

## Wicker Park Committee

General Membership Meeting Wicker Park Lutheran Church, May 4, 2005

Alvin Joyner, president, presided, and immediately introduced our guest speaker, 1<sup>st</sup> Ward Alderman Manny Flores. (Alderman Matlak, of the 32<sup>nd</sup>, was also invited; a representative from his office accepted and confirmed but failed to show.)

**Alderman Flores:** The Alderman began by calling to everyone's attention printed material he'd brought with him and announced that new city vehicle stickers would be available for purchase at his office at 2058 N Western one day only, June 20. He advised everyone to appeal their property taxes every year, saying that "it can't hurt." (If anyone is interested in attending property tax workshops, they should contact Raymond in his office.) He also issued a reminder that the 17<sup>th</sup> annual citywide "Clean & Green" volunteer clean-up would be held on Saturday, May 14.

The Alderman said that developer interest in Milwaukee Avenue continues to grow; by and large the commercial projects under consideration or in the works are in keeping with and characteristic of the historic district. A number of national retailers have expressed interest, including Urban Outfitters, G Star Denim, and Scoop, which, the alderman said, he sees as a very positive step forward, and reassured everyone that he is as always sensitive to the historically significant architecture along Milwaukee.

In other developments, he praised the new library as "state of the art," and told us about the new park that will be sited at Wabansia and Leavitt. The demolished recycling center at 1800 N Milwaukee will be redeveloped as commercial/residential.

Then the alderman took questions.

The first member to rise to his feet praised the alderman and thanked him for all that he'd done in his two years in office, to which the alderman replied that he did it all with the indispensable support of his committed staff and with help from concerned residents of the 1<sup>st</sup> ward.

A number of members expressed concern about the development of Milwaukee Avenue - that if the national retailers come, it will become, as Ted Vardell put it, "a Disneyland version of a hip neighborhood." Craig Norris worried that, though the alderman's sensitivity was much appreciated, the historic buildings were still at risk and asked if the Milwaukee streetscape could be landmarked.

The alderman countered with what he called a "pipe dream" for addressing the foot traffic and parking problems on Milwaukee, a grand scheme for building multi-level parking structures and widening the sidewalks.

While the demolition of neighborhood recycling centers seemed to most and in most ways to be a good thing for the neighborhood, some members pointed out that at least

when they were there you could be sure your recyclables were being recycled by the legions of people trolling the alleys with shopping carts. A few questions were raised as to the efficacy of the blue bag program and whether or not the alderman had any ideas for improving the recycling in the city. He said that he had indeed put some thought into it, and then he challenged the committee to take a lead in establishing mini neighborhood recycling centers, which would not only process cans and bottles, etc., but in doing so could actually raise some money for neighborhood charities and projects.

Other members rose to complain about pigeon droppings under the viaduct at Milwaukee and Leavitt; to inquire about the status of outstanding contracts with city workers; to grumble that a certain building wasn't on the city's tax rolls. The alderman took note and responded fully to all questions and comments. When we'd taken up far too much of his time, Alvin said we ought to let him go.

**Antique and Junque Sale:** Mark Sutherland reminded everyone that the sale will be held on June 18 and asked for volunteers to distribute flyers and posters. He announced that maps would be given free to shoppers.

**Communications:** Gordon said that the first quarterly newsletter had been printed and mailed to members and that he was now working to upgrade the WPC website.

**Association House:** Teddy Vardell and Craig Norris updated the membership on the latest developments in the fight to protect the Association House playground. A vote taken at a recent Landmarks Commission meeting supported in theory the appropriateness of building on the land. Meanwhile, Craig and others are contesting the "procedure and substance of what happened" at that meeting. Craig claimed that the Near North Montessori school showed interested in the site but were discouraged from going further. An article due to appear in the reader the next day should help to clarify matters. "It's Not Over," he said.

**Miscellaneous Business:** Mark Amundsen reported on the last CAPS meeting and was pleased to announce that the biggest concern expressed there was that people were feeding pigeons in the park, resulting in lots of pigeon dung. He said that the beats are upbeat. At that point another member remarked that there had been active drug dealing in the wee hours on Pierce, right around the corner from the church, and Mark took note.

Before adjourning, Alvin asked for a volunteer to head up a recycling effort, as Alderman Flores suggested. When no one leapt to their feet, Alvin sent us all marching home.

Respectfully submitted, Laura Hunt, secretary.