

Meeting Summary for May 18, 2009

By Rick Callihan, Dunwoody Resident

Bonser and Heneghan absent

Public Comment:

- I opposed the amendment to allow non Dunwoody residents to serve on committees
- Dunwoody Preservation Trust and Dunwoody Woman's Club opposed having art festival within three weeks of Lemonade Days. (see more on this issue below)
- Someone complained about the signage (House For Sale, Painting, etc) in right-of-ways along Mt Vernon Road (see below on MORE signs for Dunwoody)
 - Mayor Wright directed staff to have a sweep of area and remove signs
- Someone complained (as John H noted here) that the "spirit of the law was violated" by not informing area residents of new zoning issues. His issue was the city (or committee) did a poor job of notifying 500 area residents of a hearing/committee meeting. He suggested that all residents within 1000 feet of a proposed zoning change be notified by mail and that larger signs (at location of zoning change).

Dunwoody Arts Festival Presentation

- Probably the most interesting part of the meeting
- The presenter painted a picture with words of a May 2010 Arts Festival for Dunwoody. The festival would have about 180 vendors on Chamblee Dunwoody Road (road will be closed for 900 feet from closed gas station down past Dun Chamber of Commerce)
- Dunwoody Preservation Trust (DPT) and Dunwoody Woman's Club (DWC) both spoke against the proposed date, claiming three weeks apart was too close. DPT & DWC feel that Lemonade Days and Dunwoody Arts Festival would compete for the same sponsors and someone would lose sponsors (that someone perhaps being Lemonade Days based on their concern)
- Councilman Ross was DTP and DWC's biggest defender at the meeting, insinuating that Dunwoody "will lose volunteers" if the Arts Festival is put on within three weeks of Lemonade Days. Ross recalled the hard work of the DWC and members of the DPT in making Dunwoody a city. I think he feels that somehow the city owes these groups something (as in no competition).
- It seemed that the DPT and DWC representatives in attendance were taken by surprise when the Arts Festival organizer answered "Yes" to Councilman Ross' question, asking her if she would personally profit from the event. Based on reaction from some it seems as no person should spend many hours organizing an event and make a profit.
- Mayor Wright was concerned there may not be enough sponsor money to support both events. Shortal and Wittenstein seemed supportive of a new event for Dunwoody. Shortal commented that he'd like to see events every weekend in Dunwoody. Ross was obviously opposed to a spring Arts Festival. Part of me thinks that if DPT or DWC had presented this first, he'd been OK with it. Taylor reserved comment on the issue.

- Councilman Ross said he spoke with DeKalb Tourism Board and they told him an Arts Festival would have very little impact on hotel business. I'd like a second opinion on that. If what Councilman Ross said is accurate is it any wonder why Dunwoody will replace the DeKalb Tourism Board?

It seems as Council is in a haze right now on new events for the city, especially until the Dunwoody Convention & Visitors Bureau issue is resolved. At one point we have council folks watering at the mouth for more events, bringing in visitors to Dunwoody hotels and businesses, branding the City of Dunwoody as a place to go and visit (and spend money). Then we have the same council concerned about the lack of business support (sponsors) for such events. It was quite disturbing that some on Council would even consider a buffer of sorts for Lemonade Days. If they (the people organizing Lemonade Days) feel they deserve more than a three week buffer on events, they are essentially blocking out NINE weeks of the year (four weeks prior, the weekend of LD, and four weeks post event) where no events with sponsorship can be held in Dunwoody. I'm sure the new Convention and Visitors Authority for Dunwoody will enjoy explaining to potential event organizers why there is a two month block when nothing aside from Lemonade Days can occur.

PUBLIC HEARING

Dunwoody Convention & Visitors Bureau

Lots of important men in suits showed up to speak in regards to this so I guess it's a big issue. Prior to the meeting I knew nothing about it but now and I think I do. The City collects money (taxes) from hotels' guests and the state law says some of that money needs to be spent to promote the hotels and tourism. Looks like the City needs to choose between a 501(c)6 or a city-appointed Authority (a committee appointed by mayor and council to decide how to spend that tax money). Both would be made up of probably nine members. But who those nine are (and how they are appointed) is the big issue.

At stake here is not much money. The City of Dunwoody VCB will be working with a few hundred thousand dollars and has Perimeter Mall parking lot, Brook Run, and a farmhouse to work with, whereas the City of Atlanta (the former director of Atlanta's 501(c)6 was a speaker at the meeting in support of a 501(c)6 model) works with tens of millions of dollars and works with the World Congress Center and America's Mart.

I think the Council is split on Authority vs. 501(c)6. The big concern here is if the mayor is willing to allow an outside person (director of the 501(c)6) to appoint the board? It all comes down to power and control. I think council will want to keep a strong control of those tax dollars at first. The 501(c)6 folks counter that the agreement of establishing a non-profit board is a one year deal, renewable (or not) every year. With the council's brief history of who it appoints to committees it seems the Authority option will allow council to sleep better (knowing that neighbors and spouses and perhaps themselves will be on the Authority). In summary, there's not much money and not much to promote so I think the council will go against those men in suits and establish an Authority.

Since Dunwoody does not have a civic center or a convention center (the Ravinia does have some conference rooms) I am puzzled at this huge discussion. On one side we have a councilman wanting to banish any competition for Lemonade Days, then later discussing the importance of establishing the VCB. Without a large convention center in Dunwoody (we do not even own our own parks yet) the VCB will be in charge of attracting metro Atlanta folks to our restaurants and festivals (if any are allowed) and then trying to lure convention visitors from Atlanta out to Dunwoody. I love Dunwoody, but no one from out of state will make a special trip here to visit the Farmhouse, shop at Perimeter Mall, and eat at McKendricks.

