

**All You Ever Wanted to Know About Evanston City
Government
. . . But Didn't Know to Ask**

*The Local Government Committee, which includes the Observer
Corps, provided the following program for
the Evanston League's Annual Meeting on May 19, 2009.*

Introduction – (Sue Brady): This is a good time for League members to review what they know about City Government – we've just been through a municipal election which resulted in a new Mayor and five of nine new aldermen. And our League is just completing a first-ever cooperative study with the City, in which we reviewed and made recommendations about Evanston's 37 Boards and Commissions.

The Local Government Committee meets the third Friday morning of each month, except for July and August. We have 14 or 15 members, and would welcome more. We observe the City Council, the Planning and Development Committee, the Administration and Public Works Committee, the Human Services Committee, and the Rules Committee. I serve as convenor of the group and I can be reached at suebrady1@comcast.net or 847-869-0873.

A few members of the group tonight will be highlighting for you the following:

The Boards and Commission Study --- Jessica Feldman

Affordable Housing and Downtown Development --- Nancy
Bashook

It's Not ALL About the Tower --- Ruth Singer

Evanston's Financial Picture --- Sue Calder

Procedural Issues the Observers Have Identified --- Jan Otwell

What's Ahead --- Sue Brenner

The Boards and Commission Study - (Jessica Feldman):

As the League's co-chair, who worked closely first with the City Law Department staff co-chair Brad Yatabe followed by Elke Purse, I was asked to give you an overview of the work of the City/League Review of Boards/Commissions and Committees. For this report I will refer to the shortened B/C/C or B/C/C Committee.

As many of you may recall, in May 2006 members of the LWV Evanston joined with the City of Evanston staff on the Boards/Commissions/Committees Review Committee to fulfill the charge of Goal 9 of the City's then recently adopted Strategic Plan "to more

effectively utilize the City's boards and commissions." The actions of the committee were aimed at producing B/C/Cs that are credible, productive, and which improve the quality of life for Evanstonians through the selection of qualified candidates. The original time line was expected to be 18 months. However, we just recently completed our work.

So what took us so long, you ask? Shortly after the Review Committee initiated its work, the City staff size and morale was reduced as the City entered a period of uncertainty and stress created by the rollout of the early retirement package with its consequential contracting employee base. City staff attention became distracted. But even though the Committee's pace slowed, at times almost to that of a snail, the Committee, which initially split its work among four sub-committees, retained its substantial workplan: developing and administering four questionnaires to staff, B/C/C members, and citizens not currently sitting on a B/C/C; studying the enabling legislation, reviewing and analyzing the questionnaires' responses and all the other data collected; producing reports with issues based on the reviewer's findings for each of the 36 B/C/Cs. These individual findings were reviewed to identify issues which applied both to individual B/B/Cs and to those across all of them. We developed recommendations that would foster the inclusion of Best Practices gleaned from other cities.

Two reconfigured sub-committees then developed two programs: one that refined/redesigned the recruitment/appointment process for filling vacancies and the second created an orientation/training program to assure well prepared B/C/C members, chairs and staff. Finally the last reconfigured committee drafted the final report.

And now you ask, what did all this effort conclude? First, although there was an initial expectation that many of the B/C/Cs could be eliminated, the committee found that that was not the case. With very few exceptions the existing individual mandates were still relevant and fit well into the City's B/C/C structure. And the mandates of the few exceptions could, by reassignment, continue to be fulfilled. During the period of the committee's work one board, the Flood and Pollution Control Board, was terminated by then City Manager Julia Carroll. Both the Review Committee and all the members of this board concurred with this action as the work of this Board was virtually completed.

Second, while by and large, the B/C/Cs accomplish what they are directed to do, the committee developed 12 broad General Recommendations that can be of value across the whole spectrum of B/C/C activity. These addressed operations: agendas, quorums, terms, minutes, reporting, self assessment, use of technology, relationship with City Council, and an overarching City policy.

Specific recommendations fall into several categories: 1) combining two B/C/Cs into one stronger, broader-scoped B/C/C; 2) conducting a group self-assessment to update responsibilities of that particular B/C/C, and 3) improve the logistics and schedule for each B/C/C to make it operationally more member and citizen friendly.

