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# WICK NEIGHBORS, INC. UPDATE

A Status Report on Recent Events

August 2006

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## **Agreement Reached with Wick District-Smoky Hollow Developer**

Zaremba Inc., an experienced, successful developer of urban neighborhoods in Northeast Ohio, has signed a predevelopment agreement with Wick Neighbors, Inc. and started preliminary work on carrying out the Wick District-Smoky Hollow Development Plan.

The predevelopment agreement outlines the developer's activities through year's end. Among the developer's tasks will be to review the Development Plan, explore financing and determine the exact types of housing, pricing and potential retail development. Once a feasibility is established, a development agreement is to be negotiated with Wick Neighbors, Inc.

The predevelopment agreement doesn't mean construction on housing and retail development will start immediately. The development agreement will facilitate construction.

A WNI committee with full community representation made the selection. The committee, including Youngstown State University staff and trustees, private businesses, the City of Youngstown, Board of Education, home builders and trade unions, reviewed the proposals and interviewed all three developers. The selection process started in December 2005 with release of a Request For Proposals. The RFP was advertised among developers nationwide with emphasis on Northeast Ohio and Western Pennsylvania. Three strong proposals were received by the early February deadline. The committee selected Zaremba based on factors including previous successful experience in similar urban, mixed-use, large-scale developments, financial capacity and the strong principals involved with the development team. The predevelopment agreement was negotiated between April and July.

## **Nationally-Known Speakers Offer Solutions for Neighborhood Reinvestment**

Speakers with national reputations in their fields outlined approaches that are successful in developing urban neighborhoods in other cities during the first two workshops in a series titled "Neighborhood Reinvestment – How To's." Wick Neighbors, Inc. and Youngstown 2010 are organizing the workshops.

- Alan Mallach of the National Housing Institute and Alex Staneff of Key Bank Community Development Lending discussed how cities and neighborhood groups could create stronger markets in troubled cities during the May 17 workshop "Reversing Decline: Goals for Neighborhood Investment in Weak Market Cities." Jamael Tito Brown of YSU and the WNI Board served as the moderator.
- Considering that Youngstown has more than 12,000 vacant properties and more than 1,000 vacant homes, Joseph Schilling of the National Vacant Properties Campaign discussed strategies other cities used to successfully return vacant property to productive use during the June 14 workshop "Vacant Properties: Neighborhood Liability or Asset?" Also, Lisa Nelson of Case Western Reserve University demonstrated the need for a comprehensive information system to do effective neighborhood planning. Schilling and Nelson were joined on the panel by Mahoning County Treasurer John Reardon and Bill D'Avignon, city Planning Director. Mahoning County Commissioner John McNally was the moderator.

Neighborhood reinvestment clearly is a hot topic in Youngstown. The first workshop, in the Zona Auditorium at the Butler Institute of American Art, had a solid turnout. The second workshop was standing room only.

Workshop sponsors include: St. John's Episcopal Church, National City Bank, Sky Bank, First National Bank, KeyBank, Home Savings and Loan, Chase Bank, Farmers National Bank, Mahoning Valley Coalition for Community Reinvestment - Charter One Bank, YSU Department of Social Work, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and Buy Into Youngstown, with support from the Raymond John Wean Foundation, Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the Youngstown Community Development Agency.

The workshops were recorded by The Youngstown Channel and can be viewed at these links on their web site:

- May 17 workshop: [www.theyoungstownchannel.com/events/wick1.html](http://www.theyoungstownchannel.com/events/wick1.html)
- June 14 workshop: [www.theyoungstownchannel.com/events/wick2.html](http://www.theyoungstownchannel.com/events/wick2.html)

## **Wick District Pedestrian Walkways To Connect YSU, Arts, Neighborhood**

Collaboration among Wick Neighbors, Inc., St. John's Episcopal Church and YSU has resulted in the proposed Wick District Pedestrian Walkways Project, two walkways that would link Wick Avenue's institutional assets to the Smoky Hollow neighborhood. The next step is seeking funding.

The proposed Arts Walkway incorporates a diagonal path that is a smooth transition in grade for pedestrians and aims to be a physical and visual unifier between Wick Avenue and Walnut Street in Smoky Hollow. The walkway would feature arts installations and serve as a gathering space. The urban planning firm, City Architecture, designed the walkway and developed the cost estimates.

St. John's Way would create an inviting walkway through the St. John's Church property, from Lincoln Avenue to Court Street, which would encompass the Lincoln Avenue entrance to the YSU campus, the Public Library and the Church. Paul Ricciuti, a Youngstown architect, designed the walkway.