Events like last weekend's Beer Fest will attract people and put people in hotels, and either way Council goes, I hope we see more local events. I am just not sure where they will be held.

Adopt –A-Spot program

Businesses and non-profits and homeowner's associations can apply for a piece of dirt to call their own. They will pay a fee (\$325?) so that they can place a sign (yes, more signs. But these signs will be OK since they are Government signs, not pesky ugly signs from businesses) advertising their business. These applicants will also make the piece of land attractive enough so that their name on the signs will let people know they want to make our city more attractive. Three concerns for this program:

- Please keep DHA out of it. I think DHA has assumed responsibility for this in the past (without legal authority probably)
- Who decides who gets what spot? If more than one applicant wants a certain area will we need an Adopt-A-Spot committee to decide who gets it? Will 'Bill Grant' areas be grandfathered in?
- What happens when a group some deem 'unacceptable' applies for a spot? Will Dunwoody allow Atlanta Pride to have a spot if they apply? How about the Scientologists?

I say we pass on the Adopt-A-Spot program and have the City pay Handy Andy or someone to keep these areas clean.

April Financial Report

In summary, we have enough money to pay our bills now and accounts receivable are higher than accounts payable so all is well. City manager expects to get more businesses to register with the city as word gets out. I think he said they have collected nearly one million and expect to be at two million soon. Wittenstein proposed an extension to the May deadline but no one else supported that at this time.

Federal Stimulus Program Update

City applying for COPS grant for up to 11 new officers but no one is expecting we'll receive a penny from this grant. The grant is focused on adding officers to areas with high poverty and unemployment. Waste of paper and ink applying, in my opinion. Perhaps some money for roads is in our future, but not cops.

Discussion of Ordinance to Amend Chapter 2

This seems to be going through with all present council and mayor in favor of having outsiders (non Dunwoody residents) on committees that make decisions that affect homeowners. Council members can continue to appoint themselves, a spouse, and even people from south DeKalb or Fulton if they so choose. The issue seems to be that the council and mayor want the PCID and local executives of business to have a seat at the table. These people pay taxes and this council thinks they should be there. Of course every member of council ran a campaign promising local control on issues. Now these same council members can keep it REAL local (in appointing a spouse or son or daughter) or go outside Dunwoody to appoint. With all the great people in Dunwoody it is a shame committees will be filled with business executives instead of homeowners. Instead, I think the business community should be invited to present to the committees and render assistance as needed, but not be on the committee itself. Seeing as the council and mayor support this amendment I am fairly sure we'll have an Authority instead of the 501(c)6.

Community Assessment and Community Participation Plan

Sorry, no notes here. I either fell asleep briefly or did not understand anything said during this presentation.

Light Off/Power Down Policy presentation

See above notes for Community Assessment and Community Participation Plan

Amendment to Create a NEW Zoning Category

This idea is a good one, not sure who thought of it but hats off to them. Support for this was 100%. In summary, if DeKalb decides to close down the fire station in Dunwoody that land cannot be used for anything else unless the council (or a committee of outsiders and spouses) says so. This new zoning category will prevent DeKalb from selling off land assets within the city of Dunwoody. I hope the council has this written in a way that it also applies to the DeKalb School System. Remember when that old school on Chamblee Dunwoody Road turned in to a bus depot with piles of gravel? I think the council needs to make sure that any property owned by DeKalb Schools must remain zoned for use of schools only. If by some miracle in the future Milton County is formed and City of Dunwoody is allowed to join, this will be an issue.

Outdoor and Seasonal Sales Permit

Until the VCB issue is resolved this issue is probably better left off the table. Speaking of outdoor events, hats off to Councilman Ross for getting the Farmer's Market a spot in a commercial area. I like to get my eggs there.

Door-to-Door Salesman Permit

Everyone seemed to agree that it's OK for the Girl Scouts to sell cookies and for the Government-schooled kids to sell gift wrap, but everyone else can hit the road. Problem is that the city cannot discriminate one non-profit from another. City attorney Anderson reminded council of that. Anderson's

laptop-aided sidekick suggested to call Dunwoody PD if you are targeted at home by sales folks who you deem suspicious. How about making all (non profits as well) apply for permits. The Girl Scouts and schools could apply for an exception on an annual basis, in person. Make the appeal process one that needs to be done in person and you'll keep most outsiders out.

Ashford Dunwoody Road Signage

I was too far back to see the piece of paper passed around showing the signs but the mayor and council discussed a sign that points visitors to City Hall. I do not think there will be a contest or submissions by local artists for this sign. At first I thought they were discussing the "Welcome to Dunwoody" signs that are now around Dunwoody (I have one near my home on Spalding Drive near Coronation). Yes, MORE signs. These new signs are quite beneficial to drivers, joggers, and door-to door salesmen. With the addition of the new Dunwoody sign near my home, a traveler on Spalding Drive can see how screwed up the county lines are. Dunwoody and Sandy Springs will each need ten signs to accurately mark the section of Spalding from Woodland over to Dunwoody Club. Don't misunderstand me, I like the signs. I just hope we are not paying DHA a royalty for each sign displaying the image of the Farmhouse.

AED units

Council meeting regular Bob Lundsten, in yet another power grab (just kidding), is pushing the idea for all Dunwoody police cars and city hall have AED units. I think this is a great idea. Total costs will be around \$75,000. I think this effort will be done without city funds, a 100% fundraiser by residents of Dunwoody and also from local businesses perhaps. Everyone seemed to like the idea and I applaud Bob's efforts on this issue. I will support it and hope the Chief of Police studies up on the issue and selects a quality unit that includes an infant pad (Zoll makes the best unit for ease of use, in my opinion).