

Blissbits

www.blissforgr.org

Newsletter of Rosalynn Bliss 2nd Ward City Commissioner Grand Rapids, Michigan Volume 10 Page 1



Volunteering for Youth Boxing Foundation



at a community Budget Meeting



with Harold Ford Jr. & Kristin Salerno



Reading to Burton Students



with Meghan at the North Park School

Greetings friends and neighbors,

This year is an election year, so life will be getting a bit busier these next few months as I am going to run for re-election. This spring you will see me walking door-to-door, Bliss signs popping up in our neighborhoods and a few changes to my website where individuals can get campaign information. You can also stay updated about the campaign by joining the Re-Elect Rosalynn Bliss group on facebook: [CLICK HERE](#)

For the year 2009, I'll continue to Chair the Community Development Committee and will be serving on the Appointments Committee, Legislative Team, Economic Development Corporation, City/County Liaison Committee and Green Grand Rapids. I am also working with a planning group to organize a Bike Summit which will take place on April 24th at GVSU downtown. This summit will focus on how to make Grand Rapids a Bicycle Friendly City. I continue to work on developing a Friends of Grand Rapids Parks organization that will be a non-profit organization aimed at enhancing and improving city parks. And I also had the privilege to work with Dotti Clune in creating an Urban Forest Plan.

In January the City Commission had their retreat where we discussed the current fiscal state of the City. Similar to the state of Michigan, we will be facing another difficult year financially. A series of community meetings were held in order to hear from the community about their priorities. The City Commission will begin deliberating about 2009/2010 budget in April and will need to pass a budget no later than June 30, 2009. Please let me know if you have questions, concerns or ideas related to the budget.

Eric DeLong began serving as the Interim City Manager in January and will serve in this role until the next City Manager is chosen. The choice before us is likely one of the most important decisions I will make as a City Commissioner. As we embark on the search process, I (and the city commission) would like to hear from you. To provide an avenue for public input, a survey was posted on the home page of the City's website, which is www.grcity.us - you will also find a blog where you can participate in a community conversation about the search. I hope you will take a moment to go to the website and complete the survey as your thoughts are valuable to us. You can also share your thoughts with me by completing a survey through my website or [CLICK HERE FOR SURVEY](#)

As always, please feel free to contact me with questions, ideas, concerns or needs.
Rosalynn Bliss

INSIDE:
Coffee with Bliss
Community Events
City Issues & Updates

Garbage Collection: 456-3232 Housing concerns: 456-3053
Street Lights: 456-3281 Sidewalks: 456-3243 Streets: 456-3232
Special Events: 456-3615 Recycling: 456-4444
Tax Questions: 456-3081

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This newsletter was not paid for with Taxpayer dollars

Coffees with Bliss:

Monday, April 20th at Noon
at the Red Ball Jet Cafe

Tuesday, May 12th at 5:00pm
at Bagel Beanery

Wednesday, June 9th at 7:30am
at Common Ground

Wednesday, July 8th at Noon
at Cherry Deli

Tuesday, August 11th at 5:00pm
at Graydon's Crossing

Thursday, September 17th at 7:30am
at Marie Catrib's

Monday, October 12th at Noon
at Suzy's Donut Shop

Tuesday, November 10th at 5:00pm
at the Green Well

City Issues and Updates:

Spring Recreation Guide

The Spring Recreation Guide is now available and can be found at www.grcity.us/parksandrec. I, and the City of Grand Rapids believe that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy recreational experiences. The City offers a scholarship program to residents who qualify, which could result in reduced rates for participation in programs.

Outdoor Vendor Ordinance

In January, the City Commission repealed the existing downtown vendor ordinance and adopted a new one. The new guidelines were created after Commissioner Gutowski and I led a series of discussions between the city, the vendors and downtown merchants. The new ordinance includes provisions requiring the licensing of outdoor downtown vendors, sets standards for outdoor downtown vendors, limits the merchandise that can be sold and the areas in which sales can occur.

Prescribed Burns

This year the City Commission amended the City Code, which governs Air Pollution Control, to allow for an exception from the ban on "open burning" in order to allow the prescribed burn of natural areas within the City. The new language describes the guidelines along with the approvals needed to complete a prescribed burn.

Reduction in Jail Per Diem Fee Rates

The cities of Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, Wyoming and Kent County reached an agreement on a reduction in Per Diem Jail Fees and arrest processing fees that will save each community approximately 25% of the cost. This is a \$244,000 reduction for the City of Grand Rapids. The 2008 jail per diem was \$47.80 a day and effective January 1, 2009 it was decreased to \$35.85 a day.

Public Hearing for the FY 2010

Consolidated Housing and Community Development Annual Action Plan
A public hearing has been set for March 24th for citizen comment on funding recommendations for the City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Investment Plan and Emergency Shelter Grants program. HUD requires a public comment period and a public hearing on the draft Housing and Community Development Annual Action Plan, which needs to be submitted to HUD in May 2009.