Lo these many months later, beginning with the assistance of the original 21 member committee but in the end dependent on the mostly patient perseverance and active involvement of League members Sue Brenner, Jan Otwell, and Karen Telser and City committee members Elke Purze, Leslie Murphy, and Cheryl Schrader-Chukwu, we have completed the final report. It is now in the hands of the interim City Manager and on the cusp of being ready for submission to the Rules Committee of the Council and then to the B/C/Cs, the staff, the League, and the public.

Affordable Housing – (Nancy Bashook):

A common item that appears on Planning and Development committee meeting agendas is funding requests from Community Housing Development Organizations, which are called CHDOs. These organizations are not-for-profit affordable housing groups under the federal affordable housing assistance program called the HUD HOME Program. The funds are used to rehabilitate buildings and support the administration and operation of these groups. Fifteen percent of Evanston's HOME funds must be allocated to these organizations for the construction or rehabilitation of rental and condo units. We currently have five CHDOs operating in Evanston, and we depend on them to develop affordable housing. These organizations run a very tight operation.

Units have been sitting vacant in Evanston for more than a year for lack of buyers willing or able to obtain mortgage financing. The federal regulations are very restrictive for purchasing a condo unit. To qualify for affordable housing, buyers must earn less than 80 percent of the area's median income, or \$60,000 for a family of four. If they earn somewhat more or less they do not qualify. This restricts the number of people who do qualify for these dollars. That's part of the reason we have many vacant units.

In this economy, lenders have become pickier about borrowers and buyers have grown anxious about taking on mortgage commitments. The aldermen are concerned about how we prevent these CHDOs from going into foreclosure. Recently, HUD HOME funds were approved for a big marketing effort to help developers sell the condo units by June 30, 2009.

Much of the discussion and controversy amongst the P&D Committee is whether CHDOs are the most effective way to use affordable housing dollars. They are concerned that not enough people are being served by these projects. The Committee voted to establish a task force to develop a comprehensive plan for affordable housing in Evanston.

708 Church Street and Downtown Plan - (Nancy Bashook):

I'm sure you're all familiar with the Downtown Plan and the planned development at 708 Church Street – also known as the TOWER. I'll briefly take you through the process by which both of these were approved by the Planning and Development Committee.

The 708 Church Street proposal began when the developer submitted a zoning analysis to the Plan Commission in April, 2007. After six meetings, the Plan commission recommended the development to the P&D Committee in March, 2008. The proposal was to construct a 49 story residential tower with 218 units and about 29,000 sq. feet of retail and office space. The proposal also included public benefits.

There was a special meeting called for March 17, 2008 to address the concerns of the public and the aldermen about the proposal. You've all heard the arguments about height, zoning issues, over-saturation of condo units, relocation of current tenants in the building, and not enough public benefits, among others. This reminds us of the controversy over the movie theatre that everyone was against. We thought that development would be the end of Evanston but it has proved to be a very successful economic development, selling over a million tickets a year.

At the March 24 P&D meeting, the developer asked for a continuance in order to revise plans. And on April 8 they came back with the new plan designed for a reduced height of 38 stories.

At a special meeting on May 7, the project was tabled until after approval of the Downtown Plan.

In November there was a request to approve the draft downtown plan. The planning stage actually began three years earlier. The consultants presented the plan using all the information gathered from the community. At the next P&D meeting on November 24, citizen's comments were heard, and on December 8 the proposal was held in committee.

At the special meeting on January 14, 2009, the aldermen reviewed all the issues within the plan and votes were taken on each. Some of the decisions were:

- 1) To establish a central core bounded by Sherman, Orrington, Church and Davis with a maximum building height of 35 stories
- 2) To approve the base height in the central core district of 25 stories
- 3) To explore redesigning Fountain Square
- 4) To further study Bookman's Alley and Benson Street Market Place

January 26 the Committee voted to approve the concept of new and expanded parks and perhaps locating the Civic Center downtown.

And, finally, on February 9, the Committee voted by 6-3 to adopt the downtown plan as amended.

Now we're back to 708 Church Street. On March 3, there was a special meeting where the developers explained that they had considered the Downtown Plan when modifying the building height to 35 stories with setbacks that conform to the downtown plan. They highlighted some changes to their proposed public benefits, which includes a \$1 million donation to the City toward the rehabilitation of Fountain Square. The Committee voted 6-3 to approve the downtown plan proposal as amended.

