



CLEVELAND HEIGHTS

Monday, March 28, 2022 Minutes

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

7:30 - 8:34 p.m.

President Hart presiding

Council Members Present: Mattox, Moore, Russell, Cobb, Cuda, Larson, Hart

Council Members Absent: None

Also Present: Chief Mecklenburg, Niermann O'Neil

Women's History Month Presentation

Council President Hart welcomed everyone to the Amazing Women of Cleveland Heights Program. She stated they asked for people to send their nominations to name an "Amazing Woman of Cleveland Heights" and they received many. They then selected a smaller group of women to honor with proclamations. She remarked about how there are some people old enough to remember some rights women didn't always have. She discussed how two generations ago, her grandmother had an arranged marriage, while her other grandmother was married off in the 8th grade. She stated how, early in her generation, the FHA forbid her from owning her own home because she was a woman. She stated we have come a long way, and women have often led the way fighting for those changes. She stated even in 2022, women are still only paid 82¢ for every dollar a man earns. Women have always been the backbone of the country, from the suffragettes up to running for office; we now have a Vice President who is a woman. She then listed various things women have invented, including the game of Monopoly and laser cataract surgery.

Vice President Cobb talked about the history of Women's History Month. He said there has been total disagreement about its exact origins. He thought it was interesting one source traced it back to a meeting of socialists and suffragists in New York City on February 28, 1909, a day they called National Women's Day. The next year, at the International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen, conference members recognized there should be an International Women's Day, which Europeans began to formally recognize in March 1911. Efforts in the United States, however, remained largely unsuccessful. In 1978, the education taskforce of Sonoma County planned and executed a Women's History Week celebration in Santa Rosa, California. The organizers selected the week of March 8th to correspond with International Woman's Day and it started a movement that spread across the country, as other communities initiated their own Women's History Week celebrations the following year. Most of Vice President Cobb's sources credited this taskforce with giving birth to Women's History Month. In 1980, a consortium of women's groups and historians

lead by the National Women's History Project successfully lobbied for national recognition. In February 1980, President Jimmy Carter proclaimed the week of March 8th, 1980 as National Women's History Week. In 1987, Congress passed a law designating March as National Women's History Month. Since then, every president has issued an annual proclamation celebrating Women's History Month; celebrating the contributions women have made to the United States and recognizing the specific achievements women have made over the course of American history, in a variety of fields.

City Manager Susanna Niermann O'Neil discussed the achievements of the women of Cleveland Heights, including Alma Cain, Dina Reese Evans, Marjorie Wright, Lana Cowell, Sue Nigro, Martha Goble, Barbara Boyd, Phyllis Evans, Lauree Garrity, Bernice Lott, Rachel Nelson, and Donalene Poduska. She stated she'd be remiss not to acknowledge the City Hall powerhouse of community services; the Cleveland Heights women (some of whom were in the audience) of public relations, Cain park, development, community relations, real estate programs, youth services and student services. For 25 years, they kept everything going. She said she remembered a poem she read as a very young woman which ended with "to live in humanity is far more than to live in a name." She said she didn't understand it then, but as she got older and worked with hundreds of women and felt their impact on the community, she now understands. She stated without even knowing their names, the thousands of women of every race, religion, and socioeconomic background in our history have kept our community strong and vital for over a century. She expressed appreciation to all of them and support to the woman of the future who will make their own history and keep the community strong.

Councilor Moore read off the list of nominees for the "Amazing Woman of Cleveland Heights."

Jordan Kilgo recited Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman." Councilor Moore then presented her with a certificate.

Councilman Cuda read the proclamation honoring Tiffany Scruggs. Ms. Scruggs thanked the nominees, honorees and City Council members. She recalled learning how to ride a bike at her grandmother's house, who was one of the first black woman homeowners in the City of Cleveland Heights. She also recalled Lauree Garrity, a woman singled out by City Manager Niermann O'Neil for her contributions to Cleveland Heights, as being part of the village. She stated she is a firm believer in paying homage and singled out her family for recognition. She thanked Councilwoman Russell for all she does and stated they have a similar 'seat at the table approach' where they believe in rallying the community members to talk about important community initiatives.

Councilor Larson presented the proclamation honoring Nadiya Freeman. Councilor Larson stated Ms. Freeman is often at the same school her daughter teaches at, so she was feeling a little emotional. Ms. Freeman said she has a heart for service; it's a legacy from her family. She said how important it is to do what we can for our children because they will be the ones taking care of us and if more people thought that way, we'd be in a better place right now. She said it's important kids also know service is important and we all need to work together to make things happen. She then thanked Councilor Larson.

Councilor Moore read Peggy Spaeth's proclamation. Ms. Spaeth said hello to her children watching from Wisconsin and Minnesota. She clarified they started the arts programs at Canterbury Elementary school, not Fairfax. She stated she felt she is in fertile ground in Cleveland Heights, starting with the PTA, where she first learned to connect with the community. She stated it can be hard to connect to the community when coming here as a single person or young person, as it was for her, decades ago. Being involved in PTA was an entrée for her to learn how to work with other people. She said at her very first PTA meeting, she asked why they don't have an art teacher and the PTA said they were going to make it a goal. She said having success in the very beginning of her community activism served as positive reinforcement. She said everyone wants the same thing, a vibrant community and to celebrate what's important. She stated she is transitioning in her retirement to environmental concerns so she wanted everyone to go outside and celebrate the parks as natural resources. She called out City Manager Niermann O'Neil, who has always been a champion of all the things she believes in as well.

