

Marina Bay Neighborhood Council Meeting (MBNC)

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

7:00-8:30 pm

MBNC Attendees: Rita Mitas, Amelia Berto Morgan, Lynne Therriault; Laura Freeze Ho

Presenters: Officer Bashar Zeidan, Richmond Police Department; Tawfic Halaby, Deputy Director of Public Works; Tony Thrasher, Public Works External Consultant; Richmond Postmaster Francisco Ascencio

Announcements/Updates:

1.) Welcome and introductions

- Rita opened the meeting at 7:01 pm
- She said that weeds will be abated this weekend on the FM lot by Lara's
- City of Richmond will once again host the July 4th celebrations on July 3rd from 5-10 pm
- Neighborhood Dumpster Day slated to run on Saturday, August 10th from 8 am to noon at Mellville Square parking lot and Shimada Park
- Status of projects in Marina Bay:
 - Permit submitted for a hotel by CVS; project has been stalled and is set to expire August 25th
 - Use permit submitted to operate a nursing and trade school in the Ford Assembly Plant, but no additional movement
 - TransMontaigne Richmond Terminal Expansion railway expansion permit is under review as well
 - Located at 488 Wright Ave.
 - The company handles storage and transfer services of biofuels and petroleum products
 - Would require new tracks which would be built within 100 feet of the shoreline
 - Would allow them to add switches so they could go from handling six railcars a day to 18-30 railcars a day
 - There was a meeting held on March 7th to solicit comments and there is an environmental review currently underway
 - All comments can be submitted now to the planning commission
 - Should invite the applicant and relevant planning commission members to discuss this matter at a future MBNC meeting

2.) Public safety update from Officer Bashar Zeidan

- For the most recent quarter, Marina Bay has had 88 calls for service; all moderate- or minor-level crimes
- Two homicides in Richmond so far this year

- Staffing continues to be the most significant challenge for the RPD
 - For the month of June, the RPD was very short staffed and announced mandatory overtime to cover all the open beats
 - Recently lost five officers from the department
 - Still not enough officers for the traffic beat
 - Nine new officers slated to graduate the academy soon
- Residents raised concerns about sideshows and street racing
 - Residents can record and send to video footage to the RPD so they can issue a warrant for their arrest
 - Officer Zeidan said he has arrested two people this year so far for street racing or sideshow activities

3.) Tawfic Halaby, Deputy Director of Public Works, and Tony Thrasher, Consultant, discussed Marina Bay residents' tax assessment

- Sent out mailers this month about what upcoming levies will be per parcel
- Engineering report also available on the city website
- Assessment not yet formally approved by the city council
- Rita inquired about what the special assessment benefits include
 - Tawfic explained it is one of two special districts in Richmond
 - Marina Bay residents agreed to tax themselves an extra assessment starting in 2009 to improve and maintain the amenities in this district, like landscape, lighting, utilities, etc.
 - Tony also noted the city is contributing 42% of the funds; the actual residents' share is 58% of the cost of maintenance
- Rita also noted the upkeep of landscape is at a baseline level that may not be as adequate as it should be and what would happen if the special district is dissolved
 - Tawfic noted there are six full-time and four temporary employees dedicated solely to Marina Bay
 - If the district is dissolved, he would need to lay off four of the employees, and the remaining employees would be absorbed into the general fund of 45 other city parks
 - Overall difficult to quantify the downgrading of services
- Amelia asked about how poorly maintained the parks might be in the rest of the city, especially not to have lighting
- One resident asked how the city is going to raise the level of service across the board and Tawfiq responded that the city only has so much budget to hire more employees
- Another resident mentioned a lighting and landscaping advisory council that people can be a part of
- A resident said they were unable to get a second mortgage on their property due to the special assessment and asked if other banks and credit unions have the same position
 - Tony responded that this is a maintenance district, but bonded districts usually have more of those types of issues

- He was surprised to hear about this issue with a smaller maintenance district since they're common across the state
- Jose Moreno is a landscaper with the city and is a Richmond resident
 - Shared that he has employees who are out on injury, there were late rains, and decision not to use herbicides means his workers have to hand pull the weeds

4.) Postmaster Francisco Ascencio discussed mail theft in the community

- He is a Richmond resident who started out as a mail carrier 30 years ago
- Noted how people are a lot bolder and more creative with mail theft, robbing carriers, etc.
- There are organized crime rings that are causing a lot of the issues
- Post office policy is to keep the carriers safe, so they're told to hand over their keys if assaulted
- Staffing has also been an issue recently, but it's improving, so they're in a good spot currently with only two carriers out on leave
- Doing the best they can to get the mail out before dark
- Trying to impress upon newer, younger carriers that this isn't just a job, but a service to the community
- One resident asked if the keys can be changed so the problem can't be duplicated
 - Francisco responded that even if the keys are changed, then the carrier could get assaulted again
 - He explained that there are new technologies being explored by the postal service at a national level
- Another resident asked if the FBI is involved since mail theft is a federal crime
 - Francisco responded that any investigation starts at the local level and the postal inspector decides if they will go forward with a case or not
 - The Richmond area is getting more postal inspectors now
- Laura asked if residents should still continue to individually report mail theft online
 - Francisco said it is important to continue reporting any mail theft, especially if your identity gets stolen
 - Even if you don't receive a response, your report goes to a database which shows the "higher ups" that this is a problem and where help and resources should be allocated
- One resident asked if a PO Box is a safer option, but Francisco said not necessarily, since criminals are also targeting PO Boxes inside post offices

5.) Open Forum

- One resident recommended sending a formal thank you to those who are involved in running the farmer's market
- She also asked if the council could speak to an official about the road conditions in Marina Bay
 - Rita said it's an issue occurring everywhere in the city
 - She noted you can go to the city website and report a pothole

6.) Adjournment

- Rita thanked members and speakers for their participation and concluded the meeting at 8:32 pm