

OANA General Meeting Minutes 09-20-2023

In order to accommodate a District A Council candidate forum, the September 2023 General Meeting was held at the Community Center of St. Bernard, 7143 St. Claude Ave. Over 50 people attended the meeting, which was called to order at 6:10 pm. There was no slideshow presentation.

Special guest speaker of the evening was Kevin Pedeaux, owner of CR Coffee, who has recently taken on the challenge of managing and reviving the St. Roch Market. He outlined plans for a bar and various ethnic food vendors, some of whom may offer retail products, in addition to his coffee shop. A native of Chalmette, Pedeaux invited everyone to meet him at the market to check out and support the vendors.

A few announcements followed, with dates to save:

- Sugar Fest is Saturday, October 14th, and more volunteers are always welcomed.
- Signup for the neighborhood Halloween Trick or Treat map should be available by October 1st, and lights for participants can be picked up at Night Out Against Crime on October 17th at Arabi Food Store.
- The Sugar Soiree for Sugar Fest patrons and volunteers will be held on November 3rd.
- The OANA members' Holiday Party will take place on December 6th at The Kitchen Table Cafe.
- September Yard-of-the-Month went to Rickey Noto & Josh Arnouville at 821 Lebeau. The next few awards will be holiday decorating contests for Halloween, Christmas & Mardi Gras. Details to come.

Candidates for the District A Council seat were invited for a Meet and Greet, where they were allowed 5 minutes each to introduce themselves, followed by a Q & A session. The four who attended (Daniel Murchison sent his regrets) made these points in their introductions (the order of presentation was randomly selected):

- Christian Sullivan is in commercial real estate, lives in Arabi Heights, and would like to see more business development, especially by rehabilitating vacant properties. He would address blight and hopes to see Old Arabi and New Arabi work together.
- Patrice Cusimano fought to establish the Council on Aging and has been active in Kiwanis for years. She'd look for a private investor for kids' activities, among other things.
- Wayne McCarthy Jr. has been an actor with Arabi Theater, especially likes Arabi for the uncrowded space, is interested in preserving the area's history, and feels that too much land is owned by out-of-towners who don't appreciate local interests (for example the strip mall where the movie theater once was).
- Jason Danna lives in Carolyn Park, is against the port (a sentiment reflected by all the other candidates) and shares a lot of the same ideas with the others.

[note: OANA is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that does not endorse political candidates. therefore no personal candidate political statements expressed should be construed as the views of OANA.]

In the Q & A session, the audience was mostly concerned about Short Term Rentals and the heavy burden on our infrastructure that will result from the Port project.

- Re STRs: Cusimano pointed out that lack of enforcement of the existing ordinances is the main issue; residents need to report problems. OANA President Alison Barrios asked for the Council's support for enforcement. A resident complained about a big problem with a certain property on Center Street, where due to ongoing complaints the STR license has been revoked.
- Re Port: Sullivan stated that our neighborhood isn't built for the traffic that the Port will bring, and a proposed access road connecting I-10 to the Port should be built before the Port is opened. This view was echoed by several residents. McCarthy pointed out that residents will be displaced, and revenue to St. Bernard is zero, while the Parish is counting on future taxes from warehouses yet to be built. He said the Parish needs to fight, file suits and emphasize that one of our evacuation routes will be blocked unless the access road is built. Cusimano said St. Bernard gets no revenue, no jobs and no benefit from the Port.

In addition to these two issues, Cusimano stated that the Parish needs more businesses and residents need to patronize them. The Parish also needs to sell its image better to support businesses. And it was announced that the Maumus Center plans to hold theater and arts & crafts classes.

Several candidates for other parish offices who attended briefly introduced themselves, and were invited to stay after the meeting to talk with residents. **Future Board and General Meeting dates were reviewed, door prizes were awarded (including two from the St. Roch Market), attendees were thanked for coming, and the meeting was adjourned at around 7:30 pm.**