



Gifford Park's Pride

Gifford Park Neighborhood: A Great Place to Live, Work, Learn and Play

March 2004

A Publication of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association

Dave Hawkins Receives Everest Survivor's Award

Congratulations to one of the GPNA's founding members, **Dave Hawkins**, for the distinction of his name being added to the **Everest Survivor's Award**. This award honors individuals who have contributed special effort and dedication to our neighborhood, and is on display at **California Tacos** restaurant at 33rd & California. Dave is very proud of this award recognition.

The following is an excerpt from a November 1989 GPNA newsletter article: "Beautification Committee Chairman Dave Hawkins requests that every neighbor take that 'extra step' toward a cleaner neighborhood. Start at your own front door. Keep the street and sidewalk by your property litter free – trim the grass and hedges – make certain trash can lids are in place. Let's display pride in our neighborhood!" Dave "The Hawk" Hawkins is passionate about a clean neighborhood and was extremely involved in the early GPNA cleanup

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Next Meeting

Thursday, March 4
7:00 P.M.

Guest Speaker:
Denise Cousin
Omaha Police Department
Northeast Precinct Captain

Creighton University
Medical Center
Morrison Seminar Room

Next GPNA Executive Meeting

Thursday, March 18th
7:00 P.M.

Discussion Topic: Public Safety

Yates School
3260 Davenport St.

All Are Invited To Attend

See The President's Column
On Page 2 For More
Information On This Meeting

Is It Spring Yet?

Well, maybe not quite yet, but it's just around the corner - and that means it will soon be time for the annual GPNA **Spring Cleanup**. This year's cleanup will be held on **Saturday, April 24th**, in **Gifford Park**. Look for more information regarding the cleanup in the April newsletter.

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From The President . . .

We are moving forward in Gifford Park. Now is your opportunity to move into the future with us. Over the next several months we will be fleshing out several of the proposals of the Destination Midtown study, as they relate to Gifford Park. The proposals fall into the following categories:

- Public Safety
- Code Enforcement
- Home Ownership and Absentee Landlord Strategies
- Business District and Residential Property Rehabilitation
- Zoning Issues
- Maintenance, Upkeep, and Signage
- Historic Preservation
- Parks and Open Space
- Neighborhood Oriented Mobility Programs

Here is your opportunity to get involved! I am looking for people who have a passion for one or more of these issues. The future of Gifford Park is in the hands of those who take ownership. If you would like to become more involved in one or more of these areas, let me know!

Over the course of the next few months, we will be examining at least one of these categories at each of the next several Executive Board Meetings. These meetings are open to the public and take place at **Yates School, 3260 Davenport**, on the 3rd Thursday of each month. The next topic to be discussed will be Public Safety.

In keeping with the Public Safety theme, I am delighted to announce that **Captain Denise Cousin** of the Northeast Police Precinct will join us for our Gifford Park Association Meeting on **Thursday, March 4, 7:00 pm**, at **Creighton University Medical Center**. I am sure we will have a lively and enlightening discussion as we build partnerships with the Northeast Precinct.

We will continue the Public Safety theme at our **Executive Board Meeting on March 18, 7:00 pm** at **Yates Academy**. We will build on the previous meeting with further discussion on the following public safety issues:

- Building a community policing partnership with the local precinct
- Creating problem solving strategies
- Identifying a change management plan
- Involving business partners with security patrols in our total safety formula
- Discussing Neighborhood Watch programs and Citizens Patrol operations
- Involvement on the precinct advisory council

I have appreciated all the helpful discussion and input we have had during the entire Destination Midtown process. The winds of change are in the air. As I have said from the beginning, I believe that the best days of this neighborhood are still in the future. Your involvement can make dreams become a reality.

by Ron Frey

Editor's note: If you have something that would be of interest to our neighborhood, we encourage you to submit an article for our monthly newsletter. Editorials must be approved by the GPNA Executive Board. Articles can be left at the GPNA Office; please include your name and phone number. Contact Sue Wilwerding (342-2795) or Chris Foster (342-6006) for information regarding the newsletter.

The GPNA Is Now On The Net!
Visit www.Giffordpark.org

Destination Midtown Update

The **Destination Midtown (DM)** project continues to progress toward creating the final master plan document, scheduled for completion in the coming few months. There are five program drafts (Neighborhood, Transportation, West Midtown, East Midtown, Parks and Open Space) being reviewed by the DM steering committee and neighborhood leaders. Neighborhood and Transportation programs have been tackled first, with the Neighborhood programs being the most important to our neighborhood since they have the most direct impact for you and me. The GPNA board has met a couple times in February to discuss details of the draft.

