

ECCO Meeting September 2012
Reformation Lutheran Church
09/20/2012 7:00pm

Fred Monk called the meeting to order and thanked residents for allowing him to serve as ECCO President. He presented a motion to officially accept the new Officers. The motion was seconded by Perrin Brunson and met with a majority vote in the affirmative. The new Officers were introduced.

President - Rebecca Haynes
Vice President - Wes Crosby (not in attendance)
Treasurer - John Sinclair (not in attendance)
Secretary - Kelli Wukela
Member-At-Large - Susan Lourie

The meeting was turned over to incoming President, Rebecca Haynes.

- Officers will be deciding about committee chairs in the next month
- the floor was turned over to Richland County Councilman Paul Livingston for discussion of the proposed Penny Sales Tax
- Fred Monk and residents offered their thanks to Cm. Livingston for getting Lyle Street paved

Penny Sales Tax info by Richland County Council Member Paul Livingston

- 2 years ago, penny tax (for funding to improve transportation) was on the ballot and it did not pass

- why is it on the ballot again? it's possible some people didn't know how bad the problem is and the alternatives turned out to be inviable

- a 39-member transportation study committee conducted meetings across the County asking what citizens want their County to look like

- study findings showed citizens concerned with all modes of transportation - roadways, public transport, greenways - and a master list of needed repairs/construction was made

- the complete list is available at www.richlandonline.com/TransportationPenny/Projects.asp

- the penny sales tax would fund these projects, create up to 14,000 jobs, make roads safer and improve our community

- only 60% of the funding will be paid by Richland County residents - the rest is by visitors

- presented a handout stating:

What does a YES vote on The Penny mean?

MORE JOBS – Over 14,000 short-term and long-term LOCAL jobs and billions in new investments, allowing us to turn our economy around sooner. And long-term funding to maintain and improve our bus system allows thousands of people in Richland County, including Fort Jackson, to get to work, get groceries and go to the doctor.

SAFER ROADS – Richland County has 2nd most dangerous roads in the state. Pedestrian improvements would help significantly; wider roads are safer roads. And improvements to our bus system will help free up our roadways.

LOCAL CONTROL – Local leaders including the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce created the plan, local voters will approve the plan, local citizens will oversee the implementation of the plan and local families will benefit from the plan; nearly half the cost of improving our roads and bus system will come from outside Richland County.

What does a NO vote on The Penny mean?

STATUS QUO – A major setback to the great progress we have made in our community and the likely loss of our bus system. And if we don't invest in ourselves, no one else will.

MORE FEES – The cost of deteriorating roads and increased fees (franchise fees, license tag fees, transit fees, toll roads) will end up costing our families nearly twice as much as The Penny, but we'll get so much less for it.

MAJOR LOSS – We don't want to lose countless jobs and investment. We don't want to lose a chance to make our roads safer. We don't want to lose our vital bus system. And we don't want to lose control of this issue to the federal government.

Imagine Richland County 22 years from now. First, imagine a thriving Richland County with a booming economy, low unemployment rates, a first-class bus system and safe, local roads that are second to none. Now imagine a Richland County on the decline with a struggling economy, high unemployment rates, no bus system and deadly, deteriorating roads that are an embarrassment to all.

That is the difference between a YES VOTE and a no vote. On November 6, please VOTE YES to The Penny and we will get MORE FOR LESS.

Cm. Livingston opened the floor to questions

- Brian Ready: Is the penny sales tax proposal going to be presented at every election?
Cm. Livingston: This proposal is a one time tax increase.
- Melanie Lewismoss: How will the projects' order be determined?
Cm. Livingston: The master list available online has the projects listed in order of preferred priority as determined by the transportation study committee.
- Brian South: Expressed thanks to Cm. Livingston for paving Lyle Street. What are the major objections to the penny sales tax?
Cm. Livingston: The one cent per dollar cost to the taxpayer is a concern.
- James Devenney: This would mean residents would pay 8 cents on the dollar. Is this the best time for a tax increase, considering the economy?
Cm. Livingston: There are transportation issues that must be fixed and there are no alternatives.
- Virginia Bedford expressed concerns about property taxes.
Cm. Livingston assured residents that he has never stated that he would "never raise property taxes" and that he is sincerely devoted to doing what's best for Richland County.
- Virginia Bedford expressed concerns about the hospitality tax.
Cm. Livingston explained that the State Legislature (not County Council) had final say as to how the hospitality tax money was used - specifically concerning the placement of the farmer's market.
- Greg Hilton: How will we be sure the money goes where it should?
Cm. Livingston: State law says the money will have to be used for transportation. There will be an oversight committee. County Council has full responsibility for determining how the money is spent (as long as it's for transportation).
- Pat McCright: Will the spending be online?
Cm. Livingston: All penny tax spending will be documented and public.
- Perrin Brunson: Is the project priority certain?
Cm. Livingston: The projects will be completed in the order listed when at all possible.
- Greg Hilton: To what extent will greenways be funded?
Cm. Livingston: A total of 8% of the funding will go to greenways, including Saluda River access and Smith Branch. *See Greenways brochure, attached.*
- James Devenney: How do we know people can afford the penny tax - is there a study available that shows how citizens are affected by increases such as this?

