

Forest Park News

A Publication of the Forest Park Civic Association

Bing Theater Renovation Update

by Brian Hale

The Bing Arts Center Project continues to move forward in spite of many challenges. The "X" Main Street Corporation's efforts to develop a multi-use community arts center in the vacant Bing Theater at 716 Sumner Avenue were aided considerably this past year when the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts generously awarded a \$15,000 grant to the project. In addition, Rep. Cheryl Coakley-Rivera was instrumental in securing a \$100,000 state earmark.

Unfortunately that state funding met with some obstructions. Last summer, Gov. Romney vetoed funds allocated to this project (and many others). The legislature subsequently overrode the veto. Then, in November, the Governor froze the funds allo-

cated (over \$430 million in all for many projects and programs). In the last week of December, Governor-elect Patrick's office announced that he would restore the funding cut from the various effected 501 (c) 3's. Needless to say, the Bing Arts Center committee is hopeful that this funding rollercoaster ride is over for now.

In the last week of December, Governor-elect Patrick's office announced that he would restore the funding cut from the various effected 501 (c) 3's.

We have been working hard to enable the public to make use of this important neighborhood landmark once again.

We hope to successfully complete phase 1 of the project later this year, possibly by this coming fall. The front of the building (storefronts, lobby, restrooms and office space) will then be ready for public use and will receive a certificate of occupancy. The gallery will

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Improvements Ordered at Longhill Gardens

by Russ Seelig

The saga of Longhill Gardens continues. The deplorable conditions at Longhill Gardens continue to negatively impact our neighborhood. Russ Seelig and Bill Malloy of Concerned Citizens for Springfield (CCS) are leading the effort to correct housing code violations.

CCS first took legal action in Housing Court in June 2006. Since then, there have been numerous court hearings and site inspections. The result, five court orders have been issued against Condominium Trust Trustees Mayer Orgel,

Moishe Schwartz and Shalom Segelman.

The violations include broken entry door closers, jammed locks, broken/missing hand rails, yard waste/litter/debris on the entire property, graffiti, dirty hallways/stairways, broken/missing windows, broken/missing window hardware, missing stairway balusters, missing window guards, broken glass blocks in the stairways and numerous lead paint problems and the paving of the parking lots.

The Court ordered the Trustees to set

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New Trees... Old Stumps

Have you noticed the new trees along Sumner Avenue and the removal of tree stumps throughout the neighborhood? Here are the answers to commonly asked questions about the project.

Q *How many trees were planted?*

A 52.

Q *What kinds of trees were planted?*

A The new trees are mainly disease resistant American elms and some sycamores.

Q *Why plant trees in November?*

A It's the best time for the roots.

Q *What about trees for other streets?*

A New funding would be needed.

Q *Will the stump grinding stop?*

A The goal is to continue until all the stumps in our neighborhood are removed. The funds for the stump grinding are from the FPCA and Concerned Citizens for Springfield.

Q *Who do I contact if I need a stump removed?*

A Bill Malloy, attymalloy@verizon.net or 734-6894.

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Check us out on the web at:
www.forestparkca.com

Our email address is
admin@forestparkca.com

Email board members using the first name
and first initial of last name@forestparkca.com

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President's Letter

Notes, News and New Initiatives

Sandra Collins

Almost daily we read in the newspaper about the "failing school" in Springfield. We hear on the news about poor MCAS scores, drop out rates, and children not reaching the academic goals set for them. As a member of the community I worry about these children and wonder what can I do to help. If you are like me, time is a commodity and the idea of signing on for another task seems overwhelming. But don't fear, if you have one hour a week you can make a difference. How you might ask? Sign up with the Springfield School Volunteers!

There are six schools in the Forest Park neighborhood: Beal, Kensington, Sumner Avenue, White Street, Washington are elementary schools and Forest Park Middle School. Volunteering one hour a week in a school to tutor or mentor a student, read to a class, even help support a teacher during the class period can make a difference. Call 787-7015 and inquire as to how you can help. The reward for you is great and the reward for a student is even greater.

