



WAMM CIVIC ASSOCIATION QUARTERLY MEETING

June 10, 2025

Bering Memorial United Church of Christ

MINUTES

Lane Llewellyn, President, called the meeting to order at 6:36 pm.

1. Introduction of Officers

Board members present included: Lane Llewellyn, President; Maria Morandi, 2nd Vice President, and Kevin Sokol-White, Treasurer.

2. Order of Business

2.1. Introduction of Speaker and Guests.

Lane Llewellyn introduced several guests attending the meeting, including:

- Edwige Ariana Cathey, Outreach Specialist at the Harris County Tax Office. Ms. Cathey distributed fliers from the Tax Office and offered to provide a property tax workshop at a future WAMM meeting.
- Nicole Mendoza, Director of Communications and Community Engagement with the Office of Council Member Twila Carter, At-Large, Position 3. Mrs. Mendoza asked whether she could give a brief, 5-minute presentation at the end of the meeting. Lane Llewellyn agreed.
- Kate Dentler, Chief of Staff with the Office of Council Member Abbie Kamin, District C. Ms. Dentler also requested to give a short 5-minute presentation at the end of the meeting, to which Lane Llewellyn agreed.
- Jen Schmerling, with the Houston Office of Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher.

Since the speaker for the meeting was delayed, Lane Llewellyn moved to the next item in the agenda.

2.2. Summary of Important Developments for WAMM

Lane Llewellyn described the following positive news for WAMM:

- WAMM section of the Westheimer Rd. water line is completed.

- The new STR ordinance was approved.
- Covenant House has re-opened with a nice, secure campus.
- COH is moving quickly with policies to make our neighborhood safer and increase the number of police officers.
- Harvey construction has started the demolition and construction activities for Phase II of the AOS campus development.

2.3. Introduction of the Speaker

Lane Llewellyn introduced the VIP speaker: Julian Ramirez, Council Member At-Large Position 1. Mr. Ramirez served as Assistant District Attorney for Harris County from 1989 until 2016. His office has an excellent electronic newsletter entitled the Ramirez Report that WAMM will be adding as a link in our WAMM Gazette.

Lane indicated that, at the invitation of WAMM, Council Member Ramirez agreed to inform attendees about the COH Quality of Life Committee that he chairs. This committee reviews matters related, but not limited, to quality-of-life issues, Housing Department Services contracts, homeless issues and services, parks, and public health. A good example is the development of the new ordinance for STRs. She described Mr. Ramirez's committee as extremely important and necessary for the success of our neighborhoods. She asked the attendees to welcome Mr. Ramirez.

2.2. Presentation by Council Member At-Large Julian Ramirez

Mr. Ramirez thanked Lane Llewellyn for the opportunity to speak at WAMM's quarterly meeting.

He explained that the At-Large position means that he deals with problems citywide, not necessarily district-specific. He became chair of the Quality-of-Life Committee last spring. This committee focuses on policies that affect the whole city, including the new budget that was past the previous week.

Mr. Ramirez said that he is a licensed attorney, specifically a criminal law attorney. He served as lawyer for Harris County in the Public Integrity sector, and investigating the police force. He also taught at the Houston Police Academy. He is intimately familiar with the Houston Police Department.

Council Member At-Large Ramirez said that recently passed STR ordinance is a start. It was meant to strike a balance between the interests of STR operators and the general public, without overregulating. Several Council Members, such as Abbie Kamin, did a lot of the work in the framing and passage of the ordinance. He did not actually write the ordinance. It was done by the Department of Administration and Regulatory Affairs, which will administer the ordinance. A website will go on line on August 1 of this year,

when owners/operators can start registering. The ordinance will be in effect starting on January 1, 2026.

Enforcement will be an issue. Mr. Ramirez has been trying to get support from the administration to support enforcement efforts. The ordinance can be amended in the future. The Mayor presents all the items for consideration and discussion by Council, which has limited ability to initiate new propositions or amendments. There is a proposition (Prop. A) that will allow Council to propose new ordinances up for voting at the next election. Obviously, the idea is to propose and pass good amendments to any previously passed ordinance.

Mr. Ramirez said that the ARA section (311) was scheduled to lose 2 people in the new budget, but he proposed to keep them to enforce the STR ordinance. Another amendment proposes to add two add 2 new attorney positions for enforcement of nuisance ordinances, for example closing bothersome locales such as massage parlors that are fronts for human trafficking. These 2 new positions could assist on STR ordinance enforcement under the nuisance rule. With respect to deed restriction violations, the offenders should be taken to court.

