

**NEARTOWN ASSOCIATION (NTA) MEETING**  
**Cherryhurst Community Center, Tuesday July 23, 2002**  
**Minutes**

NTA President, Ed Gonzales, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Mike Padgett moved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting (6/25/02). Robert Graham seconded. The motion carried. Ed reported that NTA has a working balance of \$1957.

Announcements:

Ron Rodricks, Pres. of Westmoreland Civic Assoc. gave an update on circumstances affecting the Masterson tree (ancient Live Oak on Burlington St. near I59). Proposed construction plans for a mid-rise condo (65 units) on the lot have not been approved.

Jackie Friedman with Houston Bikeways brought maps of official bike routes in Houston.

Ed Gonzales announced that Sgt. Johnny Vollert will be leaving the Neartown Storefront for a new job within HPD. Sgt. Marion Craig, from the Heights Storefront, will be the new Neartown Storefront supervisor.

Scheduled topic - Reconstruction of the Southwest Frwy and the downtown Spur 527:

Ed Gonzales introduced Houston City Councilmember Carroll Robinson and representatives from the City Traffic Division ("T" Teofilo Rebagay, Sr. Engr. Public Works & Engr.), Texas Department of Transportation (Quincy Allen, Area Engr., East Harris, Houston Office TXDoT), and the Downtown Management District (Thomas Davis, Director of Construction). They gave an informative overview of the next phase of construction on US 59 (known locally as the Southwest freeway). Residents were especially concerned with what steps were being taken to lessen the anticipated burden on neighborhood streets.

Construction on this \$80 million project is scheduled to begin this fall and will not be completed until early 2006. It will pick up where the last phase left off, between Mandell and Graustark, and continue north toward downtown and include the Spur 527 exit into downtown. Over the next three and a half years this elevated section of US 59 will be widened and lowered 20 feet below grade (the rebuilt Spur will remain elevated to cross the southbound lanes). Bridges will be constructed at both Graustark and Montrose (which currently run under the highway). The Montrose bridge will actually be a double bridge to carry four lanes of traffic.

Last week project planners participated in a peer review meeting with experts from around the country to further refine the project plans.

Councilmember Robinson has proposed that City Council require all large truck traffic to bypass the city center (inside the loop) during peak traffic hours. Such a plan has been implemented in other cities with good results. Mr. Robinson stated that he sees this construction as part of an overall regional transportation plan.

Quincy Allen, Project engineer with TXDoT, explained that the new Main St. exit from US 59, currently under construction, would be completed and open to traffic before any construction on the existing highway lanes begins. Rail on Main St. will be ready in 2004. An exit ramp will also be constructed (Aug. '02 -Jan. '03) from US 59 to Polk St. downtown (near the Brown Convention Center). Mr. Allen explained that the project would use an extended work schedule

of two 10-hour shifts, 6 days/week. There are four completion milestones, each with substantial monetary incentives intended to keep contractors on schedule. He also described the pump station that will pump water from the sunken roadway.

City engineer "T" Rebagay said that the Spur 527 is scheduled for closure Oct. '04 - Feb. '06. He described various widening and reconstruction projects being completed on other city arteries, including US 90A (Main St.), Westpark, and Kirby, intended to improve commuter traffic flow. One recommendation that came out of the peer review was that Westheimer, between Bagby and the 610 Loop, be milled and overlaid (repaved) to more safely and efficiently carry a higher volume of traffic. This would occur before Oct. '04.

Tom Davis, with the Downtown Mgmt. Distr., explained that last week's 3-day peer review brought in 5 experts from around the country with expertise in highway geometry, highway operation, etc. The areas of most potential included programmatic issues and infrastructure issues (improving existing streets). Richmond and Alabama were identified as two main arteries for improvement. The panel also recommended a public information office for the project.

To get the current status of downtown street traffic and construction, go to the following website: [www.downtownstreets.com](http://www.downtownstreets.com)

The meeting was adjourned.

Secretary, Dana Padgett