The structure of the "Neighborhood Programs" draft document includes specific recommendations for the following areas: implementation mechanisms, public safety (including community policing), code enforcement, absentee landlords, rehabilitation of homes, buildings and small business districts (Main Street Program), zoning and overlay districts, maintenance and upkeep, historic preservation, parks, open space and community gardens, and neighborhood oriented mobility programs (including biking).

A couple key points are worth highlighting. First, more effective law and code enforcement is absolutely crucial to real improvement in our neighborhoods – I believe this is well understood by all of the DM partners. With more awareness regarding the core neighborhood issues, it is our hope that the appropriate resources and changes will happen reasonably soon. Second, is the plan's recommendation for the major institutions and corporations to create a not-for-profit Midtown Development Corporation (MDC) to provide resources and funding to help carry out some of the programs listed above. The MDC board would have representation from neighborhood associations.

Of course implementing this plan will be challenging. This is why some of the DM steering committee members will be visiting Portland, Oregon later in March to learn how this progressive city has implemented their master plan. Specifically regarding neighborhood issues, members of the steering committee will meet with city staff from Portland's Planning, Redevelopment and Community Development Corporation to see how they do it.

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Free Tax Help Available Now

The site for the annual free tax assistance is the **Lay Apostolate Center at St. Cecilia's Cathedral, 40th & Webster St.** Tax help will be available **Mondays 1 to 4 p.m., Thursdays 6 to 8 p.m. and Saturdays 10 to 11:30 a.m.** though the tax season. Everyone is welcome! IRS representatives will provide free tax help for our neighborhood for the 10th year in a row. Processing of basic tax returns and electronic filing will be available. No appointment is necessary; walk-in appointments only. Please call **Jackie at 551-3629** for more information.

Note: **Raquel Ayala**, has volunteered to translate for Spanish-speaking people who need help with their taxes. If you are interested or know someone who could benefit from this assistance, please call her at **880-6225** for more information.



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Taking A Look At The Zoning Issue

Note: most of the following article was written by Sarah Newman, Planning Liaison of the Dundee-Memorial Park Neighborhood Association. Sarah gave the GPNA permission to reprint the article. Our neighborhood shares many of the same concerns regarding zoning issues.

Why should we be concerned about zoning? After all, isn't the charm of our houses and streets obvious? Why would someone tear down the things that are the neighborhood's draw—the turn-of-the-century buildings, the trees, the yards?

Unfortunately not everyone sees our neighborhood as those of us who live here. Where we see a fixer-upper, others may see bigger opportunities. Many of those who pursue such development projects are not residents, and so have little attachment or emotional investment in our neighborhood. The existing zoning enables those larger opportunities to be pursued with little or no constraint.

The problem with such projects is the way they can start a decline on a street and eventually change an area. You begin with a street full of well-kept owner-occupied single-family houses. Someone decides to tear down a house and build a small apartment building because the zoning allows it. The whole look of the street is altered by the incompatible, modern building. The presence of eight additional units on the street adds extra parking pressure. The property values of the entire block drop. Someone else may decide to capitalize by chopping their house into apartments, cementing over their yard to provide parking, further degrading the look of the street with expanses of concrete and cars, further depressing property values, on-street parking becomes an issue, and so it goes. The resident homeowners begin to flee, the houses become rentals, upkeep falters, there are teardowns, and the street is converted over time.

There is a subtle psychological effect of slotted-in apartment houses and poorly designed new development. The choppy visual effect created by mismatched building materials, minimal building setbacks, and missing greenspaces creates a sense of unease, a lack of the comfort and orderliness that is present on other streets. The maze of on-street parking to negotiate, the visual obstructions of parked cars, and the closed-in feeling of buildings too close to the street creates a discomfort that makes people avoid using those areas. Interest and attachment to those parts of our neighborhood decline.

As residents of Gifford Park, we should consider a vision for the future of our neighborhood. As we look ahead twenty or thirty years, what would we like to see? Our single-family streets intact or slotted-in apartment buildings, high rises, and rental units? We need to make sure that the zoning protections that are in place are what will achieve our vision of the future. But first we must understand zoning and what it can or cannot do for Gifford Park.

