

**MINUTES OF THE REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE
SCHENECTADY CITY COUNCIL – SEPTEMBER 8, 2008**

The meeting was called to order by Council President Margaret C. King at 7:00 P.M. in Room 209, City Council Chambers at City Hall.

Ms. King called upon Rev. Steven Clunn, First United Methodist Church, to deliver the Invocation.

Ms. King then called upon Joseph Battaglino to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

At this point in the meeting, Ms. King asked if there were no objections, she would like to take Agenda Items #4A, #2, #3, #4 and #4B out of order. There were no objections.

Resolution No. 2008-152 Adopted Unanimously

Mrs. Brucker invited Doris Aiken to come inside the rail to accept a resolution recognizing and commending RID on its 30th Anniversary. Ms. Aiken thanked the City Council for the resolution.

Resolution No. 2008-153 Adopted Unanimously

Mr. McCarthy invited James DeMidio and members of the Anaconda Indians team to come inside the rail to accept a resolution congratulating them for their dedication, commitment and skill in the sport of baseball. They thanked the City Council for the resolution.

Resolution No. 2008-154 Adopted Unanimously

Mr. McCarthy invited James DeMidio to come inside the rail to accept a resolution congratulating and recognizing him for working tirelessly, committing time and personal funds to build a baseball program. He thanked the City Council for the resolution.

Resolution No. 2008-155 Adopted Unanimously

Mr. Allen invited Carlos Caraballo to come inside the rail to accept a resolution declaring September 15th through October 15th as “Hispanic American Heritage Month” in the City of Schenectady. Mr. Caraballo thanked the City Council for the resolution.

Resolution No. 2008-156 Adopted Unanimously

Mr. McCarthy invited Joseph Battaglino to come inside the rail to accept a resolution recognizing and saluting him for his many years as a tireless champion for working men and women and as a promoter of our economy. Mr. Battaglino thanked the City Council for the resolution.

PUBLIC HEARINGS: None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Blanchfield moved that the minutes of the City Council meeting of August 25, 2008 be approved as submitted by the City Clerk. It was seconded by Mr. Della Sala. Hearing no objections, Ms. King declared the minutes approved as submitted.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Official –

From the Mayor, a list of appointments.

General - Public Announcement:

The Bellevue Preservation Association will hold its meeting on Thursday, September 11 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Hall at 1911 Fairview Ave. at 7:00 P.M. The Guest Speaker will be Jeffrey Clark, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity. For additional information, contact Rick Kehrli at 393-1065.

PETITIONS: None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Mr. Della Sala stated that the Intergovernmental Relations Committee met and he invited Ed Kosiur to report on the Summer Camp at Central Park. Ed Kosiur introduced 2 success stories of over 100 kids who enjoyed the SJTA Program. They presented the Council, Fire Department and Mayor with gifts.

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR (LEGISLATIVE ITEMS):

Ms. King invited all who wished to address the City Council on any item of the Legislative Agenda to come forward. The following speakers rose to be heard and their remarks are summarized:

Mary McClaine, Schenectady resident, stated that she was incensed by some comments by the Councilmembers. At the last meeting, the Council appointed a Saratoga person to serve on the DSIC. Tonight, the Council sells a parcel of land for \$1.00 and the IDA will give it to Price Chopper FREE. The Council is not fighting for us.

Pat Zollinger, 150 Clement Ave., spoke in regard to Agenda Item #1 – a resolution authorizing the conveyance of a tiny parcel of land on the Northwest side of Maxon Road to the IDA. I object to the use of the word “tiny” in an official document put out by the City Council. Just what does the word “tiny” mean here? Tiny is a subjective term and there are other words that could have been used in place of the word “tiny”, just as effectively. You could have used teeny, or teeny weeny. Little, minute and minuscule could have been used also. How about petite or small. So my question is simply this. Does this parcel have a tax identifier and if so, why isn't that being used to describe the property in this agenda? And if it doesn't, why doesn't it? It (is/may be) described in the actual legislation (check) but the public has no easy access to this. If they come down, there may be a copy left over, but, it's not posted to the city's website and everyone has access to computers now a days – so there's no excuse not to. And looking at the rest of today's very tiny agenda, I can see that the city hasn't had very much work to do. No legislation to pass, no changes that need to be made to the Charter. No new laws or updating of the existing laws have to be done. And I haven't heard a word about the budgeting process that's supposed to be underway. It used to be that we heard from this Council – the Finance Committee's report on what has been going on. Every year except this year. But wait, isn't Mr. Blanchfield the Chairperson of the Finance Committee? Over the Summer, I've heard plenty from Mr. Blanchfield about what the State of New York is doing. But wait, isn't Mr. Blanchfield running for Assembly? Personally, I don't care for my property tax dollars going to any Council-member who is not doing the work of the city. This Council has always touted the budget and the budget process, no matter how it was spun to make whoever look bad, but, this year – we have heard nothing. In 2003, the City Council wanted to receive the Mayor's budget by September 1st so it could go over it more thoroughly. But the City Council never modified the existing legislation in the city codes to make that a law, so October 1st, it is. And I can hardly wait for the Mayor's spin on his 2009 budget. How much of a “reduction in the size of growth” can we expect this year? Are we going to get another tiny reduction in our property taxes? There is much work to be done for our city. Much of our city codes is out of date. That's the real work of this Council. No putting out fires or creating problems where none exist. All of you are paid handsomely and this Agenda tells the people of our city what work you actually do.

