

Ward 5 Update September 27, 2011

Approximately a dozen residents attended a Ward 5 meeting on September 27th at Mrs. Mitchell's at the plaza at Homestead and 202 from 6-8PM.

1) Jeff Hayden Director of the HCC Kittredge Center and Erica Broman, Director of the HCC Foundation joined our meeting to give an update on the HCC road project. Erica summarized that the Governor has recommended funding in the supplemental budget that is working its way through the legislature now. They hope to receive approval this fall and begin construction in the spring of 2012. It is believed that this will relieve traffic congestion taking a left on to Homestead from 202. They intend to have a light at Sunset and the new road at 202, but it is open for discussion at the neighborhood meeting that will be held once the funding is definite and one remaining permit is received. It was noted that some neighbors on Sunset want to try the new road without a light to see how it will function. Jeff stated that safety concerns and traffic counts would need to be considered as part of the decision. When asked the costs incurred to meet the environmental concerns, Jeff responded that it had added \$350,000 to the project. Erica noted that this was paid by the Foundation and not out of funds for Holyoke Community College. It was also explained that there will be two buildings developed near the school end of the new road as part of the project.

2) Big Y: There were rumors that Big Y is not coming to the Atlas Copco site. Linda followed up with Andrew Crystal VP at O'Connell Development Group and he replied that as of a meeting on September 23rd there has been no indication from the folks at Big Y to change their development plans at the Atlas Copco property. A suggestion was made that Linda request consideration for a percentage of unemployed Holyoke residents when Big Y is hiring. They will be investing approximately 12M in the site, would plan to begin construction in 2012 and open in late 2012 or early 2013.

3) Re: Geriatric Authority, Linda updated the group that the Retirement Board voted to place \$464,991 on to the tax payers due to failure of the Geriatric Authority to pay its portion of the retirement benefit for the last number of years. I was emphasized that no one is questioning the care provided and that all residents are guaranteed to receive the needed level and quality of care they require regardless of any changes made to the GA. Linda discussed her order to declare the land purchased from the GA by the city, surplus so that it can be sold and hopefully developed for market rate housing. Linda stated her position is that the Geriatric Authority should be sold to a company in the business of providing health care and that the tax payers should not keep paying for a bankrupt authority. It is the only one of its kind left in the state as other communities got out of the healthcare business long ago.

4) The ward boundaries have been approved with no changes made to Ward 5. There were small changes made to A and B precincts with some people moving to McMahon School for voting.

5. Charter Commission Report: Linda noted that the Final Charter Commission report is posted on her website and encouraged those interested to review it prior to receiving it in the mail as they will only have a couple of weeks to look at it before the election. The question was approved to go on the ballot on November 8th by the City Council last night. Linda also read the summary that will appear on the ballot.

6. Truck traffic at night on Homestead follow up: The new Chief requested days and times where the most offenses are occurring. Feedback offered from neighborhood and at the meeting indicated that 8PM-11PM M-F and 5AM-6AM M-F are commonly problems. It was noted that Yellow Freight is frequently seen travelling on Homestead at night.

Linda asked for any feedback those present wished to offer on a casino in Holyoke. Response was mixed with some wanting no casino, some thinking it would be good on Mt Tom and others expressing no strong opinion. In summary, the response was mixed on this issue.

Suggestions made by those present include:

- 1) Add a yield on green sign to the left turn arrow at 202 and Homestead when proceeding toward downtown.
- 2) Add a sign or lights or raised cross walk on Homestead Ave as people often do not stop for individuals in the crosswalk.
- 3) It was also noted that people are NOT supposed to walk in the cross walk when the traffic light is green for motorists
- 4) To encourage business development and repair of abandoned buildings, forgive old outstanding taxes.
- 5) Add cameras to intersection at Homestead to use to ticket trucks that use it at night
- 6) It was noted that there is a lot of trash near the K Mart plaza and it was noted that they hope Big Y will keep the area free of trash.
- 7) The idea of a shuttle service to the Pediatrics building to reduce pedestrian traffic there was put forth. It was noted that it is an unsafe area to walk as there are no sidewalks on Lower Westfield Road and no room to add them there under the bridge.

Linda thanked Jeff and Erica for attending and residents of the ward for their interest and participation. Attendees were asked to provide email contact information and to spread the word to neighbors when the forums are set.

Linda Vacon, Your Ward 5 City Councilor