On another note, the FPCA has been in communication with Mayor Ryan's office regarding specific issues that negatively affect our neighborhood, see Top Ten List. Mayor Ryan's office has been working with the FPCA to address these issues. If you have a *specific* address/issue that you would like addressed, please call or e-mail Brian Sears. The list is a revolving one; in that once an issue is addressed another concern is added to the list.

At a recent board meeting, Representative Cheryl Coakley-Rivera announced that money has been earmarked to continue the lighting project that began several years ago. The lighting project consists of reproduction, historic lights to be installed along streets throughout the neighborhood. Driving down Sumner Avenue and part of Longhill Street will give you an opportunity to see the current lights. There are also lights at the

"X". The money, \$75,000.00, will allow for more lights to be installed. Possible streets include Oakland and Belmont. These lights are placed below the tree line, which enables more light to shine on the sidewalks and roads, as opposed to lights shining above the trees. Another item to remember with the early winter evenings, keep your porch lights on in the evening and night. As Belle Rita Novak says, "A well lit neighborhood is a safe neighborhood."

Do you have children/grandchildren/nieces/nephews? Did you know that with a library card, entrance to the Springfield Museums is free to Springfield students? Springfield residents receive free admission on Fridays. On school vacations or cold winter days, spend the day exploring art and culture at the museum for free. Don't have a library card? This is free also, just sign up at any library.

The FPCA is planning the annual meeting scheduled for February. The meeting will be a pot luck dinner held at the Sumner Avenue School on Sunday, February 11, 2007, from 4:00-6:00 pm. The program committee is working on a guest speaker, possibly someone from the Police Department to discuss recent changes in the neighborhood sectors. Election of officers will be conducted for the upcoming year. If you are interested in becoming a board member or have questions, please contact me. Being a board member is important work and can be very fulfilling. Also dues reminders will be mailed to you soon. If you are able, I would encourage you to consider making a contribution in addition to your dues, to the FPCA to help offset monies spent on the tree project.

Happy New Year. I look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting.



Sandra Collins

Mayor's Office Responds to the FPCA's First "Top 10" List

by Keshawn Dodds

- 1 Corner of Sumner and Longhill: no sidewalk curb cuts and the size of the sidewalk does not meet ADA standards.
I will talk to DPW about what needs to be done with the curb cuts. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 2 Trash/litter/dumping in empty lot on corner of Revere and Grand Streets.
I will report this to Clean City and it should be completed no later than Monday 11/20/06. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 3 Drug activity at 108, 110, 112 White Street. Police have been informed but with little improvement.
I will talk to the Chief of Staff and also officer Brown in the Police Department today. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 4 220?-Orange Street, Alex's Market. Dumpster is always overflowing.
I will report to Code Enforcement and DPW to try to resolve. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 5 Repair damage from the October 2005 storm to the duck pond area in Forest Park.
Completed.
- 6 285 Tiffany Street. The Beal School. Neighbors trespass on the school playing fields during the day with their dogs and leave feces which hinders the children from playing safely on the grounds. When these people are approached by school staff, their response is rudeness and blatant disrespect of the request.
I will talk to DPW to see if we can get some 'No Trespassing' signs up and also signs for fining people who do leave their dog feces on the school grounds. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 7 Explore what can be done to ease the extremely heavy traffic flow on Fort Pleasant Street, speeding and cars failing to stop. Tom Walsh is suggesting placement of more stop signs to reduce the speed of traffic.
I will have to talk to traffic and DPW about this issue. There are some traffic regulations that need to be followed but I will see what we can do. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 8 Fund the X Main St. Corporation.
I am currently looking into this with Barbara Garvey. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 9 Sidewalk replacement/repair on White St.
I will talk to DPW about this issue. I am not sure what funds are available to do this but will look into it. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06.
- 10 Repair and renovate the Forest Park Branch Library.
I will talk with Barbara Garvey about this. She works closely with the libraries. –Mr. Dodds responded to the concern on 11/16/06. (See article on page 5.)

About the FPCA's "Top 10" List

At the June, 2006, meeting of the FPCA Board, Keshawn Dodds, an aide to Mayor Ryan, requested a "Top 10" list of neighborhood issues/concerns. The list will be an evolving one: once an issue is addressed by the city, another can be added by the FPCA.

