

Highlights of Activities and Accomplishments During 2005 - 2006

The first item of business this term was to deal with the organizational impacts of the Council's reorganization in mid-2005. Under the new Council committee structure, the Environmental Health Commission reports to both the Transportation and Environment and the Neighborhood Quality of Life Committees. Our response was to suggest that the person selected to be vice chair of the Commission have background and interests in the areas most likely to be important to the Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee. The current chair is more likely to contribute to the work of the Transportation and Environment Committee. This recommendation was accepted and Barbara Pittman was named Vice Chair. This was a very logical move and provided the Commission with a capable second leader. Unfortunately, it has made little real impact this term as no questions have been forwarded from either Council committee.

After some probing, the Commission decided to focus on two major topics:

- environmentally sound development planning
- continuity of service planning for a potential avian flu pandemic

Environmentally sound real estate development planning. Discussions with the Development Services Department, Jill Jordan, Assistant City Manager, Councilmember Ed Oakley and Real Estate Developer Diane Cheatham revealed that the City is capable of handling alternative development planning when the developer has the time and money to work with the City staff. The process requires that a Planned Development District (PD) be negotiated and approved. If the elements of the plan differ from the standard practices, this can take some time and patience. It also became fairly clear that developers who do not have the time, patience or project scale to warrant the delays of a non-standard process would most likely not opt for a non-standard approach.

The Commission wishing to encourage the formulation of more useful regulations for environmentally sound real estate developments has attempted to engage the Development Services Department in further conversation about its plans in this area. So far, these efforts have not met with success but there are firm plans for an additional discussion at our June 2006 meeting.

Planning for Potential Avian Flu Pandemic. Dr John Carlo, Medical Director of the DCHHS Department, met with the Commission in December 2005 to brief us on the potential for a flu pandemic derived from the avian flu that is infecting worldwide bird populations. Dr. Carlo returned in January 2005 to continue the discussion with an emphasis on community preparedness efforts. Based on these discussions, the Commission decided to take up the topic of community preparedness as one of its major areas of focus. The chairman wrote a letter to Councilmember Leo Chaney, chair of the Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee, with some recommendations for action

by the City in relation to continuity of service plans by City Departments and businesses that provide essential services to our citizens. A copy of this letter is attached. Unfortunately, no response has been received to that letter.

The cooperation and the progress made by the DCHHS Department and the City's Emergency Preparedness Department, headed by Kenny Shaw, have been impressive. The City is in the process of preparing continuity-of-service plans for all of its departments. The Health Department is conducting planning exercises with stakeholders and is making presentations to non-governmental groups in order to get them thinking about the impact of a pandemic on their organizations, members and consumers. The DCHHS website contains an impressive amount of useful material for people and organizations seeking to undertake their own planning efforts.

In spite of the progress being made, the Commission continues its focus on this topic. We recognize the inherent difficulties in bridging between the public sector priorities and private sector ones. It is encouraging to see that the Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce is now focusing some attention on this subject.

We continue to believe that the Council and City Manager should pay attention to this topic and should use their influence with the companies that provide essential services to the citizens of Dallas. Realistic plans are the best way to help our citizens navigate the difficult waters associated with a pandemic should one arrive on this shore.

REVISED GOALS/WORK PLAN FOR 2006

- The Commission plans to continue its efforts on environmentally sound development planning. We see this as the most important goal of the near future.
- The Commission will also continue to follow and encourage pandemic flu preparedness planning with emphasis on essential services provided by agencies of the City and by private enterprise.
- The Commission has begun consideration of environmental scorecard systems that might be useful to Dallas. We will continue to investigate these to see if an approach would our resources and needs.
- For the last two years, the Commission has followed the progress of the restaurant and food establishment inspection system. In 2005, the Council passed a new inspection code. Since this new system has requires inspectors to go about their duties in a different way, the Commission has been interested to follow progress.
- The City has created the new department called Environmental Quality. Staff from the Office of Environmental Quality have briefed the Commission, but no working relationship has been established. The Commission will give some priority to determining what its relationship should be with the Environment and Health Services Department and the Office of Environmental Quality.
- The Commission stands ready to respond to requests made by the Council committees or the City staff.