

Menlo Park Neighborhood Association
Meeting: December 14, 2023
Sentinel Building, 320 N. Commerce Park Loop, 6-8 pm

Board members present: Kylie Walzak, President; Anthony Nelson, Second Vice President; Wendy Sterner, Secretary; Liz Martinez, Treasurer; Mamta Popat, Parliamentarian; Liza Grant, Historian & Newsletter; Keren Torres, Celina Soto and Kara Harter, Members at Large

Welcome and Introductions: Neighbors spent the first 20 minutes of the meeting enjoying potluck food and gathering around tables discussing topics of interest and coming up with one or two actionable items to share with the group.

Children youth and families: actionable items:

- find out what TUSD's plans are for the future of Menlo Park Elementary School
- Ask City of Tucson Parks and Rec to keep the lights on over the fields in Menlo Park for the once-a-week family game night in the park

Parks and Open Space:

- Family Park for Barrio Sin Nombre to be put on the city-owned, recently remediated Nearmont landfill, which is on the 1.5 acres recently removed from the IID. Look into using monies left over from BSN street improvements to develop a master plan for the park
- Support efforts to preserve open space along the Santa Cruz River

Traffic and Safety:

- Work with the City to create more crosswalks in the neighborhood, including exploring sources of funding
- Look into research and data about traffic mitigation strategies that encourage safety

Public art:

- Set up a committee review process for proposed public art installations in the neighborhood that includes neighbor agreement that the art is aesthetically pleasing
- Find a definition of Public Art to guide the committee in reviewing proposals

November minutes for approval: Liza moved to approve the minutes, Mamta seconded, the motion was approved unanimously.

Treasurer report: The current balance in the MPNA checking account is \$1635.40; the increase is due to a deposit of cash from t-shirt sales at the 2023 Dia de San Juan Fiesta

Santa Cruz River Urban Wildlife Refuge Coalition Update:

Luke Cole, PhD, with the conservation nonprofit Sonoran Institute, spoke about the progress they are making to conserve open space along the Santa Cruz River. They are partnering with the Wilderness Society and US Fish & Wildlife Dept to create a federally recognized urban national wildlife refuge. The site that initially inspired this work was the threat of possible development of the A Mountain landfill. The land at the base of A Mountain as open space includes habitat for wildlife, birds, and panoramic views of Tucson including downtown. The goal of this project is to build community support and demonstrate that the land is worth federal protection from development. Dr Cole noted that designation as a wildlife refuge does not include express protections for wildlife, and stewardship of the land would require involvement from federal, local and tribal governments. He cited a project called Valle del Oro, outside of Albuquerque NM, which was the first project of this kind in the country, which can serve as a roadmap for this project. There is no "rulebook" for achieving the designation, but the Sonoran Institute and partners are taking grassroots approach to get community buy-in and emotional investment. The federal government must see community desire and acquirable land, two things that are very achievable with this land. We need to show US Fish & Wildlife Department that this is a mature project with significant potential.

Currently the Sonoran Institute is reaching out to communities along the Santa Cruz River and crafting a vision based on community input. They have met with many community organizations and groups already, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly supportive. They are laying the groundwork to build a coalition of volunteers for fundraising, research, and enlisting support of public officials. They already have a lot of support, including a letter of support from Congressman Raul Grijalva. The Menlo Park Neighborhood Association could lend significant support by advocating for preservation of the Santa Cruz River in our neighborhood plan. The “acquisition boundary” for the refuge would be a half-mile buffer of land on either side of the river. Land purchased within the boundary doesn’t affect those who live inside or outside of the buffer zone. Ideally the boundary would be from the Pinal County line at the north end all the way to the Arizona border with Mexico. Tribal lands would not be included in the refuge but remain as tribal lands. Dr Cole asked neighbors to let him know what they think about this project, in particular those who have doubts or don’t like this idea. You can call him at 520-290-0828 ext 2 or email him at LCOLE@SONORANINSTITUTE.ORG

Call to Audience/Announcements

Ward 1:

- Menlo Park neighborhood liaison, Flor, has moved on and they are looking for someone to fill her position.
- The participatory budget process is still happening, you can submit ideas for funding to W1. All ideas submitted will be put on a ballot for people to vote on. Ward 1 is looking for volunteers to be “proposal captains” to sort through proposals over the next month, contact Ward 1 if you are interested.
- The city is working on a Drexel bridge over Santa Cruz River.
- There was question about eliminating or rerouting bus routes through Menlo Park: it’s not going to change based on feedback from neighbors. W1 looking into a north/south route that doesn’t require going downtown and transferring. Will get back to Kylie with proposed route changes and if there will be a second round of public feedback.

Pima County District 5/Keith Bagwell:

- The Board of Supervisors adopted a 13-point budget process to address poverty issues in Pima County, like affordable housing, employment, education. If you’d like to know more, can look at the “prosperity initiative” on the Pima County website.
- Pima County is working to find more funding to help immigrants and asylum seekers as federal funding will run out at the end of March.
- There will be a public forum next Monday night to meet the candidates running for District 3/Sharon Bronson’s seat, as she has stepped down from the Board of Supervisors.

Isabel requested update on prop 407 money for Menlo Park. Kylie said she recently ran into Greg Jackson, who is in charge of Prop 407 projects. He told her that Phase 2 items have all been addressed: repairing and replacing the pool stairs, painting & renovating pool house and deck, and draining and resurfacing the pool. Phase 3 hasn’t started yet, but you can look up the schedule online.

Liza moved to adjourn, seconded by Keren.

Next meeting: Thursday January 11th 2024