Zoning

Zoning is the method used by a municipality to determine land uses. The zoning ordinance spells out what uses are allowed in a specific zone and under what conditions.

In the city of Omaha, there are ten zones for residential housing, varying in density. The zoning ordinance spells out the uses, as well as the minimum lot area and width, building height and setbacks, floor area ratio, and percent coverage permitted in each zone. Additional uses can be permitted in a zone through issuance of a conditional use permit by the Planning Board, and special uses can be approved through the City Council. If a project cannot meet a zone's ordinance requirements, such as for a setback or parking needs, a permit for a variance may be obtained through the Zoning Board of Appeals. Most of the time, whole blocks or areas fall under one zoning designation. If a single parcel is granted a very different zoning from that surrounding it, that is called spot zoning—not usually considered a desirable arrangement.

The zoning that covers parts of our neighborhood would permit development that would substantially change the character of our neighborhood if its allowances were to be fulfilled at some point in the future. Remember, if the zoning is in place, the allowed uses may be pursued with little constraint other than the requirements of the ordinance (setback, height, coverage, parking, etc.).

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Dave Hawkins . . . *continued from page 1*

efforts like the spring and fall cleanups, park cleanups, street sweeping preparations (back then volunteers put up/took down the "no parking" signs on all the streets – a lot of work!) I remember when Dave would recruit cleanup volunteers and educate everyone who would listen (and even those who did not listen) about the benefits of picking up litter, and he did it with as much enthusiasm and energy as anyone I have been involved with.

Dave and his wife Marge hosted the very first GPNA organizational meeting at their house. They were married in 1974, have seven children between them, and have lived at 508 N. 32nd Street since 1971 (their house was built in 1890). Besides cleanups, Dave and Marge were involved with most aspects of the GPNA in the early days including Easter Egg Hunts, developing relations with city officials, membership, Yates carnival event, fund-raising, Yates PTA, Gifford Park improvements, social activities, garage sales, newsletter articles and delivery, 33rd & California business district, neighborhood Watch Group, and were very active at general and board meetings. Marge was also the first treasurer for the GPNA. Ron Yates, past GPNA president and founding member, said it best – “Dave and Marge simply did what it took to get the job done and encouraged others to get involved, and above all they enjoyed the experiences.”

Dave is 56 years old and grew up in east Omaha and was involved in Boy Scouts and ROTC (Tech High School). He served in the Vietnam War from August 1967 – June 1969 as an Army Engineer, and he is a lifetime member of the VFW (Bellevue Post 2280). One of Dave’s hobbies includes a large collection of pencil sharpeners – over 200. It’s also well known that he is very good at Trivial Pursuit.

The GPNA wants you both to know how much we appreciate your tremendous efforts early on to form the foundation of the organization we have today. Dave, your unique way of getting people like myself involved with "taking that extra step" for a clean neighborhood is a gift. Good Luck, Dave and Marge!

by Chris Foster

Zoning . . . *continued from page 4*

There are several avenues available for our neighborhood to pursue regarding zoning in Gifford Park:

- 1) Leave things as they are.
- 2) Encourage individual landowners to downzone their properties to less-intensive residential zoning designations. The neighborhood association may be able to assist this effort by making a joint application for the landowners, reducing the cost of the rezonings.
- 3) Petition for a neighborhood downzoning, which would involve a parcel-by-parcel analysis of the neighborhood, determining existing uses, existing zoning, and appropriate new zoning designations. A sizeable majority of property owners within the proposed downzoned area must support the change.
- 4) Petition for designation of the Gifford Park neighborhood as a Landmark Heritage District. A Landmark Heritage District designation is given to an area determined to have special character or significance. The designation enables its particular features to be preserved. At least 51% of the included property owners must concur in the designation. Preferably 70-80% of property owners would show support for the petition.
- 5) Petition for a Neighborhood Conservation District. This is an overlay district specially written for a neighborhood which allows variations in the permitted uses and site development regulations of the underlying zoning, and develops supplementary site regulations that will protect its character. A majority of property owners within the proposed district must support the petition.