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CURRENT BOARD AND
COMMISSION VACANCIES:

Automobile Parking Commission
Board of Zoning Appeals
Cable Television Advisory Forum
Civil Service Board
Construction Code Board of Appeals
Downtown Improvement District
Grand Rapids Historical Commission
Housing Appeal Board
Housing Rehabilitation Appeals Board
Income Tax Board of Review
Tax Increment Finance Authority

***Please contact me if you are
interested in any of the above
opportunities to serve your city!***

City Issues and Updates *continued:*

WiMAX Update

The City continues to work Clearwire to establish WiMAX throughout the City of Grand Rapids. Recently the City Commission approved locations for additional towers that are needed for the service. Currently there is no launch date set, however work continues at a steady pace. The City anticipates that WiMAX will enhance public safety by dramatically increasing the information available to our City's Mobile Police Officers and Fire Fighters.

Budget Cuts

In January the City's Chief Financial Officer Scott Buhner presented an Economic Review and Outlook Report at the City Commission's Retreat. In his report, Mr. Buhner concludes that the City's General Operating Fund (GOF) will record a current year deficit of \$4.5 million, resulting in mid-year budget cuts of \$3.4 million dollars. The projected GOF deficit for FY 2010 is projected to exceed \$8 million. Two of the City's three principal revenue sources, property taxes and state-shared revenues will at best remain flat. The third and most significant revenue source, the City income tax, is expected to continue to fall in the short term. It is projected that the FY 2010 budget will face similar challenges that will only grow in future fiscal years. A series of community meetings were facilitated to hear from residents about their priorities and budget ideas.

New Planning Commission Ordinance

The City of Grand Rapids adopted a new Planning Commission ordinance in February. This brought the City Code into compliance with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. This Act is intended to ensure consistency in the powers, responsibilities, and procedures for all local units of government involved in planning and to reduce confusion among those developing property in more than one jurisdiction.

City Manager Search and Hiring Process

After interviewing three firms, the City Commission chose to award a contract to the Waters Consulting Group Inc. to conduct a nationwide search for a new City Manager. The Waters Consulting Group Inc. will lead the search process by advertising the position nationally, identifying potential applicants, accepting resumes, filtering resumes and presenting final candidates to the City Commission. The City Commission hopes to begin interviews in April and have a new City Manager in place by July 1, 2009.

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Little Fact about Grand Rapids:

Grand Rapids is a leader in the green movement and sustainability. The Grand Rapids area leads the nation in the number of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified buildings per capita.

These buildings are created using environmentally friendly materials, create less pollution, and save money on heating and cooling costs. Examples of these buildings include Marie Catrib's, the Grand Rapids Art Museum and David D. Hunting YMCA.

City Issues and Updates *continued*:

Uptown Corridor Improvement Authority

Uptown is an area composed of four business districts including Eastown, East Hills, East Fulton and Wealthy Street. The Uptown Forward Team, which has representatives from three area neighborhood associations and four area business districts has been working for over a year to find ways to improve Uptown. The Uptown Forward Team initiated the creation of an Uptown Corridor Improvement District (CID), which was heard by the Commission in February. Some of the benefits of a CID include: establishing funding mechanisms for ongoing maintenance of public improvements; building a framework for decision making and prioritizing public improvements in Uptown.

I-196 Reconstruction in 2009 and 2010

Significant work is planned for the I-196 corridor over the next two construction seasons. In 2009, the College Avenue Bridge will be reconstructed. Then in 2010, the Coit Avenue and Lafayette Avenue Bridges will be replaced, and the entire highway will be removed and reconstructed. MDOT and City staff have been working with the neighborhood and other stakeholders on design and traffic management matters.

GRFD Obtains \$800,000 Grant

The Grand Rapids Fire Department was successful in securing a significant Homeland Security grant for fire equipment acquisition. The grant money will be used to acquire two pieces of fire apparatus that were next on our equipment replacement schedule. The \$800,000 grant will buy down the cities cost for this equipment to about \$400,000.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Local Works!

Local First recently partnered with Civic Economics to analyze the performance and economic impact of independent businesses in Kent County and to identify opportunities for economic enhancement based on that analysis. The study highlighted the impact that shopping at local businesses can have on the local economy. For more information about the study, go to www.localfirst.com



with Sharon Evoy on "Bliss for GR" show.

COMMUNITY NEWS *continued:*

The Foreclosure Crisis in Kent County

In February, The Foreclosure Crisis in Kent County: A Call for a Comprehensive Response was published with the generous support of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation and the Dyer-Ives Foundation. The report is a comprehensive look at the extent of the problem, the roots of the problem, the impact of foreclosures, local efforts at addressing the foreclosure issues and promising practices. For more information, go to www.foreclosureresponse.org

Valuing Our Trees: An East Hills Urban Forest Plan

In February, the East Hills Council of Neighbors published an East Hills Urban Forest Plan. The plan provides a historical perspective about the East Hills Neighborhood, the history of green activism, an East Hills tree inventory and an Urban Forest Plan. The report details the diversity of trees that exist in the neighborhood and identifies next steps in ensuring a rich urban tree canopy. For more information about the report, go to www.easthillscouncil.org