

York Neighborhood Association General Membership Meeting

Norway Hall—1419 North Forest Street

October 25, 2023 Minutes

Approved: Motion 2024-01-25.1 ✓

Present: YNA Board members Colin Beazley (President), Chris Donaldson (Vice President), Opie Knechtel (Treasurer), Mark Ellis Walker (Secretary), Élan Engel, Tom Scott, Megan Doyle, Kevin Cussen, and about 20 or so community members (including City Council member Lisa Anderson and Anne Mackie, plus guest speakers Ellie Duncan (York Neighborhood Garden) and Erin Vonnahme (Bellingham Food Bank) and guests Russ Whidbee, Kim Lund, Liz Darrow, Dan Hammill, and Jon Scanlon.

Excused: Jeremy Ferrera.

Called to order at 6:30pm by Colin with general introductions of community members.

1. Introductions and Quick Updates

After Colin had all the Board members in attendance introduce themselves, he presented an overview of some of the Board's activities and events of this summer. These included a recap of the annual picnic held on September 10, which saw around 120 York neighbors in attendance throughout the event and featured terrific live music by the band Wild Geese of the West in addition to the kids' talent show, piñata, and hot dogs courtesy of Nelson's Market. Dumpster Day, held on June 24th, was a big success and very popular, with the dumpster filled by 10:00.

As an update on the YNA's Small and Simple Grant from the City of Bellingham for the creation and installation of bulletin boards at our two parks, he noted that the Parks Department had now poured the concrete foundations for them and will be installing them in the coming month. Also, Rock Hill Park is now next in line for the Parks Department's anticipated renovation of it; they'll soon be polling the neighborhood about what features are wanted.

The York Yard Crawl, which is not a YNA-sponsored event, took place on the afternoon of July 29. This neighborhood-wide festival of yard parties featuring art, yard sales, music, and activities for kids of all ages was started in 2018, inspired by the Sunnyland neighborhood's very popular Sunnyland Stomp event. Megan has been working with its founder, June Hathaway, to have the YNA take a more active role in next year's event. To that end, she's already gotten Kulshan Brewing Company signed up as a sponsor. It was noted that one thing learned from this year's York Yard Crawl that the YNA could help with is that there was a need for port-a-potties and hand-wash stations.

2. York Neighborhood Garden

Guest speaker Ellie Duncan of the York Neighborhood Garden (recently featured in the YNA's Yorker newsletter) talked about their history and activities. Since she became its manager recently, the garden has become a project of the Center for Community Learning at Western Washington University (WWU), primarily serving SeaMar Community Health Centers' local services and is intended to be a student-focused platform for learning together. They're hoping to open up some

plots for community use next year; there's also a chicken co-op mostly managed by the garden's founder, Mary Loquvam.

They hold work parties and events such as an upcoming cider-pressing celebration (with local apples, albeit pressed off-site prior to the event because of legal requirements regarding food safety). These are posted on their website and social media.

3. Food Rescue / Gleaning Concept

Erin Vonnahme of the Bellingham Food Bank presented an idea for a gleaning/food-rescue project we might explore—maybe a gathering event followed by a drop-off of results at the Food Bank and elsewhere needed—to make use of the neighborhood's occasional bumper crops such as this year's abundant apples.

4. Caroling Party Planning Status

Tom reported that the annual Holiday Party and Caroling Wagon Rides are scheduled for December 9, a date established in advance so that he could reserve the wagon in a timely fashion. The event organization is just getting started, but it's likely we'll be working with the usual partners, such as Nelson's Market as host and the Food Bank as beneficiary of donations. Probably we need a new contact for school choir participation. Megan says that she has booked local contemporary-Celtic folk-music band Gallowglass to play, as they have an album coming out on the 17th and will want to promote that.

5. Candidate Fireside Chat

The remaining hour of the meeting was reserved for an opportunity for candidates in the upcoming local elections (November 7) to talk about the role of neighborhoods in the city and answer questions about their platforms and priorities. Because Neighborhood Associations cannot sponsor candidates, Colin chose to respond to candidates who reached out with interest in joining a York meeting and did not conduct a broad outreach.

The candidates present for this were Kim Lund (for Mayor), Liz Darrow (for City Council Ward 3), Dan Hammill (for reelection to City Council Ward 3), and Russ Whidbee (for City Council Member-at-Large). City Council member Lisa Anderson, who is running unopposed for reelection to Council Ward 5, was present but not as part of the panel. Jon Scanlon (for Whatcom County Council-at-Large Position B) arrived near the end of the meeting and spoke briefly.

After general introductions and presentation of the candidates' views on Bellingham's neighborhood representation and York's own character, Colin invited the candidates to briefly outline their platforms and priorities. General themes included: Bellingham's housing crisis and the need for affordable housing not just to be in the works but actively addressed now in novel ways, the ongoing crisis of fentanyl use and both creating and supporting groups responding to it, public safety and the need for resumption of foot and bike police patrols (especially downtown), climate resiliency, and the wish that the City Council be more of a revolving door between the City and neighborhood associations than the more unilateral "report out" style of the current administration.

The floor was then opened for questions, and five Yorkers presented the candidates with questions and concerns they wanted to know how the candidates would address if elected. The main concerns were about housing affordability and availability, how to improve residents' ability to participate in City governance, enforcement of rental code requirements in the face of landlord code violations, and a request for elected officials to be more present among their constituency. Each of the four candidates responded, agreeing that these issues were real and present in Bellingham and should indeed be addressed with more initiative and vigor than current City administration was showing.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:10pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mark Ellis Walker, Board Secretary.