Councilman Mattox started by congratulating and honoring City Manager Susanna Niermann O'Neil. He stated when he was a 12-year-old boy, he went on a tour of City Hall and it was her he met and she fostered so much opportunity in, not just the teens in his neighborhood, but around the City. He honored her today and he wouldn't be there if it wasn't for her and her heart. He then read the proclamation for Susie Kaeser. Ms. Kaeser said she was so grateful for the honor. She said she had a love affair with Cleveland Heights since she moved here in 1979. She was drawn to the civic energy of the community. It wasn't until she did the research for her book where she realized where it came from; it was all the community groups who wanted to take on a really hard problem like segregation and they created the civic infrastructure of the community. She said the main player was Susanna Niermann O'Neil. She echoed Peggy's point when you get together with common shared concerns, you can make something happen and it has made Cleveland Heights a really special place. She thanked them for the recognition.

Councilwoman Russell read Joyce Dixon's proclamation. She thanked Ms. Dixon for everything she's done for the Caledonia area. Ms. Dixon thanked Council and said she came to have a vision to help the community in many ways, but mostly by helping the people who are considered the less desirables. Instead of talking about things that need to happen, she was going to make every effort, on her own, to make sure things do take place. She said it's a very difficult road, especially when you have people who don't try to understand what's happening. She opened up the community center for day treatment centers, for children who can't go into public school and for seniors who don't have anywhere to go. She thought it was very important to have children and adults, who maybe have a little bit of mental illness, be able to express themselves so they do a lot of art. They also provide a lot of training, she stated not everyone is going to be able to go to college, so they prepare those who may not be able to go with different trades. She believes you have to have the fight in you in order to make a difference and said she has that fight and she will continue to fight.

Council President Hart presented Chief Mecklenburg with her proclamation after she discussed her background and thanked her for her service. Chief Mecklenburg said she is honored and it meant a lot to her to be in such good company, with so many amazing women of Cleveland Heights she has had the opportunity to work with. She stated over 31 years ago, there weren't a lot of women going into law enforcement, and now she believes there still aren't enough. She said without the support of her family, namely her mother and father, she wouldn't be there. After

joining the department in 1990, she was welcomed with open arms, even after hearing horror stories of women having hard times joining police departments. She thinks she got lucky and stated she couldn't ask for a better community, a better city or a better police department. They were welcoming of everyone. There were women in the department who mentored her and helped her along the way. There were also men and women along the way who saw in her something she never saw in herself, a leadership quality, and encouraged her to pursue becoming a ranking officer all the way up to Chief of Police. She said she can't thank everyone enough; she's had an amazing career here. She has met so many amazing people in this community. About one year after she started here, she moved in and has never left. She said to all the people she got to know over the years and what they accomplished, she is so grateful for their friendship and kindness in making the community a better place to live, work and visit. She then thanked the amazing men and women she works with every day, saying they have some dedicated, committed and compassionate police officers in the community, who show up every day. She said she's worked with a lot of people over the years and they are the most professional and dedicated police officers she's known. She thanked everyone and said it's been wonderful.

D'Aryl Snead recited Amanda Lovelace's "One." Councilor Larson presented her with a certificate.

Council Members Russell, Larson and Moore presented City Manager Susanna Niermann O'Neil with a plaque. Councilor Larson stated few people have served the Cleveland Heights community for so long and in so many impactful ways then Susanna. She helped create the 1976 Nine Point Plan, which made it illegal to engage in blockbusting and promoted a vibrant, integrated city. Councilor Larson stated City Manager Niermann O'Neil has worked for the City for over four decades in various roles. During those years, she has made an impact on the lives of the City's residents in many ways. Most recently, she stepped into the breach when former City Manager Tanisha Briley left and she took the helm of the ship to not just keep the City afloat in a time of crisis and transition, but also to ensure the City kept moving forward. She has served the City with compassion, grace and generosity. She has dedicated her life to make Cleveland Heights a place where "All are welcome." Councilwoman Russell read the proclamation. She said Susanna was with her when she first became a Councilwoman and she helped her hit the ground running. She said she has learned a lot from Susanna by just being in her presence. She said she loves and respects this City so deeply, no other woman in Cleveland Heights deserved it as much as she did. City Manager Niermann O'Neil said she was truly surprised. She said she's been there 46 years but it felt like ten because every day was wonderful, exciting and energizing because she was in the City of Cleveland Heights, saying there is no other place like it. She said the center of Cleveland Heights is we really, truly believe in diversity and integration; of helping, accepting and going forward. She mentioned building the Community Center and said it was a hard-fought fight. She said they opened up the Center and "all are welcome" is what the Community Center and Cleveland Heights are about. The goal is it keeps going that way; all religions, all races, all ages, all socioeconomic levels. That is the heart of what they are. She can't ever forget, every day, no matter what they had to do, everything got done because it was all Cleveland Heights people; women, working so hard. It wasn't just the staff; it was all the people coming together. She told the story of when she was asked to come work at City Hall and she said no, because she was a young know-it-all. She was convinced to go work for a year to try it and that was 45 years ago. She thanked everyone and said we are a community committed to diversity and that must be our future.

Council President Hart thanked everyone for participating and coming.

NEXT MEETING OF COUNCIL: MONDAY, APRIL 4, 2022

Respectfully submitted,



Melody Joy Hart
President of Council



Craig Cobb
Clerk of Council, Pro Tem