

OANA General Meeting Minutes – 2/9/17

The meeting, held at the Maumus Center cafeteria, was called to order by President Mike Pechon at 7:05 p.m. Over 50 people attended.

Mike led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the first order of business, a 2016 year-in-review slide show. The organization had its best year ever, highlighted by these achievements:

- the 3 spring (capped off by Cinco de Mayo) and 3 fall Sippin' in the Sunset events were extremely successful, raising around \$8,000
- Sugar Fest raised \$8,239.21
- our events inspired the first series of four Sippin' on the Bayou evenings, held at the Islenos complex -- not organized by us, but this year will co-ordinate with ours so as not to compete
- helping the community's most needy through Arabi Elementary school, OANA donated a total of \$3,000 to 20 families for Thanksgiving and \$5,000 to 10 families for Christmas
- we also donated more than \$300 to the City of Central flood victims
- the Mitchell Smith Culinary Scholarship distributed \$1,000 to fund one recipient's studies at Nunez, and has enough to continue helping one student at a time for several years to come
- In the spirit of involving new neighborhood businesses each year, our Christmas Party was held at the new Valiant Lounge, with catering by The Kitchen Table and Rear Window

A financial summary was displayed for all to see. Going forward, the OANA hopes to be equally as successful and sustainable. Our goals include continuing to advocate for issues that represent our core values, and putting forward ideas to promote Old Arabi. We aim to have good representation in the St. Claude bridge project, while the St. Claude Ave. beautification project is progressing and North Peters improvements are still to come. We see new businesses continually moving in along the Cultural Corridor.

Mike then turned the floor over to Barry Lemoine for announcements on events and membership:

- Spring Sippin' in the Sunset dates will be Thursdays, March 16th and May 18th, 6-9 p.m. The events have been cut from 3 to 2 this season, but have been lengthened from 2 hours to 3. The March Sippin' will have a pre-St. Patrick's Day theme, while May will be "school's out".
- It has been brought to our attention that the 1999 OANA Articles of Incorporation specify that membership is limited to residents of Old Arabi only, thus excluding business and property owners. This document supersedes our Bylaws. Although the Board would rather do more interesting and positive things for the neighborhood than deal with legal issues, memberships will only be collected from residents, who will later be asked to vote to change the Articles to allow more classes of members. About 40 new and renewing memberships were collected at the meeting.

Representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers then gave a presentation of the proposed Inner Harbor Navigational Canal (IHNC) project, which would involve widening the locks and replacing the St. Claude Bridge. Highlights included:

- various approaches to the project, and the path to the current tentative project design
- a history of the IHNC, which was opened in 1923, through various phases since Congress authorized replacement in the 1950's
- environmental issues and the Community Impact Mitigation Plan, regarding relations with affected communities

In the Q&A session that followed, attendees asked whether there is still a need for the canal (the answer was "yes", for maritime commerce), if a marine traffic forecast has been done ("yes"), and what would be involved in the construction (dredging, increasing the height of flood walls, a new bridge).

Public comments are being accepted until March 1, and can be sent to Mark.H.Lahare@usace.army.mil. Several members of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association were present, and expressed their opposition to the project.

There will be another presentation by the Corps to the Parish on Thursday, February 23 at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers. Residents are strongly encouraged to attend.

Tim Doody and John Laguens both spoke on the history of their (and the OANA's) involvement in previous incarnations of this project, including a letter written to congress voicing neighborhood concerns. In the past, both families fought the MRGO and the Industrial Canal, citing the continued negative effects on St. Bernard residents. Regarding the current draft, neither the Parish nor OANA was contacted for input, as required in the original plan. In a 2008 analysis, the lock was determined to be obsolete, and we know how disruptive it is to our traffic every time a bridge goes up. The new plan would create a 220% increase in lock capacity and efficiency, resulting in possible "trains" of barges that could require all three bridges to be up at once. Also, no evacuation route is mentioned. Mr. Laguens warned against the problems that this project would create, and urged us all to attend the meeting next Thursday to voice our concerns.

Door prizes of gift certificates to local businesses were awarded, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15.