## **WNI Design Review Formation Committee Completes Design Guidelines**

Thanks go to the 11-member WNI Design Review Formation Committee, which recently completed the goal of creating Design Guidelines for the Wick District. Guidelines have been finalized for new residential and commercial construction, existing residential properties, existing commercial properties and the Wick Avenue institutions. The Design Guidelines are the foundation for maintaining high standards of design, materials and visual quality for the Wick District-Smoky Hollow neighborhood. Fr. Richard Murphy was the task force chairperson. Members were Mike Kovach of City Machine Technologies; Robert Mastriana of the 4M Company; Hunter Morrison of YSU Urban Studies; David Reed of the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio; Rebecca Rogers, an architectural historian; Anthony Worrellia, a Smoky Hollow resident and design professional; Bill D'Avignon, City Planning Director; and Joe Jenderasiak, a landscape architect.

## **Community Coming Together to Reopen Segment of Walnut Street**

Walnut Street is a major connection between the Smoky Hollow neighborhood and the Chevrolet Centre and Downtown. Because of that, a Wick Neighbors, Inc. task force focused on improving the street and re-opening the closed section between Wood and Commerce streets is working with city leaders to start the process. The Walnut Street Task Force of the Visual Enhancement Committee reviewed the condition of the closed section and agreed on a goal of getting the segment of road re-opened. The task force recently met with Councilman Artis Gillam, Sr. and City Public Works Director Carmen Conglose, Jr. The recommended actions were:

- Start with beautification of the space into a pedestrian walkway.
- Seek an engineering study to return the street to two-way vehicle traffic.
- Determine how to make the project a city priority.

Task Force co-chairperson Sharon Letson of Youngstown CityScape led a volunteer effort that has cleared heavy brush from the hillside, leaving the street looking much better already. Task Force members include: Co-chairperson Donna Buzulencia of Coldwell Banker/First Place Real Estate; Carmine and Joe Cassese of the MVR; John Hyden of YSU Facilities; Rev. Nick Mager of First Presbyterian Church of Youngstown; Joe Meranto of Choffin Career and Technical Center; Mike Shafer of the YMCA; Elder Oliver Stallworth of Butler Presbyterian Church; and Harold Whatley and Anthony Worrellia, Smoky Hollow residents. Also joining the effort are Liz Norah of the Children's Museum; Mike Latessa of the MVP 20/30 Club; Matt Hufnagel of the Chevrolet Centre; and Adam Tokash of the Mahoning Valley Thunder.

## **City Planning Board Approves Wick District Community Development Plan**

The Youngstown City Planning Commission unanimously approved the city-sponsored Community Development Plan for the Wick District-Smoky Hollow neighborhood at its May 16 meeting. The plan evaluates property conditions in the neighborhood and outlines the tools that could be used in redevelopment. The next step for the plan is securing City Council approval. About 15 supporters from Wick District businesses and institutions attended the meeting in a strong show of support for WNI and the Community Development Plan.

## **Wick District Community Celebrations**

The Wick District-Smoky Hollow community and Wick Neighbors, Inc. recently have celebrated the district in different ways:

- WNI members and friends gathered May 4 for the WNI Annual Meeting and Dinner at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church hall. Keynote speaker Richard C. Harwood, a noted national expert on strengthening communities and improving public life, talked about the reasons he believes the city has moved from being a place he once described as "stuck" and "a city in waiting" to a "community on the go." During the annual meeting, the board chose two new officers: Scott Schulick of Butler Wick as Vice Chairperson and Jamael Tito Brown of YSU as Secretary; and elected three new Board members: Presley Gillespie of Key Bank; Karen Abrams of National City Bank; and John Finizio of Humility of Mary Health Partners.
- The Third Annual Ecumenical Service on July 9 at St. John's Episcopal Church celebrated the progress made to date in developing the Wick District-Smoky Hollow neighborhood. Congregations and religious institutions filling the church for the service included St. John's Episcopal Church, First Presbyterian Church of Youngstown, Butler Memorial Presbyterian Church, New Beginnings Outreach and Ursuline High School.
- Many thanks go to the sponsors and volunteers who made the Third Annual Smoky Hollow 5K Run and Family Fun Walk on July 8 such a success. Honorary chairpersons were Annie Gillam, Pat Sweet and Sonya Williams. Cassese's MVR sponsored a complimentary brunch for runners, walkers and volunteers. The final count was 100 runners and 103 walkers. The men's winner was Tim McNeil, 32, with a time of 17:16. The female winner was Alana Smith, 14, who clocked a 23:10. Awards also went to the male and female winners in a number of age categories. Walkers who finished the course received ribbons and kids 12 and under received a medal.