

SMILE General Meeting minutes

Wednesday, January 5, 2021

Via ZOOM, online

Main Website

www.SellwoodMoreland.org

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Procedural

www.SMILErecords.org

OFFICERS PRESENT: Simon Fulford, President; Ayomide Nikzi, Vice President; Eric Norberg, Secretary

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Elaine O’Keefe, Bob Burkholder, Sarah Bunger, Jim Friscia, Emily Muro-Pitts

SMILE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: R. Corless, Tom Hickey, Ann Howell, David Schoellhamer, Susan Wilch, Brenda Ray Scott

VISITORS FROM ELSEWHERE: Multnomah County Assessor Mike Vaughn; Tim Mercer, Multnomah County Tax Division Manager; Ryan Yambra, Multnomah County Communications

President Simon Fulford called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. He began by reviewing, for those attending, the protocols for SMILE’s recorded ZOOM meetings and announced that the meeting was being recorded – and then presented the evening’s agenda. Without a quorum present at the meeting, no motion could be entertained for approving the unapproved minutes of the past three months of General Meetings, so there will be four months of minutes to approve at the February General Meeting.

First on the agenda was our featured speaker, via ZOOM: Mike Vaughn, Multnomah County Assessor, who had been asked to explain how property taxes are assessed here. With him were Tim Mercer, who is the Tax Division Manager in the Assessor’s office, and Multnomah County Communications Specialist Ryan Yambra.

Vaughn presented a slide show entitled “Understanding Your Tax Bill”. He explained that property taxes are the funding mechanism for local services and local priorities; today’s tax system is still governed by laws going back decades. For each property, the assessed value is seldom the same as the taxable value, which is generally substantially less. He asked rhetorically if those at this meeting thought there actually is a 3% limit on increases in Oregon property taxes from year to year; some thought so, and he said that is a common misconception – but there is no such limitation. Measure 5, passed in 1990, “moved us from a levy-based system to a rate-based system”, and applies a \$5 per \$1,000 assessed value limit on property taxes budgeted for schools, and a \$10 per \$1,000 assessed value limit on property taxes budgeted for local government. Later on, Measure 50 set a maximum increase *of assessed value* of 3% on a property’s taxes; but that limit is not affected by additional indebtedness authorized by voters for various local options – temporary levies to fund specific operations – and to repay bond measures.

However, the assessed value of a property – the lesser of real market value and maximum assessed value – is allowed to increase no more than 3% each year, unless there are changes made to the property that change its value.

Vaughn went over a sample bill to illustrate these points, and he pointed out that if you study your own property tax bill, most of this information is itemized there. He opined that such property tax limitation measures are inherently inequitable, resulting in some properties on a block paying far more property tax than some other relatively comparable properties on the same block. But on the other hand, he conceded, taxes based on a standard assessed value

formula don't take the income of the owner (ability to pay the taxes) into consideration, and can also be quite unfair as a result. Reform, he said, is needed.

Next on the agenda was David Schoellhamer, Chair of the SMILE Land Use Committee, who reported that there has been a 33% increase in the number of housing units in the Sellwood-Westmoreland neighborhood over the past few years; he observed that if the city as a whole were to have experienced the same amount of growth, Portland would already have met its 2035 housing density goals.

He explained the purpose of SMILE "neighborhood contact meetings" – which, he said, are usually simply opportunities for residents to learn more about planned developments, and perhaps to offer some suggestions to the developers. Since most of these projects are already permitted by the zoning in the planned location, such meetings offer no opportunities to block or require changes in these plans. Sometimes, though, he said, developers at such meetings have liked suggestions made to improve the appearance of the planned construction, and voluntarily do adopt some of them.

But the only projects where SMILE actually has a role in determining the future of a planned development occurs when such a development requires a city zoning change before it can go forward. One such is a proposed two-block-long development between Insley and Ellis Streets in Westmoreland, on the west side of S.E. Milwaukie Avenue – which would replace all the business building now there, on the edge of Oaks Bottom Bluff. The developers seek to change the zoning there to allow taller buildings than are currently allowed. The SMILE Land Use Committee will host a community contact meeting for the proposers of that development at a date to be determined, early this year. When the date is set, it will be announced in the Land Use section of the main SMILE website – www.SellwoodMoreland.org

Last on the night's agenda was a return visit to SMILE by Trang Ho and Trang Sharbaugh to tell in more detail about their online "Masa Fresh" food business – www.masafresh.com. The business is intended to boost and sell local foods, and everyone in Portland can participate. It's an online marketplace for local food, including some prepared foods. Sellers set their own prices and pay a 10% commission on sales to Masa Fresh; buyers pay a 5% service fee on their purchases. The web-based business launched in April of 2020; it has 3,000 users, and has provided 2,700 products so far. Its owners plan to launch the online service in a second metropolitan area soon.

There being no other items on the agenda or offered from the floor, Preident Simon Fulford adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.