

King Neighborhood Association Membership Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

Virtual Meeting

KNA Board Members Present

John Rooney (Chair)

Laverne Martin (Co-Chair)

John Kim (Secretary)

Martina Steinkusz (At-large representative #2)

Absent: Libby Deal (Treasurer, Land Use Chair), Cheri Folsom (At-large representative #1), Paxton Rothwell (At-large representative #3), Eryca Morris (At-large representative #4)

Community Members Present

Andre Miller, Community Justice Organizer from Commissioner Hardesty's Office

Nat Kim

Oliver Longwell

Theresa McGrath

John Rooney called the meeting to order.

Old Business

Previous meeting drafts were approved.

There was a vote to reimburse John Rooney for the cost of renewing Zoom in conjunction with the Vernon Neighborhood Association, in order to share costs.

New Business

John Rooney Updates

- John said that they were still working on the Community Message Board initiative that Martina had brought forth.
- He is tracking gun violence initiatives and trying to figure out ways that the KNA can be a facilitator to dialogue. One suggestion was to check in with the Alberta Abbey Foundation and see if the KNA could get use of their facilities to hold a community meeting bringing together the community at large with city and police officials to

discuss the ongoing gun violence crisis. – If the pandemic is still an issue preventing in-person meetings, another option would be to hold the meeting virtually, but then the KNA would need to investigate getting a better Zoom license in order to be able to hold more people.

- John reported that the KNA had made its yearly contribution to the Franklin Family Foundation's annual holiday meals distribution.
- John reported that Martina was still working with Solar Oregon to secure a grant to help fund community outreach in conjunction with information and help for the community in regards to solar energy (a dual effort)

Franklin Family Mission Foundation

Laverne reported that the second annual holiday dinner distribution, in conjunction with Highland Community Church, was another success. Two-hundred and fifty boxed family dinners were distributed, paralleled with along a toy distribution for children to ensure that children had a happy holiday.

Andre Miller

The Community Justice Organizer from Commissioner Hardesty's Office, Andre Miller, was a guest speaker at the meeting. Andre's focus in Commissioner Hardesty's Office is to deal with Houselessness and Gun Violence.

Andre was born and raised in Northeast Portland. As a youth, he participated in and benefited from the mentorship of his older peers and from programs such as the Boys and Girls Club. He is currently serving as a Board Member for the Alberta Abbey Foundation.

Andre emphasized that the current state of gun violence has roots in the disinvestment from the Black Community, a problem that is not unique to Portland, but which communities all over the nation are experiencing. It emphasized that it is important to have resources to give to youth to not just survive, but also to thrive.

John R. asked Andre what were the most important things that kept him safe from gun violence growing up.

Andre explained that, as someone who had a father who was addicted to drugs and who could not be an effective role model for him, a key factor to his success was the mentorship program where older peers helped mentor younger men and boys, who were not only role models, but who educated him about what it means to be a black man. There were also programs, such as sports initiatives that gave people like him a safe and productive outlet, such as the midnight basketball program being run every Friday night – programs that are no longer available.

Andre said that it is important to push for that investment back into the black community. Looking at the root causes for gun violence, one of the causes is wealth disparity. A way to address gun violence is to provide resources and opportunities such as the ones he benefited from growing up.

Andre stated that it's not just a gang problem. He said that he just lost two friends to gun violence and had three friends who had lost their sons to gun violence. But having personally experience profiling and other racist actions by Portland Police, that the solution was not going to be found from law enforcement. Andre pointed out that Chicago was one of the largest murder increases, and yet has one of the largest police forces in the country, with the inference that law enforcement by itself is not the solution.

Any solution would have to be sustainable and derived through committed funding that looked at upstream solutions that attacked root causes. He has had and is participating in meetings with counterparts in other city and state officials dealing with the same issue. Everywhere, violence is exacerbated by lack of funding and support for black communities, a problem that is currently being amplified by the stresses brought about by the Covid Pandemic.

Laverne said that she wanted to hear from Commissioner Hardesty about what specific steps the city is taking to address gun violence and houselessness. She said that she and her daughters, all Portland natives who have lived in the community all their lives, are almost ready to pack up and leave. Laverne wanted to know what was being done.

Houselessness

Andre said that in 2018, the state took funding away from local cities to treat substance abuse. As Community Justice Organizer, he connects daily with the people most impacted by houselessness. He talks to the houseless, to victims of gun violence in order to understand their plight. For resources, the City has to work with the County and State to get resources. Already the City is working on six areas for safe rest villages and is working to establish a behavioral health facility downtown.

Gun Violence

Gun violence is structural violence. Public practices and policies have impacted the black community. In the early 90s, there were programs to mitigate gangs, but funds were taken away from community-based organizations that had been making an impact. Currently, they are working to invest back in the community. Millions of dollars have gone to community-based organizations. The City is investing in community-based organizations, both those with historic connections to the community, but also new organizations that are able to step in and to be violence interrupters and mediators.

Laverne asked how is that money being monitored to make sure that people are truly getting money and services. She also asked for information around the discussion about defunding the police.

Andre answered Portlanders cannot arrest ourselves out of the situation. He said that we need to look at data, examine root causes. Being punitive creates a more violent society. Police aren't the ones that prevent crime from actually happening. They do investigations. The only things defunded from police were school officers, transit police, and the Gun Violence Reduction Team. The Gun Violence Reduction Team had a history of profiling Black Americans.

There is a new team to address gun violence, one that has a community oversight team. Since Commissioner Hardesty doesn't have the police department under her profile, it would be Mayor Wheeler's office that would deal with police matters.

Andre emphasized that a lot of the killings are retaliatory. But again, we can't arrest ourselves out of this situation. The solution is to invest in long-term programs to mitigate and slow down gun violence.

John R. agreed that we cannot arrest ourselves out of the current predicament and noted that it seemed almost a generational problem. The biggest threat to any funding is changing priorities. How can they guarantee that work is sustainable and that funding is still there 10-15 years from now?

Andre responded that elected officials would change and future officials might not support community initiatives. Commissioner Hardesty is working with County Chair Deborah Kafoury to ensure that those organizations will have long-term funding, and that their growth and accomplishments would be monitored.

John R. said that the problem was much bigger, impacting any community. He mentioned that he grew up in Philadelphia, and one of the things that made him want to move to King was its diversity. He asked, how could we encourage community to have those values and programs?

Andre said that communities are hardened right now. Communities are hurting, especially the black community. Its taking a toll on a lot of people. Asking for volunteers has been tough. But he has four children, and he needs to do this work for them, for future generations. There needs to be a discussion with youth to get their input, and understand what is the community that they want to see for their future, as they will be impacted by anything being done right now. He said that people need to be advocates for youth. Meet people that are being impacted and those who are involved.

He reiterated that as a teen, what helped him was having kids 19 years old mentoring him.

John R asked if he would be willing to return at a later date when more community could be present.

Andre answered absolutely.

Open Forum

Oliver Longwell

This was Oliver's first meeting. Oliver has teaching experience and is looking to be helpful with initiatives, such as for test preparation for students.

Meeting was adjourned