

South Euclid ward meeting begins plan to form citizens committees, gather residents' ideas

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[Jeff Piorkowski, Sun News](#)



SOUTH EUCLID A large crowd of 122 Ward 1 residents turned out for a new type of ward meeting that city officials hope will eventually result in residents' ideas being put into action.

The meeting was held the evening of Aug. 17 at Hofer Hall, on the grounds of the former St. Margaret Mary Church, 4217 Bluestone Road.

It involved residents being seated at one of six tables. At each table was a city department head. The department heads, representing the police, fire, finance, building, community development and service departments, each spoke about what they do and the finances involved in doing their tasks.

The residents were then permitted to ask questions of them.

For nearly three hours, residents had the opportunity for close-up conversations with those who run their city. Mayor Georgine Welo, who is hosting the meetings in each of the city's four wards in the coming weeks, walked from table to table chatting with residents.

Community Services Director Keith Benjamin said he was asked by Welo to come up with a different style of meeting than have been held in the past.

“We decided to have an interactive meeting,” he said.

The residents were also asked to sign on to committees involving each of the departments to lend suggestions and ideas that will improve government service.

The plan, Benjamin said, is for the residents of all four wards to work together over the next six to nine months as a set of citizens advisory committees. The committees will identify priorities and work to reach consensus on short-term issues affecting South Euclid.

In addition, over the next 12-15 months, the committees will share ideas and resources that will result in the implementation of a new community action plan. The plan will re-envision the city as a “livable community” that is “economically, socially and environmentally sustainable,” according to Benjamin.

During the course of the Ward 1 meeting, residents learned a number of things about their city.

- Service Director Ed Gallagher spoke of his desire to get input from residents on a new method of collection of recyclable materials. Gallagher had with him a new, plastic container that would be delivered to each household and that would be for the disposal of all recyclables, without the need for separation.

Gallagher also spoke of a desire to further explore the automated garbage collection system now used in Lyndhurst in which only one man is needed to operate a collection truck.

- With the city's need to shave more than \$2 million from its budget in January to meet costs in 2011, finances played a large role in each of the director's talks. Finance Director Joseph Filippo said the city will collect \$15.8 million in income for city services this year, compared to \$17 million last year.

"Sixty-seven percent of our budget is personal services," he said of salaries and benefits.

He said the city's general fund balance in 2009 stood at \$3.7 million. It was \$4.5 million in 2008. Filippo said the city takes money from this fund when revenues don't meet expenses.

- Gallagher received questions about the bad conditions of city roads. He spoke of having but \$1 million annually to fix roads, an amount not nearly enough to make a dent in the problem.

And, he added, "I will not do a new road on a street that needs a new water pipe or a new sewer."

That's because. He said, the infrastructure work must first be done before it is covered with a new street resurfacing.

- Assistant Police Chief James Franey handed out information sheets that told of the SEPD staffing of 40 full-time officers for a population of 21,031 residents, as it compares to other local cities (Brook Park, 44 officers, 19,194 residents; Solon, 46 officers, 21,866 officers).

It was also noted that, in 1970, South Euclid police, with 38 officers, handled 4,466 calls with a population of 29,210 residents. In 2009, the number of calls had risen to 17,380 with 8,000 fewer residents.

"I think this was a great meeting," said Diana Brown of Princeton Boulevard, "but that we need even more time to talk with (city leaders)," Brown said.

Brown attended the meeting with Sylvia Billups of Bridgeview Drive.

"This was a wonderful, great idea," Billups said of the meeting's format.

Billups said she believes the biggest issue facing South Euclid is development.

"If you want to bring in the finer people, we need to have fine restaurants, fine bars and fine shops to make this a middle class Chagrin Falls."

James and Ramona Thurmond, of Homestead Road have lived in the city 24 years.

Ramona Thurmond, too, loved the meeting's format.

"Society has changed," she said. "If you're going to succeed you have to ask residents their ideas and have these community planning efforts."

"As mayor," Welo said, "I feel this was very successful.

"It's important for me to hear what's important to the residents and to hear their ideas.

"As mayor I know how appreciative (residents) were to have all the departments heads here talking with them."

Future meetings will be held on these dates and at these locations:

- The Ward 2 meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 15 at the South Euclid Community Center, 1371 Victory Drive.
- Ward 3's meeting will be at 7 p.m. Sept. 28 at South Euclid-Hillcrest United Methodist Church, 1534 S. Green Road.
- The Ward 4 meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Oct. 13 at the Notre Dame College Great Room, 4545 College Road.

*Contact Piorkowski at
(216) 986-5862.*