Seeing no other speakers to come before the City Council, Ms. King declared the Privilege of the Floor on the Legislative Agenda closed.

INTRODUCTION OF AND ACTION UPON LOCAL LAWS, ORDINANCES & RESOLUTIONS:

Consent Agenda –

Resolution No. 2008-157

Adopted Unanimously

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR:

Ms. King invited all who wished to address the City Council on any matter of city business to come forward. The following speakers rose to be heard and their remarks are summarized:

Robert Rood, 927 State Street, spoke in regard to skateboarding and how there is nothing being done about it.

Deborah Rembert, 521 Michigan Ave., stated that no one cares about poor families in Schenectady. Someone has to help them. How have any Democrats helped me with my many issues?

Vince Riggi, 2138 Campbell Ave., spoke in regard to comments made by Mr. Anotol a few weeks ago. This is our right to dissent – it’s what America was built on. As far as coming up with answers – we have come here with suggestions. You need negative and positive – in order to have things work correctly. Erie Blvd. people are coming up with good suggestions - so you have to listen to them. I take that comment personally. This is a right – not a privilege, a right to come and speak.

Harry Brand, 2108 Van Rensselaer Drive, said – Please extend the crossing lights on Erie Blvd. – 15 seconds is unpractical. Also, I have reported street lights in my neighborhood for 14 weeks now. They claim that the lights are obsolete and they can’t get light bulbs for them. Why are we paying for them? Also, Union Ave., at the bus stop – 3 cars are parked there everyday – none ticketed – none towed. Also, take a look at the garbage at Erie Blvd. and State Street – you want to spend \$15,000,000.00 to upgrade the area? On Lenox Road, there is a “No Standing Anytime” sign. Apparently, people don’t understand it. I suggest a “No Parking or Standing Anytime” sign and start ticketing and towing and you won’t ever have to raise our taxes.

Pat Zollinger, 150 Clement Ave., said – In continuing with respect to the so-called budget process, I would like to point out several concerns that I have, as a taxpayer, living in the City of Schenectady. The budget directly affects what we pay in property taxes, but, it's not just the budget. And, it's not just what you call property taxes. It's the fees like the water and sewer fees. And it's the garbage fee. And, it's not just the taxes and fees we pay, but, it's also the debt that our city incurs that we pay back over a long period of time. Those municipal bonds that we are getting such good rates on. The fact of the matter is that, over the past 4 years, the actual increase in our yearly budget has far outpaced the rate of inflation. But no one talks about that. The Mayor touts the Moody rating upgrades, but, no one hears about the fact that Moody's doesn't care where the city gets the revenues from, just that the city gets them. Moody's could care less that we, the taxpayers, get tax increases, notwithstanding that tiny decrease last year, rather than an actual increase in our tax base. Moody's could care less that we get a so called garbage fee, monies dumped into the General Fund rather than going directly to the cost of waste removal. So our city looks great on paper and that's all Moody's cares about. The Mayor can add all that good stuff to his political resume, but down the road, it's going to be all the taxpayers that end up suffering. And, we are suffering now. "How?" you might ask. The first thing that comes to my mind is that we have cops on paid suspension, to the tune of approximately \$180,000.00. And the DA calls for the Attorney General to work this case instead of a special prosecutor. That certainly appeared to hold things up, rather than expedite the process for the benefit of the taxpayers. I don't see where having a Commissioner has helped us yet, at least in the area of government accountability. And now that the entire country is succumbing to the notion that we might actually be in a recession, the nonsense being played out by the State of New York with its budget deficits would be laughable if it weren't so tragic. And need I mention the lack of information from the county. We're still among the top 10 highest taxed counties in the entire country. And all I can do is shake my head when it comes to our school system. And where are these 3000 jobs that came into the City and County of Schenectady via Metroplex anyway? Are they going to give us another tiny tax break with this year's budget? Last years was cancelled by the fee increases as well as the County increase and the school increase. This chart taken from The Capital District Regional Planning Commission website, serving Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga & Schenectady Counties, shows TINY Schenectady having the LARGEST property tax rates of the FOUR counties it represents. They had to add another column just for us. So when are we going to hear about the budget? When are we going to hear the real scoop on the city's debt? How are we going to be able to afford the city's portion of the Erie Blvd. multi-million dollar plan? Won't we have to come up with about \$2,000,000.00

of that on our own? And what about this new high-tech \$20,000,000.00 garage complex that's supposed to be going up on Foster Ave.? Is that all going to add to the debt? The TINY taxpayers want to know.