Mr. Ramirez indicated that there is a new, 16.7 billion, 5-year capital improvement plan that is available on the web. Houston had some success in addressing the number of homeless people. The goal was to place homeless individuals in a private home with City support and services. HUD offered vouchers for permanent housing, but these funds have dried out. As a result, the number of homeless people has increased. The mayor has a plan that involves a significant expenditure (in the order of 70 million dollars/year) derived from taxes, penalties, and county funds. The issue will be addressed in the next meeting of the committee he chairs. The plan calls for having stations or hubs (the first will be located east of downtown) from where permanent housing will be assigned.

Lane Llewelly asked about the budget for parks. Mr. Ramirez responded that parks have not done well in the proposed budget. There are some funds, but for establishing a new park. Lane responded that the association can get the money but needs to know how to get the pertinent permits. Kate Dentler responded that she would get the district involved to determine what steps are needed. Nicole Mendoza indicated that there are some opportunities that Council Member Carter could support.

Lane Llewellyn continued asking Mr. Ramirez about the budget for public health. Council Member Ramirez responded that service contracts will include performance metrics, outputs, and milestones. An efficiency study indicated that output metrics were met but not outcome measures. Lane gave the example of Covenant House that plans to double the number of adults that receive their services. For now, it looks good. She indicated the funds come in part from the city. She asked whether Mr. Ramirez could summarize any budget issue important to the Monroe area. Mr. Ramirez responded that there is a new Public Safety Director. The city and the police have a central role with significant increases for the Police Department because the city cannot compete

hiring new police officers. Also, there is a lack of police cars. There are now 2 police officers per car instead of one, when clearly the mere presence of police officers deters crime. Lane said that she is very impressed with the new Major.

Lane Llewellyn opened the meeting for questions.

Kevin Oskol-White asked whether the property at 1901 Richmond Ave., which is now fenced, is a case of nuisance. Mr. Ramirez responded that it is. Noise complaints should be reported to the police as non-emergency issues. There will also be a 24-hour emergency line. Council member Ramirez said that he tried ARA to enforce noise violations, but they declined. The only option is to call the non-emergency police number, but they do not have enough police officers. There was a proposition to have constables help enforce ordinances, but it did not pass.

CC Conner asked about the problem with long delays in yard waste collection. Mr. Ramirez responded that there is a need for more trucks and drivers, and that others also feel this issue should be prioritized. Purchase of additional trucks has been approved. Lane asked about recyclables collection. Mr. Ramirez responded that the Department is short-handed, and they are doing the best they can. There are on-going studies as to how best manage the problem and the findings will be released soon.

Erasto Cortez asked about the availability of cycling lanes and whether the city is interested at all in prioritizing availability for the cycling public. Mr. Ramirez responded that the Major is not promoting bicycle lanes but is prioritizing traffic. Lane Llewellyn asked whether the bike lanes are functional. Erasto responded that they are but are not designed optimally. Dedicated bike lanes are needed but they are not continuous and place bikers at risk. There was a discussion among the audience with diverse opinions about inappropriate placement, such as the lane along Waugh Dr. Erasto indicated that it is faster for him to bike to the VA Hospital where he works than taking the bus (typically a 1-hour bus drive). But it is dangerous; one driver was hit even during a Critical Mass event (600+ bikers). An attendee mentioned that there was an attempt to make a compromise with respect to maintaining bike lanes but the Major was not committed to the concept.

Chris Sokol-White mentioned that there have been cuts to BART and money is being spent for removing bike lanes. Mr. Ramirez said he understands the argument.

Lane Llewellyn thanked Mr. Ramirez and asked Kate Dentler to give her update on District C. Ms. Dentler announced that the small water line project will start at the beginning of the summer. There will be a virtual community meeting through Microsoft Teams. Erasto Cortez asked whether the drains will be repaired/replaced when the roads are refinished after the small water line project is complete. Kate indicated that we should advocate for that because drains are not currently included.

3. New Business

Chris Sokol-White described the restoration of the esplanades on Lovett Blvd. and Yoakum Blvd., including the trimming of trees, planting of native Texas plants, and placement of ollas for passive watering (he explained what they are). Resources for these improvements were mostly provided by Chris and Kevin Sokol-White. He requested volunteers for maintaining and progressing on this work. In addition, he asked for volunteers for the 1st WAMM Monthly Neighborhood Trash Cleanup. Lane and Kathy Conti volunteered.

Lane Llewellyn indicated we will have a speaker from ParkHouston at the September quarterly meeting. He/she will explain the process for obtaining residential parking permits. Be ready to have a list of the streets where people cannot park. Kevin asked how the program works. Lane said that at least 80% of the residents of the street for which a permit is requested need to sign for the program.

Maria Morandi reported that there are 78 paid members to date. Kevin reported that the regular account has funds of \$12,000, and the reserve account has \$8,000.

Lane called for volunteers for committees.

Kevin emphasized that 311 is very responsive to calls and that Kroger has cleaned up around their site.

Lane Llewellyn called the meeting adjourned at 7:59pm