Mr. Dodds's responses appear in italics below each item with the date of his response.

The list is a unique opportunity for the FPCA to communicate *specific* concerns of the neighborhood and a commitment on the part of local government to address those concerns. Please keep in mind if you have an item for the list that *specific* concerns are those most likely to be resolved.

In this issue of the newsletter are two additional articles that focus on how residents can help resolve problems in the neighborhood.

John Kontekakis has written about how to use the housing court to address specific neighborhood problems. He has also put together a step by step guide to navigating housing court that will be available as a download from the newsletter page on the association's website

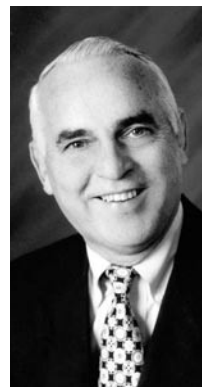
Susan Poole has an article explaining a new "data-driven" system being implemented by the police department, where decisions about police coverage are significantly shaped by community input.

The FPCA will keep you informed in future issues of the newsletter on how the city addresses issues on the Top 10 list.

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928 BELMONT AVENUE
SPRINGFIELD, MASS



PAUL J. SEARS

OFF: (413) 785-16 36

RES: (413) 732-8861

FAX: (413) 788-0662

Taking Back Your Neighborhood

by John Kontekakis

There are a lot of pressing issues in Springfield right now. One of the most stressful ones directly affecting its citizens is quality of life issues, such as crime, violence, and disturbances. Police Commissioner Edward Flynn poignantly remarked that much of the violence is “nitwit on nitwit” crimes. The Commissioner and Police Department seem to be taking great strides in dealing with the worst of it, such as the drug dealing and gang activity.

Some of the more difficult items for police to deal with are the noise disturbances and unruly neighbor issues. Unless they catch the perpetrators in the act, all they can do is give them a reprimanding. Most of the time, it falls on deaf ears, and even fuels the fire.

As a Realtor, I witness firsthand the culprit of a certain culture of abandonment, and that's absentee landlords. The hot real estate market of the past 6 years (or so) has attracted an influx of outside investors (Forest Park has approximately 2451 multi-family buildings and 2956 single family houses) due to our affordable housing stock. Many of these “investors” have little or no experience in property management, or simply don't care, as long as they get their check. Personally, this always poses a dilemma for me. I'm in the business of selling houses, so eager customers are usually a welcome sight. As a Forest Park resident, I cringe, because I know what the possible outcome could be. For my part, I go to great length to prepare my clients in order to become successful and responsible landlords. But as fate would have it, I had investors from the eastern part of the state buy the 2 family next to me and one across the street for me. Needless to say, mayhem ensued. Screaming, vulgarities, tire screeching, car racing, window rattling stereos, aggressive pit bulls, drug activity, street fighting, and so on. All this till the early morning hours. Every time the police came around, the activity magically subsided.

After living through the year from hell, I decided to take matters into my own hand. The easy way out, would've been to put up the house for sale, like so many of my neighbors and others around the city. But why, I asked myself? Ninety-five percent of the people around me were decent hardworking people. Why should we allow a few “nitwits” to hijack the entire neighborhood? So with the encouragement of nearby activist neighbor, Susan Poole, I decided to start the process of taking the next door tenants and property owner to housing court. She introduced me to the Community Police Sector H (Forest Park/East FP) Beat Management Team, spearheaded by Andrew Crane and Police Officer Chris Hrycay. Andy and Susan outlined the process of going to court and, using the same organizational skills I use daily as a Realtor, I got to work putting together my case. Andy emphasized having credible witnesses, so Susan and I were able to gather four other neighbors to testify with me. The outcome of the hearing was a great success. The neighborhood was once again transformed to a decent area.

At the most recent Beat Management Team in October, Springfield Police Lieutenant Moynihan stressed that “the citizens must get involved”. It's the only way we can take back the city and make it what it once was. To that end, I've outlined the steps I followed in going to court and posted it on the Forest Park Civic Association's web site as a downloadable “How To” pdf. I stress gathering information regarding the disturbances. It should be noted, though, that the most important part is gathering witnesses to testify with you in court. *Step up to the plate Springfield!*

How to Go to Housing Court Against Offensive Neighbors (And Win)

by John Kontekakis

This is a guideline for those who are fed up with an unruly neighbor, and have decided to do something about it. In most cases, numerous calls to the police have yielded little or no results. It may all seem like a lot of work, but it's worth the effort. The results can be dramatic and will add peace back into your life, restore your neighborhood, and protect your home's value.