What specific actions can be taken concerning zoning issues? Discuss the question of zoning with your spouse, your friends, and your neighbors. Talk with your neighborhood association board, your city council representative, **Jim Vokal**, and the Omaha Planning Department. Ask questions. Decide what you would like to see done about this issue and then make your choice known. If you would like to know the zoning of your individual parcel, you may access that information under the valuation information at the Douglas County Assessor’s website, www.dccassessor.org. Get involved in the **Lively Omaha/Omaha By Design** efforts. Their community input meetings will be held at the **Scott Conference Center, 6450 Pine Street, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.** Their meeting on neighborhood proposals is scheduled for **April 28**. Further information on their efforts can be found at their website, www.livelyomaha.org.

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What's Happening In The Neighborhood . . .

Omaha Main Streets will be sponsoring a workshop to help participants learn how to research an historic property. The workshop will be held on **March 4** from **1:30-3:30 p.m.** at the **Neighborhood Center, 115 S. 49th Ave.** Workshops are **FREE**; please RSVP to **Vince Furlong** at **553-5644** or vfurlong@cox.net.

Project Safe Neighborhoods presents "**Community Engagement Day**" on **March 9** from **9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.** at the **Neighborhood Center for Greater Omaha, 115 S. 49th Ave.** The purpose of this day is to educate the community on the comprehensive efforts, spearheaded across the nation, to reduce gun violence through Project Safe Neighborhoods. This is a free event; lunch will be provided. You must RSVP by **March 3** to **Mike Behm** or **Kim Roewert** at **402-661-3700**.

On **March 19**, there will be a **Spotlight on Prostitution Conference: Facts, Myths And The Impact On Our Community.** This conference will be held at the **Douglas/Sarpy Extension Central Office, 8015 West Center Road.** Registration begins at **8:15 am**; conference is from **9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.** Registration deadline is **March 8, 2004.** For questions, more information, or to register contact **Amy Gilroy** at **561-7581** or email her at argilroy@unmc.edu. The conference fee is **\$5.00**; lunch is included.

On **Tuesday, March 30**, **Creighton University** will be hosting an informational forum to discuss the pros and cons of the proposed campus' master plan to expand. Keynote speakers will be **Lennis Pederson**, Associate Vice President for Administration and Director of Facilities Management and **Dan Burkey**, Vice President for Administration and Finance. The forum will be from **5:30 – 6:30 p.m.**, for questions call **561-7583**. Registration is required by **March 19th**, call **Sue Abou-Nasr** at **561-7581** or email sabounasr@mail.unomaha.edu to do so. Refreshments will be provided.

Omaha by Design will hold a community meeting to discuss **Civic Omaha** on **Wednesday, March 31.** Here is your chance to be heard and give your ideas on this important process. The meeting will be held at the **Scott Conference Center, 6450 Pine Street**, from **6:30-8:30 p.m.**; admission is **FREE**. For more information on Omaha by Design, please visit www.livelyomaha.org or call **342-3458**.

GPNA member **Rodney Hay** has volunteered to develop and maintain a web site for the GPNA. Check out www.giffordpark.org the next time you are surfing the web. Rodney has volunteered for many years hauling trash and cooking food for our spring and fall neighborhood cleanups. Many of you have also enjoyed the turkeys he has cooked the last couple years for our Holiday Banquet.

Work has begun on the conversion of the Foxley Building on **Duchesne Academy's** campus to an assisted living facility. According to Duchesne Head of School, **Sheila Haggas**, workers began gutting the building around the first of the year. The renovation will take approximately a year. Duchesne will be meeting with the developers soon to discuss a variety of issues, including naming of the facility.

Destination Midtown . . . *continued from page 3*

The GPNA has created a document of its own listing specific resolutions on future development in the Gifford Park neighborhood. This document is focused primarily on land use issues. Included are: defining a "buffer" area between the institutions and our neighborhood to facilitate future development, compatible design of new buildings, preserve existing neighborhood houses and greenspace, support appropriate "down-zoning" to maintain the integrity of the area, tree-planting along key streets to create "green" corridors, and the return of Yates Elementary School as our neighborhood school. The GPNA plans to meet soon with the adjacent institutions and the City Planning Department to discuss these resolutions, which we think are in the best interests of everyone as we move forward.

by Chris Foster



**Join The
GPNA
Today!**

A Note Of Thanks

The GPNA wishes to salute the people who have volunteered their time in the delivery of the newsletter. Without their willingness to help this would be an insurmountable task!

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
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Special thanks go to **Mike & Candy Bacome** for their efforts stuffing and labeling envelopes every month to mail out the newsletter in a timely order – this is very time-consuming and they do a great job.

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