

CITY OF WHITING – OCTOBER 2, 2007

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF
THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WHITING, INDIANA**

The Common Council of the City of Whiting met in regular session on Tuesday, October 2, 2007, at 6:30 p.m. with Councilman Sarvanidis presiding as President Pro Tem. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, followed by the invocation from Councilman Stolman.

I. ROLL CALL

Councilmembers Greer, Jennings, Sarvanidis, Spebar, Stolman, Unate and Zubeck were present. Also present were Clerk-Treasurer Drewniak, Clerk-Treasurer Elect Adam, City Attorney Sejna and interested citizens.

Mayor Stahura was unable to attend the meeting due to a prior commitment.

Councilman Spebar moved for suspension of rules to allow a visitor from the Northwest Indiana Forum (NIF) to address the Council; seconded by Councilman Jennings. Roll Call: Councilmembers Greer, Jennings, Spebar, Stolman, Unate and Zubeck voted aye. Vote: 6 ayes, no nays, no abstentions. Motion carried unanimously.

President Pro Tem Sarvanidis introduced Karen Lauerma of the NIF, who will be speaking to the Board concerning possible expansion of the South Shore railway line.

Ms. Lauerma showed maps of the planned expansion, reaching from the Millennium Park hub in Chicago out to Munster, Dyer, Valparaiso and Lowell. Ms. Lauerma came before the Council as part of a community outreach program, as this expansion will have economic, environmental and quality of life impacts on Whiting and surrounding communities.

Ms. Lauerma pointed out that additional lines will increase ease of traveling both to and from Chicago for work and recreation reasons. Planned expansion is still in the planning stages, and will hopefully relieve passenger congestion on the existing rail line. A well-planned rail line will give opportunities for transit-related economic development as well as increase educational access to local colleges and universities. Ms. Lauerma listed other advantages of increased rail service, including air quality improvement, redevelopment of areas that are currently underutilized, and increased tourism. She pointed out that the 4.2 million commuters who used the South Shore last year drove 91 million miles less and saved over 3.9 million gallons of gasoline. This represents both an economic and environmental savings.

She spoke in favor of the many advantages of public transportation, including health and community improvements. Ms. Lauerma noted that preservation of existing green space is an important factor in planning this expansion. She suggested that good public transportation would reduce 'brain drain' by providing access to good jobs in Chicago without having to move out of the area. Because ridership on the South Shore has

dramatically increased and there is strong financial support for the existing line, now is a good time to expand services and to provide new railcars for commuters on the existing service as well. Surveys done in the communities which would be most affected by this expansion show a 79% acceptance rate for this project. Congressman Visclosky has identified \$500 million of Federal funding from gas tax that could be used for this expansion. State Legislators are also interested in supporting this expansion.

President Pro Tem Sarvanidis commented that, in the struggle to maintain quality of life in the northern Lake County communities, he would rather see the people who work in Chicago live in Whiting and surrounding communities. Councilman Sarvanidis stated that he would rather not provide incentive and reward for those people who have left the area by making it easy for them to get to work. He questioned whether there would be any real economic benefit to Whiting from this expansion.

Ms. Lauerman provided examples from similar urban areas across the U.S. to support the idea of expansion as a way to direct economic expansion, which tends to occur along public transit lines.

Community Development Director Lowry asked how this would impact Whiting directly, since the City is already close to the train station. Ms. Lauerman stated that cross-promotion of all the rail lines should reawaken interest in all communities near the rail line. Discussion of planned expansion lines took place, which should give all commuters more access to more trains.

Dennis Moore, who commuted for work to the University of Chicago for 30 years, commented that he never saw anyone from Chicago take the train to Indiana unless they were going to a game at Notre Dame. He noted that Chicago jobs are not useful unless they are near a railway station.

Councilman Jennings asked why East Chicago, Gary and Whiting are not included in the list of contributors for this study, noting that it might not provide any benefit for them beyond what already exists. He stated that the true benefit will be to southern Lake County and additional Porter County communities, and asked if northern Lake County communities will be expected to help fund this expansion. Ms. Lauerman stated that funding options are still being investigated; at this stage, only discussion of the expansion concept is being presented.

Councilman Stolman asked if Ms. Lauerman thought the expansion would help reduce urban sprawl. Ms. Lauerman stated the hope that, with proper planning, rampant growth would not be allowed. Mr. Stolman said that unanticipated development in unincorporated areas in southern Lake County will likely be the result. Ms. Lauerman will send a copy of a study to Councilman Stolman which addresses this concern.

President Pro Tem Sarvanidis stated that this expansion would remove one of Whiting's valuable marketing tools, which is proximity to train stations. If the expansion goes through, many more communities will be able to make that claim.

Ms. Lauerman informed the Council that their website for further information is www.gosouthshore.org, and commented that they have just begun their public education and awareness campaign phase of the planned expansion. Ms. Lauerman plans to return before the Council as more progress and legislative information becomes available.

President Pro Tem Sarvanidis returned the meeting to the regular format of the Common Council.

II. MINUTES

President Pro Tem Sarvanidis asked for consideration of the minutes of the September 25, 2007, regular rescheduled Common Council meeting.

Councilwoman Unate moved to approve said minutes, as submitted. Councilwoman Greer seconded the motion. Roll Call: (Voice) All Councilmembers voted aye. Motion carried unanimously.

III. COMMUNICATIONS, PETITIONS, MEMORIALS OR REMONSTRANCES

None.

IV. REPORT OF THE MAYOR

Due to the absence of Mayor Stahura, no report was given.

V. STANDING COMMITTEES

No report was given.

VI. REPORT OF THE CLERK-TREASURER

Clerk-Treasurer Drewniak presented Civil City Accounts Payable Vouchers #2203 - #2246 inclusive for approval.

Councilman Stolman moved to approve said Vouchers for payment; seconded by Councilwoman Unate. Roll Call: (Voice) All Councilmembers voted aye. Motion carried unanimously.

VII. REPORT OF THE CITY ATTORNEY

No report was given.

VIII. SPECIAL COMMITTEES

No report was given.

IX. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

X. ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

None.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

None.

XII. PUBLIC DISCUSSION

None.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Councilman Jennings moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 p.m.; seconded by Councilman Zubeck. Roll Call: (Voice) All Councilmembers voted aye. Motion carried unanimously.

MARGARET DREWNIAK, Clerk-Treasurer