1. Make a record, log as many incidents as possible. Make notes of the following:
 - A. Date & time.
 - B. Location, e.g. - home address, as well as in the street, on sidewalk, porch, back yard, etc.
 - C. Description of people involved. Try to find out their names. That can be tricky. See paragraph 3 below.
 - D. Description of any vehicle involved, e.g. - make, model, color, and license plate number.
 - E. Name of offense, e.g. - loud stereo, screeching tires, drug dealing, smoking, etc.
 - F. If available, video tape offenses that take place in public (i.e., street, sidewalk, or neighborhood playground). Things like drug dealing, boisterous, etc.
 - G. If available, video tape offenses that take place in private (i.e., porch, back yard, etc.)
2. Take photographs. Use the same precautions. They can be brought with you to court as evidence of your case.
3. Get witness support. Start communicating with neighbors who you can trust and are willing to assist you. If you are the type of person that never gets to know the neighbors or are new to the neighborhood, take a look at the houses around you, get them, and drop a note off to their door. Make note of the address, write a quick note, and address it from the mailbox, or mail it to them. A good place to find owner's names and addresses is from the Springfield GIS (Geographic Information System) website (<http://www.sp SpringfieldGIS.com>). Simply ask if they are bothered by the ongoing disruptive activity in their area along with the diminished quality of life and if they are interested in public evidence, tell them your story. Simply ask if they are interested in public evidence, tell them your story. Simply ask if they are interested in public evidence, tell them your story.
4. Create a Police Log. Call the Springfield Police complaint line at 787-6002. You can also file a complaint via the internet at www.sp SpringfieldPolice.com.
5. Make record of Housing Code violations. Call the Springfield Office of Housing at 787-6002 or go to their website: www.sp SpringfieldHousing.com. If there are noise or nuisance properties, but you think there are violations, report them. First review the Good Neighbor Handbook for a reference of the city ordinances. You can obtain a copy by contacting the Community Police at 787-6002 or by going to the website of the Police at www.sp SpringfieldPolice.com. They also charge a fee, and is in the vicinity of \$35.

6. Prepare your complaint. Your complaint should be clear and to the point. Write a draft on scrap paper to fill out the actual form. The actual form is available at <http://www.sp SpringfieldPolice.com> as well as at the housing court.
7. Go to court. The hearing is held in the middle of the street, not having to face the judge. He will put things in motion and act as a mediator. Bring the form to the Housing Court Clerk's Office. He will put things in motion and act as a mediator. Bring the form to the Housing Court Clerk's Office. He will put things in motion and act as a mediator. Bring the form to the Housing Court Clerk's Office.

A step by step guide to using the Housing Court is available on the FPCA website. The PDF has interactive links in it that will take you to the city agencies you will need to contact and the forms you will need to file.

ARCHITECTURE

william j. devlin ala, inc.

71-B Avon Pl. Springfield, MA 01105

413 • 732 • 6197 Fax 413 • 732 • 3812

Increase Your Chances for Police Involvement in Your Neighborhood

by Susan Poole

It is important that you dial the police department and report *all* questionable or unlawful activity in your neighborhood. Before you say you don't have the time, know that a *new plan concerning data collection and response has been implemented*. The department has been reorganized to emphasize *responsibility* and *accountability*.

This is how it works: all calls that come into the communications room are used to generate weekly reports by the Crime Analysis Unit for the Commissioner. They generate reports on call types and look for trends. Even when a unit does not respond, the call is still used for statistical purposes and used at the weekly command staff meetings. Areas needing attention are pinpointed using this process. Even complaints made at the front desk or at different departments are included. *If you don't take the time to call or make reports, the department may assume all is well in your neighborhood.*

Second, the reorganization of the police department offers hope that neighborhood problems will be handled more effectively. For on-going or repeat problems we are now asked to directly call or email the upper echelon. So now, instead of hoping that our complaint gets to the top, it starts at the top. The Deputy Chief of the South Division, which includes Sector H – Forest Park, is William Fitchet. When he receives a communication from you, he will begin problem solving. The Deputy will be holding people accountable for the orders he has assigned. We already have some great reports about Deputy Chief Fitchet's responsiveness.