Cm. Livingston: Citizens would be saving money in other ways. If the penny tax is passed, residents will no longer pay a 2% fee on their utility bills (a fee adopted in Feb. 2011 to keep the bus system running after the penny tax failed to pass in November 2010).

In closing, Councilman Livingston encouraged residents to get more information at richlandonline.com by clicking on the penny and gave residents his direct phone numbers, home and cell, so that he can answer any additional questions.

Susan Lourie, Member-At-Large, invited any new residents to stand for introductions. No new residents were present, but two graduate students from the University of South Carolina were in attendance and introduced themselves. They are completing a project on a Columbia neighborhood and have chosen Earlewood as their focus. They will be spending lots of time in the area and hope to meet more residents as they continue their research.

Virginia Bedford, Chair of the Parks Committee, shared information on the amphitheatre and community center fountain:

- trees will be planted at the amphitheatre to help with shade (*see drawing, attached*)
- public bathrooms will be constructed
- the new community center building will have green rooms for actors/performers
- the green space showcasing the Earlewood fountain will be called the Elizabeth Glover Davis Garden in honor of longtime Earlewood resident, Elizabeth Davis
- there will be a granite and bronze marker in front of the fountain stating: *This fountain was given to the City of Columbia by the National Human Alliance in 1908 on the request of the Ladies of the Civic League of Columbia, led by Miss Belle Williams. It is one of 125 watering troughs/fountains presented to communities around the United States through an endowment from its founder, Herman Lee Ensign. The fountain features water flowing from lions' mouths into a basin of polished Maine granite trimmed with bronze with the upper bowl for horses and small cups at the bottom for dogs and smaller animals. Originally located at the intersection of Lady and Assembly Streets, adjacent to the Farmer's Market, this 5-ton fountain was moved to Earlewood Park after 1951, when the market moved to Bluff Road. It was relocated to the Township Auditorium in 1980, but this historic fountain was returned to Earlewood Park in 2012.*

Perrin Brunson, Chair of Communications Committee/Playground Committee Member, gave updates on several items related to Quality of Life events, playground progress, and fundraising:

- Thanksgiving dinner will be at the new community center, but the community center grand opening will happen in the spring
- residents should plan to vote at their temporary voting station this year
- all members of the Playground Committee (Melanie Lewismoss, Perrin Brunson, Linda Oakleaf, and Kelli Wukela) were introduced
- the new playground will be located where the picnic shelter used to be, below the new Parks and Recreation Headquarters, next to the new community building
- the playground is in the final stages of approval before construction and should be ready to for play by January
- starting Monday, donations will be accepted online to help fund the tree planting and fountain marker (goal: \$5,000)
- Trunk or Treat will be coming up in October and will be held at St. Mark's on Lyle Street
- there will be no neighborhood meetings in November and December due to holiday events

The floor was turned back over to Rebecca Haynes, President, who noted that Rudy Mancke would like to come back in the spring to do walking tours of Earlewood Park. She also offered Bark Park updates:

- everyone is invited to the Smith Branch stream cleanup, September 29th at 10:00am
- Anne McGovern, resident of Seminary Ridge, will be taking over as Bark Park Chairperson in January
- the Bark Park is working to become it's own non-profit
- resident Brian Ready stated that trees within the Bark Park are losing their branches and suggested planting more now to offer continuous shade, and mentioned that a bench in the park is sinking
- Rebecca Haynes noted the stated concerns and opened the floor to additional comments

Virginia Bedford suggested that the fundraising for trees be increased to include trees for the playground and dog park to be planted on Arbor Day along with those for the amphitheatre. She also gave a summary of the Lancaster house carport issue and the carport at Columbia and Northwood. ECCO will continue to follow these situations and work towards a resolution. Also, there is a large lot at the end of Beaufort, adjacent to Earlewood Park, that has been cleared to build three houses. The zoning committee will continue to monitor the progress on this project.

Rebecca Haynes adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Kelli Wukela, Secretary