The approval process for 708 Church Street took two years. From April 2007 to March, 2009 there were: 6 Plan Commission meetings and 7 P&D Committee meetings for a total of 13 meetings on the topic. And there were five meetings within a three month period to discuss the downtown plan just this past year.

Not everything was about "The Tower" – (Ruth Singer):

1200 Davis formerly owned by United Methodist Church will be the new home of Roycemore.

1000 Central (Reviewing stand for the 4th of July parade)– National College's program for PACE (Professional Assistance for Education) for challenged adults was approved after some modifications were made to the dorms and classrooms.

OTR (Over the Rainbow) at Hill Arboretum. (Formerly the Elizabeth Hill Hospital which served the black community for many years as blacks were not welcome at Evanston or St. Francis hospitals) asked for \$366,000 for rehab which was approved after an alley blockage was corrected.

912-46 Pitner (across Main St. and just north of Sam's) asked for a zoning change from industrial to mixed use to add additional parking spaces. Nels Johnson, the landscaper, was against the change. He felt it was an encroachment on his business. There is currently residential property in the area (Ald. Jean-Baptiste's parents live there) and the Committee approved the zoning change.

631-749 Chicago Avenue (at Kedzie) is the current home of the Salvation Army, and the former home of the Pony shop). The developer is planning a rental property with retail stores that will generate \$950,000(?) retail taxes.

222 Hartrey – Orthodox Jewish School was proposed for this site (which has been vacant for six years) but was not approved as the building would be taken off the tax rolls. The developer is planning to sue the City.

Much of 2007-2008 was spent working with developers who had plans for PUD's (Planned Unit Developments) in Evanston. The playing field has changed.

There are questions of LEEDS and if the developer is required to retroactively change his LEEDS rating when the project begins.

1700-22 Central (former home of the Evanston Theater)–given a 2 year extension.

Kendall College site slow down (**1717-25 Sherman, 1710 Orrington**)–given a 3 year extension.

708 Church given a 4 year extension.

1881 Oak, a condominium project that was brought to P&D by Mr. King and Carole Properties in June of 2006 was given an extension to July 2008 and then another 2 year extension to July 2010.

In 2007 another Carole property at **1890 Maple** (corner of Maple and Emerson) proposed a mixed use commercial and rental property. The developers offered \$150,000 in affordable housing funds which was later reduced to \$50,000 to the City. Trader Joe's said the commercial space

with a curb cut met their needs, then they backed out. The Committee approved removal of the parking meters on the south side Emerson (which developer will pay for). Emerson will be turned into a four lane highway. More residential units were added with no additional height.

The developer was then given tax breaks on the sales tax revenue generated by a proposed grocery store for the cost of subsidizing the rent rate to attract a grocer and would reimburse the developer for half the city's portion of the incremental real estate tax revenue generated by the new development over a 20 year period.

The vote was 5 to 4 Aldermen Wollin, Jean-Baptiste, Holmes, Tisdahl and Rainey voted for the measure. The supporters argued that the tax breaks will help get the project off the ground at a time of economic uncertainty when other projects have stalled, and that if the project doesn't succeed the city will not have to make any payments to the developer

West Side Plan still in discussion.

Some projects have not asked for extensions, i.e., 1603 – 1629 Orrington (retail stores) and 1717-1725 Sherman (the Orrington Hotel garage), 959 Dobson.

Foreclosures will be a large topic and continuing topic this coming year. Condos foreclosed in multi-unit buildings, abandoned homes and no outside maintenance, etc. In 2007 there were 179 foreclosures; in 2008 there were 278 foreclosures; and in just the first quarter of this year there have already been 91 foreclosures and many units are in pre-foreclosure. Hopefully, the stimulus package will be used to help alleviate this situation.

Evanston's Financial Picture – (Sue Calder):

The following provides a summary version of the City budget by funds, the number of City employees budgeted, the unfunded liability in police and fire pensions, some proposed projects for stimulus funding, and an explanation of Tax Increment Financing.

City Budget:	General Fund	\$89,669,200
	Capital Fund	7,821,016
	Other Funds	<u>97,490,816</u>
	Total	\$233,822,830

# Employees	City	Police	Fire
2008-2009	855.03	220.75	112
2009-2010	839.27	218.5	111

Police and Fire Pensions (in millions)

Total unfunded liability by 2033: \$145.8 million

Annual Funding: in 2010, \$12.9; in 2033, \$29.3; in 2034, \$16.0

Stimulus Money

Top 5 Capital Projects

Evanston-Wilmette Water Interconnection	\$6,860,000
Heated Intake System	\$456,000
Rehab Water Plant	\$4,250,000
Robert Crown Center	\$20,500,000
Police Grants	\$1,350,000

There are many other projects out of other pots.

