

## **BANKERS HILL COMMUNITY GROUP MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES**

Monday, May 20, 2019  
Bankers Hill Clubhouse, 3030 Front St.

BHCG Board Member Char Lou Benedict called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The following Steering Committee members were present: Benedict, Chair Amie Hayes, Treasurer Jeanne Rawlings, interim Secretary John Lamb, John Percy and Becky Veen. There were approximately 40 people in attendance.

### **Announcements**

Benedict welcomed attendees. Rawlings provided a treasury report (\$3,590.66 in the bank) and urged attendees to sign up to help with volunteer San Diego Pride cleanup hours, which helps fund BHCG activities. Paul Johnson, liaison officer for Pride, addressed details of the upcoming festivities and confirmed that additional trash receptacles will be provided during the July event. Recycling bins will also be available this year. Johnson said he would have more details later. Johnson also detailed efforts to encourage Pride attendees to park on the east side of Balboa Park and shuttle to events as well as ride-share opportunities on the west side.

Board member Percy then handed out ballots to attendees so voting could commence on this year's eight nominees for Community Improvement Awards. Percy provided a quick recap of the nominees and the voting process. Percy said the winners would be announced at the June meeting.

### **Government Representatives**

Maria Bojorquez-Gomez, staff assistant for Congresswoman Susan Davis, updated attendees on the work of the local representative, including recent votes.

Toni Duran, representing Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins, provided an update on state legislative actions. Duran said the current proposed portion of the state budget dedicated to homelessness is \$2.75 billion. She also encouraged attendees to donate undergarments for the upcoming stand down for homeless veterans in June. Duran also said Senate Bill 50, aimed at boosting housing development statewide, "is not dead."

Brandon Torres, representative for county Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, updated the audience on the county budget and regional efforts regarding asylum seekers, a new mental-health facility proposed near UCSD Hospital, and increasing availability of electric-vehicle charging stations.

Brett Weise, representative for Councilmember Chris Ward, gave an update on district-wide issues, including budget recommendations to the mayor. Weise said money has been secured to repaint Quince Street Bridge and improve medians on Sixth Avenue. Weise also touched on childcare, dockless-scooter regulations, Olive Street Park and Balboa Park. Peter Raymond noted that Bankers Hill roads are in greater need of repair since the earlier rains. Weise said he would check on the status of repairs in the community.

### **Featured Speaker: Michael Kelly, Committee of One Hundred**

Michael Kelly, president of the Committee of One Hundred and editorial consultant for the *Journal of San Diego History*, and Robert Thiele, a local architect who volunteers with the committee, gave attendees an update on efforts to preserve and rehabilitate the southern central portion of the Balboa Park known as the Palisades, dominated now by a large parking lot. Kelly said the committee decided about five years ago to focus its attention on the Palisades, near the Air & Space Museum, municipal gym, the automotive museum and the soon-to-be-completed Comic-Con museum. He said the area has been a neglected part of Balboa Park for a long time. Kelly

said he refers to the area as “the ugly step-sister to the Plaza de Panama,” because it was once a beautiful part of the 1935 exposition and now serves only as a parking lot. Kelly said the committee’s vision for the Palisades includes four aspects: rehabilitating the exposition buildings from 1935; water-friendly gardens; a central fountain; and pedestrian plazas. He noted that the area once was home to the Firestone singing, dancing fountains, with synchronized lights and music. He also showed the four 18-foot-tall tile murals over the entrance to the automotive museum that the committee is working to restore.

Thiele spoke about his involvement in the restoration work. He said RTK Studios based in Ojai has been working on the tile murals while his local firm has been working on Mayan-influenced ornamentation details and structural work. He also discussed the early thinking on restoring the gymnasium, which he described as a work in progress.

Kelly also talked about restoration plans for the old Starlight Bowl, which has fallen into disrepair and been unused for years. Efforts are under way to bring it back to its former glory, and Kelly expressed his hope that will happen.

Kelly said the committee has had discussions with a company called Wet Designs, a water-feature firm that created the fountains for the Bellagio in Las Vegas and hundreds all over the world. He said the firm felt it could do something within the same footprint of the original Firestone fountains for \$5 million or \$6 million. He said that’s a rough guess, but he was hopeful someone would step forward and offer to pay for it.

City master and precise plans for the park have called for removing cars from the Palisades, but the debate continues, Kelly said. Using a shuttle system to allow removal of the parking is under consideration as well.

Thiele discussed other aspects of the proposed plazas, including large kiosks in the areas where large speakers used to stand. Regarding the fountain expense, Thiele agreed that “we need a Daddy Warbucks.” He said 25 or 30 meetings with the public and others occurred last year, and he expressed hope that the Palisades “rehabilitation project” will commence some time soon. He showed some digital renderings of what the plaza could look like with 280 vehicles removed from it, including gardens, seating area and a possible stage. Thiele said he’s aware of neighborhood concerns about the loss of parking, but he said he has confidence there are options on the east side of Balboa Park to accommodate parking, including Inspiration Point. He said the committee looks forward to public input on the proposals.

The committee members then took questions from the audience. Benedict suggested adding multi-level parking down the slope to the east of the coming Comic-Con museum. Kelly said that has been discussed. The question, he said, is who is going to pay for it? Kelly said the committee is also trying to avoid “project creep,” since plans are already challenging enough.

One resident said she’s concerned about the loss of trees in the park. Any plans for trees in the Palisades? Kelly said he can envision that, but it will be up to citizens to decide the final design. Kelly also confirmed that Comic-Con is interested in programming events at the Startlight Bowl.

#### **Uptown Parking District Update**

Chris DeMoville, project manager for the Bankers Hill community, and community board member Tom Fox discussed parking-related accomplishments in the neighborhood and plans for the coming year. DeMoville said, through reconfiguration, 110 parking spaces have been added to the Bankers Hill community. Fox said “dirt should turn soon” on bike, lighting and street improvements on Fourth and Fifth avenues. SANDAG, the regional planning agency, is in the final stages of developing its bid documents, a significant milestone, Fox said. The hope is to break ground in December or January.

DeMoville thanked Fox for his work and provided a few more details and provided audience members with additional information on the “Walk the Walk” signage program, which is also in the works. He said the net gain in parking spaces came from community input and focused on the area near the new Sharp Rees-Stealy facility on Fourth Avenue between Grape and Fir streets. He said the “huge gain” in parking spaces came at a cost of only \$1 a space. The bikeway, he said, will result in some parking loss in Hillcrest. But for Uptown in general, he said, there should be a net gain of 18 parking spaces when all is completed.

In the coming year, DeMoville said the district hopes to increase parking-meter occupancy levels, which he described as “fairly low.” That might include offering market pricing on Third Avenue to lower the cost of those meters that aren’t being used as much. About 20 locations have been referred to the city for review. He also said the most-occupied parking meters in Bankers Hill are those found in the vicinity of Orange Theory Fitness on Fifth Avenue at Nutmeg Street.

DeMoville also discussed details of the Walk the Walk signs, which are planned along Sixth Avenue from Upas to Elm streets. Raymond noted that Uptown Planners unanimously supported the signage program. DeMoville concluded by inviting residents to attend parking district meetings to provide input and keep up to date on developments.

Meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by John Lamb, interim Secretary.