

Ward 5 Update January 16, 2013

Approximately forty-five (45) residents attended a Ward 5 meeting on January 16th at Mrs. Mitchell's at the plaza at Homestead and 202 from 6:30-8:30PM.

Big Y Project Update: Both the planning department and O'Connell's say that Big Y is still planning to come to Holyoke. There will be no building of the store until the intersection work is done. The timing of the intersection work is in dispute with the developer saying it will be 2015 and the city planning head saying it will be done in 2014. The signing of a year lease by O'Connell's with the Social Justice Charter School for one year beginning in the fall has raised doubts about the Big Y project.

Parking Issue at McMahan School: Neighbors had requested that an order be filed to establish "no parking" in front of the school and near the corners so people can drive on the street safely and emergency vehicles can travel on the street. An order has been filed for the no parking area in front of the school. Signs have been placed on Kane Road and an additional sign has been requested for Knollwood at the end near the school, as cars park right up to the street, reducing visibility for drivers attempting to exit Knollwood on to Kane.

HCC Road Update: The new road at HCC has been approved and construction will begin, probably in the spring. Traffic flow was discussed and it was expressed that people leaving HCC should be taking a right turn only out of that road to avoid cutting through the neighborhood.

Truck issue on Homestead: Following a request to Chief Neiswanger for some follow-up enforcement, residents reported improvement with the truck traffic problem. The new visible signs are also found to be helping this situation. The other issue of engine brake use has also been addressed with signs placed in new locations and a new sign to be added on Homestead Ave near Lower Westfield Road.

Assessors' Certification/Macy's issue: This agenda item was added per constituent request. The information regarding Macy's was provided to the group. The owner had appealed the higher tax rate and it resulted in the large repayment that was in the news. The assessors had not reported the appeal to the auditor in a clear manner so it had not been expected to affect the free cash. At the meeting, it was noted that the current total taxes paid by Macy's is higher than it would have been if the assessors had not initiated a rate change.

Re: the certification issue: The Public Service Committee is still reviewing the situation of Tony Delude who had not obtained his certification for 8 years and had received payment for it. He is currently repaying the money and the committee will recommend any disciplinary action to the full City Council.

Tax Rates/Proposition 2 ½: A general overview of the budget process that results in the tax bill was given. It was clarified that the City Council can only cut the budget, and cannot add or otherwise change line items. It was noted that we are approaching the budget ceiling. Proposition 2 ½ limits the total tax of the city to 2 ½ percent of the total value of the city. Residents were encouraged to contact City Councilors **now** with any budget concerns as the budget will be set in May and June for the next tax cycle.

Other Issues:

Yield sign at 202: An order has been filed to change the "yield" sign at the cut off from 202 to Homestead to a "Stop" sign. It is in Ordinance Committee now.

Traffic blocking the Fire Station: Signs have been put up and single lines have been drawn so the driveway to the fire station on Homestead will not be blocked by traffic. However, drivers continue to block the driveway. A resident who lives across from the station requested that the lines be painted for do not block the box as they are on Northampton Street. It was discussed that a control could be placed in the fire station to turn the light at 202 green for traffic travelling north on Homestead when the alarm is sounded. It was requested that Councilor Vacon look into this.

Homestead Ave crosswalks: The caution light was repaired. Residents requested signs to bring more attention to the cross walks.

Coal Plant: A question was raised about taxpayers having to pick up the lost taxes from the plant. It was explained that as the production has decreased, all taxpayers have been picking up the difference.

Social Justice School: A question was raised about the lease for the school and if it was allowed in the zone and in the charter for the school. Councilor Vacon will look into this.

A constituent requested an opportunity to comment on a Ward 5 matter. All present were offered the opportunity to speak for two minutes. They were reminded that there is a speak-out time at the beginning of each City Council meeting for any resident of Holyoke.

Keith Davis spoke about the Social Justice Charter School. He looked into the philosophy of the school and noted that the Social Justice philosophy is one of Marxism developed by Paulo Freire from Brazil, rather than the typical public school. He noted that this seemed like a strange school to have in Holyoke where we already have a Charter School and only 40,000 people. It was also noted that we just spent millions of dollars to renovate Holyoke High School.

In summary, it was a very well-attended meeting with many good questions and good discussion. I agreed to follow up on some issues, file orders on the fire department issue and follow up with Ward 5 residents at a future meeting.

Linda Vacon,
Your Ward 5 City Councilor