

Speakers at TGENA meeting tackle neighborhood needs

State roadwork on Gravois, help for the homeless, loss of government aid, new speed humps, sidewalk improvements, troublesome dumpsters, abandoned cars and a possible data center were among issues discussed at Tuesday's general membership meeting of the Tower Grove East Neighborhood Association.

Also, current officers of TGENA were re-elected to serve another year.

Speakers included 78th District State Rep. Marty Joe Murray, Seventh Ward Alderwoman Alisha Sonnier and Neighborhood Improvement Specialist Andrew Hernandez.

At the meeting, Rep. Murray said the state will begin to take feedback from the community in February about its plans to redesign and repave Gravois. Bump outs and center medians will be among the topics.

Ground won't be broken until 2029, but Murray said, "I'm trying to put pressure on them to start earlier." Asked about problems on Gravois, he said the community has been pushing the Missouri Department of Transportation to do something about pedestrian accidents and deaths there. He said there is a major problem around the Schnucks between Gravois and South Grand.

Association President Tristan Mackenzie noted that about 10 years ago, city residents succeeded in forcing the Missouri Department of Transportation to back away from its plans to close many side streets feeding into Gravois. The purpose then was to improve safety.

Mackenzie said Tuesday that if you had strong feelings about the plan then, you have a voice now: "I encourage people to go and give feedback."

Here is the website outlining Modot's plans:

<https://www.modot.org/projects/missouri-route-30-pavement-resurfacing-st-louis-city>

Also, you can write to Andrew Gates - Senior Community Relations Specialist at MoDOT at: andrew.gates@modot.mo.gov

In his report, Rep. Murray reviewed how the Missouri legislature is dominated by the Republican majority. The GOP has 158 seats to 51 for Democrats. State lawmakers, among other things, are seeking to overturn the constitutional amendment passed by voters last November that allowed abortion again in Missouri; and, at President Trump's request, are redistricting the state to allow one more Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives. This is being done by dividing Kansas City among three congressional districts.

These issues have prompted a number of legal challenges. Asked whether the clock might run out on the challenges, Murray said, "I'm hopeful."

He said Republicans also overturned a measure, also approved by voters last November, mandating that businesses provide one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours of work.

Commenting on government withdrawal from food programs, Murray said the Republicans “don’t believe feeding people is the government’s job.” They feel “it’s the church’s job,” and the community should step up.

Alderwoman Sonnier said she is investigating ways to deal with the pending SNAP and Free/Reduced Lunch Program suspensions, such as expanding food pantry programs that are now seeing more people seeking help. She urged residents to volunteer to lift up their neighbors in their time of need.

Sonnier said she is talking to the city school district about the possibility of making some schools be food resource hubs. “Send me an email if you want to volunteer,” she added. Her email is SonnierA@stlouis-mo.gov

She also is concerned that winter will be challenging for those displaced by the tornado. She is working on legislation to provide emergency housing and rental assistance.

For TGE, Ald. Sonnier also said she also has proposed a traffic-calming plan that will put a speed hump on the 3300 block of Wyoming, the 3400 and 3500 blocks of Humphrey and the 2700 and 2800 blocks of Arkansas.

Schoemehl pots will be placed as a roundabout in the middle of the Minnesota/Magnolia intersection.

Also, paving is set to be done on Ohio, between Sidney and Shenandoah; on Sidney, between Ohio and California; on Nebraska, between Lafayette and Sidney (both Tower Grove East and Fox Park); in the alley south of Magnolia, between Nebraska and Oregon; and in the alley south of Sidney, between Pennsylvania and Nebraska.

Funding also will be provided for the 50/50 sidewalk improvement program, explained here:

<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/street/street-division/50-50-sidewalk-program.cfm>

Asked what’s happening to the median along South Grand, she said it has been cleared and is “on pause.” Some ideas are floating around to deal with it, including setting up a special business district or simply covering it with concrete, she said.

Regarding the possibility of data centers being established in the city, specifically at the Armory site, Sonnier said she had serious concerns about their resulting in excess water usage and higher utility bills for residents. The data center at the Armory is now on hold because the city is demanding the developers go through a procedure that involves answering 44 questions, she said.

Murray noted that we are in an AI Industrial Revolution, but we have to make sure we have the infrastructure to support it. St. Louis just happens to be at the forefront, he added.

Mackenzie noted that one reason Missouri is attracting data centers is the state’s low electricity rates, compared with other areas of the nation.

Sonnier added that her new legislative assistant is David Steele, who can be reached at steeled@stlouis-mo.gov

Hernandez said he is traveling up and down neighborhood alleys looking for rotting dumpsters that allow trash to drop out of the bottom. "My main goal is to get the dumpsters replaced."

He also said he has emailed Third District Capt. Angela Dickerson of the St. Louis Police Department to have an officer patrol around the International Institute. Car thieves have targeted the Institute neighborhood, he said.

He reported he got three abandoned cars towed out of the area from the 2300 block of Michigan, 3500 block of McKean and at Arkansas & McKean. One car didn't even have a front end. The city's tow lot is pretty full but it is now auctioning off cars that have been stored there, he said.

An audience member asked Hernandez to get more waste bins in the 3200 block of Hartford, where there are only two trash receptacles now.

Hernandez added that the old recycling bins can be used for trash but the yard waste containers are still for yard waste.

In other business at the meeting:

-- Officers were elected by acclamation. They are: Paul Pearson, a software architect for Reinsurance Group of America, as president-elect; Mackenzie as president; Norah Ryan as treasurer and Mary Anne Pikrone as secretary.

Also, these committee chairs will stay the same: Zach Ford, Charitable/outreach; Lane Forman, Safety; Bryan Brown, Membership; Amy Kurz, Engagement/social; Brandon Corbin, Communications; Patrick Moore, Development; Danielle Langeneckert, Newsletter; Anne Moore, Beautification. The TGE Community Garden and Orchard will choose their own representatives.

The Ways and Means committee chairmanship remains open. Anyone interested in serving should contact Mackenzie at tge.president@gmail.com

--Beautification chair Anne Moore said the next neighborhood cleanup and tree maintenance will take place Saturday, Nov. 8, from 9 to 11 a.m. Volunteers will meet at the Commerce Bank parking lot.

--Membership chair Brown said if you have questions about your membership status, he can look it up for you. Meanwhile, he has for sale new red and blue Tower Grove East Neighborhood Association T-shirts.

--Communications chair Corbin said the association's Mail Chimp e-mail service is broken. He hopes to get it running soon.

--Newsletter chair Langeneckert is putting out a new web edition and welcomes articles and story ideas.

--Community Garden representative Cal Thomas reported that last Saturday's Haunted Garden event was a great success and attracted about 200 people. He's looking for help cleaning up the area.

--Orchard representative Susan Herzberg said Roosevelt High School volunteers will be working at the orchard as part of their day of thanks and giving. If you want to help, please contact her. Washington University students also will be helping to clean up the orchard.

--Mackenzie congratulated the Garden and Orchard for putting on a successful Halloween event.