

**Columbia Neighborhood Association
General Meeting**

20 February 2024
St. Paul's Episcopal Church Parish Hall
Social 6:30 pm
Meeting 7-8:30 pm

Board Members in attendance: Renee Running, Vice President; Christina Tawes, Treasurer; Deborah Wessell and Steve Bieler, Membership Co-Chairs; Jon Running, Member-at-Large; Kit Topaz, MNAC Representative; Deborah Valentine, MNAC Alternate

Could not attend: Greg Hope, President; Stacy Clauson, Secretary

Agenda:

1. Welcome and socializing
2. Call to order and agenda review
3. New Board member introductions
4. Reports and general membership business
 - Treasurer's report – Christina Tawes
 - MNAC – Deborah Valentine
 - Events – Kit Topaz
 - 2024 calendar
 - 4th of July
 - Community Projects – Renee Running
 - Share Shack proposal
 - Other projects TBD
5. Guest speakers:
 - Blake Lyon, Director, Planning & Community Development Dept., City of Bellingham
 - Scott Jones, Co-Founder, Save the Waterfront
6. Open comments, discussion, Q&A
7. Adjournment

Vice President Renee Running called the meeting to order at 7:00. There were approximately 15 people in attendance. Renee reviewed the agenda, introduced new board members, and talked about the two open board positions and our need for volunteers.

Treasurer Christina Tawes reported that our current balance is \$1,374.50.

Membership Co-Chair Deborah Wessell reminded the attendees that there are no longer any dues for membership and asked them to spread the word.

Deborah Valentine, our alternate representative on the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission, gave a report on the Jan. 17 MNAC meeting. The meeting was held via Zoom due to the weather. New Mayor Kim Lund attended. She spoke about the shelters that were opened to

cope with the storm and how the city worked with the Bellingham School District and the Opportunity Council to ensure that everyone had a place to go. There were no recorded fatalities.

Lund spoke about the need for a two-way conversation between the city and its neighborhoods. This led to a conversation at our meeting on the Simple Grants provided by the city and how other neighborhoods have used this money to put up neighborhood signs in multiple languages and improve communications with their residents.

Kit Topaz, MNAC representative, asked for people to express any concerns or ask any questions that she can then bring to the commission. One example, raised by an attendee, is people biking at night without lights and reflective clothing.

Kit reported on our annual events. The 4th of July in Elizabeth Park committee leads are returning for this year's event. They need volunteers. There will be an early-March meeting to start planning where people can sign up to help. Check our website for the date.

The Chalk Festival will be incorporated with the 4th of July celebration.

The neighborhood yard sale will take place on June 8. If you want to participate, you'll be able drop your name and address into a form on our site to help us build a yard-sale map. You can also add notes on what you're selling. Volunteers gladly welcomed.

Peter Roberts, president of the Eldridge Historical Society, which sponsors the Elizabeth Park concert series, announced that the concerts will begin on June 20 and end on August 22.

Kit said that a recent survey of Columbia residents revealed that the two neighborhood events at the top of their list are the 4th of July celebration and a block party. Given the similarities between the two events, and the amount of work involved, we decided that the 4th of July celebration *is* the block party.

Other ideas generated from the survey included tree-planting, new neighborhood signs, and a fruit-tree map (if homeowners with fruit trees want to share their harvest). Deborah and Steve volunteered to find out more about new neighborhood signs. There was also a discussion of where we might be able to post notices about neighborhood doings without having to tape them to stop signs, e.g., coffee shops, Little Free Libraries, the Share Shack, and the holders that realtors use.

Renee offered a list of proposals (see attached) to rehabilitate the Share Shack, which is currently on hiatus. We want to find the right activity or activities for this corner without wasting time and money or turning it into an attractive nuisance.

Blake Lyon, our first speaker, spoke about the City of Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan, which will look ahead to 2044. The plan will be based on what the community wants. There will be a series of open houses and focus groups this spring and summer to gather that information. He said that all counties in Washington must look into population projections for the next 20 years and plan how they will house those people. Whatcom County is expected to add 34,000 people

by 2044. He discussed urban villages, infill development, and the trade-offs between building new housing and maintaining or increasing our urban forest. (Note: The sale of the golf course on Meridian has fallen through. The city is working on a way to protect the tree canopy there.)

Blake also outlined the many steps in the Development Approval Process and how citizens can follow the course of an application and understand the many opportunities for engagement. He offered this tip on speaking at city or county council meetings: If you only have 3 minutes to speak, keep it simple – make one point. Follow up in writing with more complex information, or write to the council members beforehand (way beforehand, not the day of).

Scott Jones, co-founder of Save the Waterfront and president of the South Hill Neighborhood Association, spoke next. He recounted how the Canadian company ABC Recycling installed what is called “the metal pile” in 2022 despite the lack of environmental oversight, discussed the regulatory issues regarding the pile, and briefed us on the proposed metal shredder near the Little Squalicum Creek estuary, the ecological effects it would produce, and the truck traffic it would send through downtown. For a full discussion of the metal pile, the metal shredder, and the future of the waterfront, visit www.savethewaterfront.org.

Renee called for final comments and questions. She adjourned the meeting at 8:30.