Tax Increment Financing

TIF is a tool to use future gains in taxes to finance the current improvements that will create those gains. When a public project is carried out, there is often an increase in the value of surrounding real estate, and perhaps new investment. This increased value generates increased tax revenues – the tax increment. Tax Increment Financing dedicates tax increments within the district to finance debt issued to pay for the project. TIF is designed to channel funding toward improvements in distressed or underdeveloped areas where development would not otherwise occur. TIF creates funding for public projects that may otherwise be unaffordable to localities. The life of a TIF, by law, is 23 years.

- Downtown II - Theaters, Sherman Garage; being retired this year
- Southwest TIF – Sam’s
- Southwest TIF II – Howard/Hartrey (Target, etc.)
- Washington National – The Park, Whole Foods
- Howard Ridge – rental building on Howard
- West Evanston – just getting started

Procedural Issues the Observers Have Identified – (Jan Otwell):

League observers always try to put themselves in the place of the citizen to see if government is working in the most productive manner. Each observer wears a large button identifying her- or himself as a League member. While we write up a report about what happened at each meeting, we feel that it is as important that government officials know that someone is watching them. These are some of the issues

LWVE's observers have noted that have persisted over the last few years. We have focused on procedures rather than issues.

- Council meetings, which are scheduled to begin at 8:30 p.m., seldom begin on time. This is often due to the late adjournment of committee meetings which precede the full Council meeting. The evening thus is very long, often running from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. or so if the Council has an executive session. Aldermen and staff cannot be expected to be at their best for the decision-making on the important issues before the City. (*The new Council has attempted to address this by a proposed change of schedule.*)
- Committee chairs should work with staff to plan an agenda which could reasonably be covered in the allotted amount of time. He or she should then, to the extent possible, exert some control over the flow of the meeting itself as well as over long speeches which frequently unduly lengthen the meeting.
- In committee meetings, when a vote is taken that is not unanimous, the chair should ask for an oral roll call so citizens, both those in the room and those watching on television know how the vote went.
- Agendas should be available in sufficient quantity to the public at each meeting.
- Issues agreed on in committee are put on what is called the Council's consent agenda which is passed simply by a voice vote in Council meetings. These issues should be briefly summarized for the audience in the room and over the air who otherwise would have no idea how these issues were dealt with.
- Aldermen should listen carefully to citizen comment. While this is not a place for dialogue, it is an opportunity for citizens to be heard publicly on any topic. This citizen comment period should be extended to meetings other than the Council.
- Members should always use microphones, should make sure they are turned on, and should speak directly into them.
- If presentations are to be made either in the Council chamber or in one of the committee rooms, care should be taken to make sure the citizens as well as the aldermen can see and hear the presentations.
- Council members should conduct themselves in a spirit of good will and civility.

What's Ahead– (Sue Brenner):

Tonight you have heard how Evanston works, what problems it has faced this fiscal year and the role that League has played in observing our local

governmental bodies. The City has many issues to consider in the coming year and the observers will be watching and speaking out issues that are important to the Evanston League.

They include:

- Observing the changes made by the rules committee to the size of the Planning and Development Committee
- Observing how the new City Council works together amongst themselves and with city staff
- Observing the hiring process for the new city manager
- Encouraging use of the new orientation manual for members of boards and commissions as well as the aldermen. The manual includes information about the Open Meetings Act and Robert's Rules of Order
- Continuing to encourage the implementation of the Strategic Plan- only two goals out of 13 have been addressed so far
- Watching what happens with the Affordable Housing Task Force
- Following decisions about the installation of AT&T boxes on parkways
- Following the debate about payment in lieu of taxes for not-for-profits which own property
- Watching how the new zoning plans work including form based zoning
- Watching issues around the City's financial situation- a quarterly report is due out soon. How will this affect City staff and City services?

There is a lot happening in our City. Join us by becoming a member of the Local Government Committee. For more information call Sue Brady, committee coordinator, at 847-869-0873.