Sabrina Hyland, 112 Erie Blvd., stated that people are getting on the band wagon regarding Erie Blvd. The meeting on September 18th will be huge. Also, thanks to the city for responding to our FOIL Request. I think we are working together.

Sarah Michner, Erie Blvd., stated that the more questions we ask, the more answers we look for – the more questions we end up with. We feel the SEQRA process should be done first, not last. There isn't enough time until September 18 to efficiently address our concerns with the architect. We ask you to delay the meeting on September 18. We need more time to formulize what we want. We can't form a final decision without more time. This is too important of an issue.

Seeing no other speakers to come before the City Council, Ms. King declared the Privilege of the Floor closed.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Mr. Blanchfield said – “Thanks” to all the speakers who came down here tonight with city issues. Erie Blvd. is still a work in progress. A lot of our questions were answered last week. There has been a lot of input and concern. We will continue to hear from the public and the businesses as the process continues. Also, when people see a short agenda like tonight's, they think the Council isn't doing anything that couldn't be further from the truth. We address problems weekly – big and small. We have had at least 3 major projects that came before us this year. We don't have a large staff; we have a Clerk and Deputy Clerk for clerical matters, but, most call backs and complaints are handled by us. I'm not saying that it's a burden – that's why we chose to run. Also, last weekend was one of the better weekends in Schenectady – The Stockade Art Show, The Greek Festival, The Little Italy Festival and it was topped off by the Stockade Gala.

Mr. McCarthy stated that paraphrasing Will Rogers to say – “No man, woman or beast is safe when Congress is in session”. People were afraid that the taxes would be increased, laws changed, etc. People are usually happy because nothing will be disrupted. It's a good discussion when people come down and put their 2 cents in. That's what government is all about. In regard to the parcel of land to the IDA, this is a major project. Thanks to Neil Golub for sighting his headquarters on Nott Street. It's an old underutilized, individual site that's been an embarrassment for a long time. It took a lot of work to clean up the title, do the environment review and today, you are seeing a lot of construction on what

will be a magnificent building. This is something we should feel lucky to have happen. It's one of the best things to happen in a long time. This is slightly out of the downtown footprint. This is good for Schenectady's long term and criticism sends the wrong message to our overall objective. Also, congratulations to the Mayor and Staff on the new brochure on the Civilian Review Board. It describes the board and its process.

Mr. Allen stated that Schenectady has some of the darkest streets in the Capital District. I think that this needs to be addressed. Also, I enjoyed the meeting with the Erie Blvd. business people. They are excited about this project, but, we have to realize this construction may put a lot of them out of business. We want to do this project right. I hope what I have heard about a "Tech Park" coming to Erie Blvd. is just a rumor. Also regarding our Police Department, I have a hard time understanding why the police officers who are out of work for disciplinary reasons are being paid for that time.

Ms. Blanchard suggested that if the meeting on this is not postponed, I think we should consider holding more meetings after that. Also regarding the tables and chairs in the room, rather than bleacher seating would make it more of a work session. In regard to the Woodlawn Preserve, we are trying to get the signage there changed as soon as possible so that the hikers are encouraged to be there.

Mrs. Brucker said – I was in the Woodlawn Preserve and I was reminded that the clarification in signage is not there yet. Hopefully, that will be clarified soon. Also, as Chair of the IDA regarding the property just transferred, the construction project there is probably one of the biggest that we have had in a long time. That property has been vacant and blighted for at least 15 or 20 years. The project is valuable as a tax base and for all the area businesses that receive business from construction workers and sales tax. Once the project is finished, it will continue to create job opportunities. In regard to the Erie Blvd. people, we definitely need to continue to talk. There is no amount of dialogue that will be invaluable – it will help to come to a final decision. Lastly regarding police officers, there are a lot of issues as to why some are on paid leave and some are not. Also, my car was broken into last week. I had to get a police report. I did call the non-emergency line and I gave my name, but, they responded quickly and I give credit to the officer who was very professional and complete.

Mr. Della Sala stated that one of the things that we are looking at on Erie Blvd. is pedestrian safety. Those intersections mentioned by Mr. Brand are dangerous and they will be addressed.

The Mayor said – “Thanks” to everyone who expressed concerns tonight. The September 18th meeting has been scheduled and notifications have been sent out, but certainly, if another meeting is needed, we will have one. Certainly with a project of this size, we have to do everything to address the issues. Many things are happening and I hope as many of you, as possible, come on September 18th. Finally, tonight was the Schenectady High School Hall of Fame dinner which took place at the G.E. Theatre; 600 people showed up to induct 3 new Hall of Fames. This is the first time that they have been here because we didn’t have a facility big enough.

Ms. King stated that the meeting with the Erie Blvd. people was very positive and we need to continue the dialogue.

ADJOURNMENT:

Seeing no further business to come before the City Council, Ms. King declared the meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

A TRUE RECORD

**BY CAROLYN FRIELLO
CITY CLERK**