



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)
www.OANA-NY.org

OANA minutes
January 19th, 2017

Richard Khuzami, president of the Old Astoria Neighborhood Association, opened and the meeting and welcomed the attendees, who then went around the table and introduced themselves. Richard began the meeting with OANA's to expand our operations by establishing work groups and committees to get involved with various projects. An example of the kinds of projects that might be involved would be OANA's successful sponsoring of a neighborhood dog run. Those who want to be on committees or to be chairs or co-chairs of committees are encouraged to put their names forward.

The meeting was given an update on Whitey Ford Field (located on 1st St and 26th Ave) by Sam Shachter of Astoria Social Softball League, who use the park from April to November and are working on plans to improve the park. Renovations needed include drainage repairs to the baseball field, removal of the metal grates in the outfield, repair of the baseball field to level the grounds and ensuring there are no more uneven areas throughout the playing field. The possibility of having the Durst Organization contribute to improvements for the park was mentioned. Richard reminded the meeting that this was the kind of project that an OANA committee might work on. Neil Herdan, who is a member of the Greater Astoria Historical Society, gave us an update on the historical importance of the area immediately around Whitey Ford Field, it was where the first Astoria settlers lived. Neil would like to see historical elements incorporated into the designs, which could then be promoted during events like historical reenactments. Erycka deJesus mentioned that Partnerships for Parks could be a resource in seeking to make improvements at Whitey Ford Field, as could her non-profit, Big Reuse.

Richard introduced new OANA board member Bret Harris. The meeting then discussed complaints Richard has received about the turn from 31st Avenue onto Vernon Boulevard. Richard outlined the possibility of asking for a traffic light there, bearing in mind the possibility that it might result in the loss of parking spots since the DOT might prefer to use "daylighting" to make the turn safer. Clare Doyle mentioned that some visitors to Socrates Sculpture Park cross Vernon Boulevard at 31st Avenue to get into the park via the entrance there. Claudia Coger said 31st Avenue to Vernon Boulevard is a blind spot, which is concerning there are children leaving and being picked up from IS 126, and that in her opinion, we should recommend a traffic light. By a show of hands, the meeting unanimously agreed to ask DOT to install a traffic light at this intersection.



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Vanessa from the Astoria Houses Residents' Association addressed the issue of the closure of the traffic cut on Vernon Boulevard/1st Street that allowed access to the Astoria Houses. She believes that it should be reopened in order to allow emergency vehicles access to the Astoria Houses. Astoria Houses Residents' Association is talking to the Department of Housing about reopening the curb cut. There are two other curb cuts—on 8th St and on 27th Avenue—that were closed due to emergency work and should be re-opened. Richard told the meeting that the Astoria Houses Residents' Association had brought this matter to the attention of Community Board 1, and that OANA will support their campaign. Richard also suggested involving the 114th Precinct NCOs, since police vehicles also need emergency access to the Astoria Houses. Vanessa mentioned that Astoria Houses Residents' Association are contacting the Fire Department about the cuts, since at present the fire fighters need to carry their equipment on their backs into the Houses. By a show of hands, the meeting unanimously agreed to send a letter of support to CB1, and may also possibly send a letter to DOT.

Ana Rodriguez from Mount Sinai Hospital, Queens (MSQ), gave the meeting an update on the new \$175 million development in Astoria as it is finishing up. She showed us a slide show of some of the features of the new facility, such as a children's section of the emergency department, six new operating theaters and advanced-level equipment such as pet scanners. Ana told us that there is a definite focus on education and she went over Mount Sinai's calendar of free events such as a women's heart health awareness event. Erycka asked Ana what she considers to be MSQ's best accomplishment. Ana said that it would probably be MSQ's free education programs and blood pressure programs. MSQ has a community nurse who goes around the neighborhood doing blood pressure testing on Wednesdays (high blood pressure has been identified as a critical issue for our community). MSQ nurses have recently been awarded Magnet status, which is another accomplishment.

Diane commented that her experience of MSQ's food had been far from a positive one. Ana said that nutrition is an important issue, and that hospital food needs to find a balance between nutrition and presentation, but that she would bring this feedback to the nutritionists. There is a shift to a more individualized serving of meals that takes into account a patient's test schedule. Bret asked when the construction will finish up, and Ana told us that the timeline should be another few months. Richard asked if there would be hospital administrators moving into the Astoria building from Manhattan? Ana assured the meeting that that is not the plan; the only administrators in the new building will be those directly involved with the work going on there. Richard commented that a clinic on the peninsula would



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be a good resource for the community (this was something that came up in the ULURP process for the Astoria Cove). Joe Vaccaro mentioned that most of the neighborhood is not zoned for community facilities.

Richard thanked Ana for her presentation and introduced the 114th Precinct NCOs (Neighborhood Coordinating Officers) who went over the basics of the NCO program and indicated that they would continue to come to OANA meetings so that we can tell them about any issues that are concerning us. Diane mentioned that there is an ongoing issues at the end of 9th Street (near the water) with a guy who is living in a storage container; there have been incidents. Joe Esposito said that he was not aware of it but would look into it. Joe mentioned that our sector, Sector David, is quiet in comparison to other sectors. There was a recent outbreak of car break ins, but the NCOs spoke to the parents of the kids involved, and that seems to have done the trick. Vanessa commented that she and the Astoria Houses Residents' Association are appreciative that the NYPD is making a renewed effort to ensure that the residents and especially the young people get to know the officers they are seeing. That's the way it used to be in the Astoria Houses, and Vanessa feels that it will make a difference to the community as residents will feel comfortable bringing their concerns to the NCOs.

Erycka DeJesus from Big Reuse then gave the meeting a presentation about the work of her nonprofit. Big Reuse (formerly known as Build It Green). Big Reuse is a non-profit that takes donations of building materials, furniture, appliances, etc. which can be purchased by householders (and anyone) at a low cost. Big Reuse is also one of the two hosts of the New York Compost Project in Queens (the other is Queens Botanic Gardens). Astoria residents who want to drop off their food scraps can bring them to Big Reuse or to various locations during the week (library branches, etc.). Erycka gave the attendees cards with the list of various drop-off locations and times, which can also be found on [Big Reuse's website](#). The times and locations vary during the year, i.e. some Greenmarket sites don't operate in winter.

The compost collected by Big Reuse is processed locally and distributed locally. Vanessa mentioned that as the Two Coves Community Garden Coordinator, she speak to the value of the compost. Two Coves has just been awarded a Youth Council Leadership Program (May-June 2017), and Big Reuse was very helpful to them during that process. Erycka said that Big Reuse is happy to partner with non-profits and other groups in Astoria, especially on the waterfront—they currently run stewardship events and are



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open to suggestions for more. Diane suggested that the end of 9th Street on the waterfront would be a great location for a cleanup and stewardship event hosted by Big Reuse.

Erycka noted that Big Reuse will be looking for a new space in a couple of years and that they hope to remain in Astoria. She stressed the importance of Big Reuse to the community as New York City moves to implement the “Zero by 30” program. Asked about organics collection, Erycka said that organics collection is not yet in every neighborhood because the plan is for the organics and regular recycling collection to take place at the same time and trucks need to be retro-fitted to allow both collections to go in the same truck.

Richard thanked Erycka for her presentation and noted that Keith Dumanski from the Durst Organization couldn't make the meeting and sent his apologies. He is rescheduled for our February meeting. He reiterated that having OANA volunteers work on committees is important in bringing the organization to the next level. After thanks to Costco and Diane for generously providing refreshments, the meeting was dismissed.