Deputy Chief William Fitchet is reachable for *ongoing* or *repeat* problems via email at wfitchet@springfieldpolice.net or by phone at 787-6330.

The Springfield Police Department has changed radically for the better by embracing accountability. In turn, if we want to see significant change in our neighborhood, we must be willing to change also, to get involved and call, call, call!

Just a reminder: 911 is for crime, fire and medical emergencies only. For general complaints call: 787-6203.

A link to a detailed chart of Springfield's Police Department's reorganized structure and a map detailing the city's sectors can be found on the FPCA website at www.forestparkca.com in the newsletter section.

Longhill

Continued from page 1

aside \$693,000 by November 30, 2006 to insure funds would be available to correct the violations. However the Trustees have failed to comply. CCS has filed a Contempt Complaint against Messrs. Orgel, Schwartz and Segelman for their failure to obey the court. This complaint will be heard by the Housing Court on January 8, 2007.

In the face of all of this the current owners of 192 units, Longhill Omega, LLC, (principals Mayer Orgel and Moishe Schwartz) is moving to transfer its ownership and thus evade the court order to bring the property into compliance. CCS has obtained a Court order to

block the transfer.

On a positive note, some improvements have been made. Some new entry doors have been installed, yard waste/litter/debris has been cleaned up, one parking lot has been paved but only a few lead-painted windows have been replaced. However, on-going maintenance is inadequate.

Housing Court Inspector Kevin Byrne, in a report on his December 5, 2006 viewing, states, "The property owners...need to commit to applying greater resources to bring this property into compliance with the court orders and to have sufficient staff available to maintain this property."

City Moves on Library Repairs

By Jeanne Kaiser

If you've been by the Forest Park Branch Library over the past months, you certainly have noticed the chain link barriers, covered walkways and scaffolding surrounding the entrance. Problems with the roof and parapets that resulted from last autumn's torrential rainfalls have necessitated these temporary structures. Help is on the way...repairs are scheduled for the spring.

On August 11, the Finance Control Board authorized funds for this project. On September 7, the roof was assessed by David Meehan of the Springfield Dept. of Parks, Buildings and Recreation Management and Holyoke architect Timothy Murphy in preparation for drawing up an RFP (request for proposals). The repair work can not be done in cold weather. However, one decorative block of terracotta has been removed so that a number of new ones may be fabricated.



The removed section of the terracotta.

A gusty October storm uprooted the large tree in front of the library. While we will miss the shade and shelter provided by this mature tree, its removal gives us with a chance to dream about what might replace it.

Colorful awnings to shade library windows? A fountain, sculpture or dramatic planting in front of the library? Wider walkways and an improved circulation pattern? Relocated book return boxes? The Forest Park Library Advisory Committee is interested in your suggestions on improvements to the library's front lawn. Please contact Ginna Ondricek at 734-3869 or ginnaond@yahoo.com with your ideas. Share your enthusiasm about our wonderful branch library.

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FPCA Annual Meeting
Sumner Avenue School
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The Bing

Continued from page 1

be opened and art classes and meetings can take place. Film nights and other cultural events can be presented. The “X” Main Street Corporation will once again have an office. The auditorium renovation phase can then be started. The front roof has been replaced, and extensive interior renovations are well underway. A heating and air conditioning system still has to be designed and installed in addition to restroom improvements and modifications.

The Bing Arts Center will enhance the Forest Park neighborhood culturally and economically. We thank Joao Alves and his crew of Putnam students, Terry and Greg Stone of Stone & Stone Woodworking, and architect Bill Devlin. Pioneer Valley Rebuilders have also been a great help! Tax exempt donations can be mailed to: The “X” Main Street Corporation, Bing Arts Center, P.O. Box 80553, Springfield, MA 01138.

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