schools, the poor. She mentioned that poor does not mean dumb and it isn't a race. She is happy that Dr. Ingram is more responsive to the poor.

Sixteen Acres Civic Association President Clodo Concepcion spoke at our meeting and told us that he was a former leader of his machine shop union who helped save pensions. He told us that he has always been a fighter, and in his retirement, he decided to become a neighborhood activist, instead of sitting on the couch. He joined the Sixteen Acres Civic Association. He fights for the seniors because they deserve everything that they can get. He came from Cuba 52 years ago when he enrolled at St. Michael's College in Vermont. He then went into the Air Force for six years after giving up his student visa.

Mr. Concepcion presented the East Forest Park Civic Association with a plaque of the Greenleaf Community Center in honor of its service to the City of Springfield. He emphasized that Sixteen Acres, East Forest Park, and the Outer Belt Civic Associations need to work together to keep our neighborhoods beautiful.

A petition was also circulated to advocate for the addition of a community room to the Greenleaf Community Center. This room would be used by local area groups so that the gymnasium can be utilized during meetings.

Announcements

Our Next Meeting will be on Wednesday, November 12th at 7:00 pm in the Holy Cross School Cafeteria. Our guest speaker will be Mayor Dominic Sarno.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm. The minutes were submitted by Shawn Sheehan on October 20, 2008.