

Council Member Cam Gordon's Report to Seward Neighborhood 3-25-09

**Cam's next Seward Office Hours:
Tuesday, April 28, 9:30-11:00am
Birchwood Café, 3311 E 25th St**

Items:

- 1) April Roundtable
- 2) Heritage Preservation Ordinance
- 3) 2009 Climate Change Grants
- 4) Trees Available for \$25
- 5) Earth Hour
- 6) Relative Homesteads
- 7) New Domestic Violence Program
- 8) Commercial Building Inspection Program
- 9) City/State Financial Relationship
- 10) Nonmotorized Transportation Grants
- 11) Crown Hydro
- 12) Beekeeping
- 13) Openings on City Boards and Commissions

- 1) Please join me for a roundtable discussion on **supporting our neighborhood businesses** on **April 23rd**, 7-9pm at **Joe's Market and Deli**, 1828 SE Como Ave. In these tough economic times, it's more important than ever for us to support our small, community-based independent businesses. I will be joined by Longfellow Business Association Co-Chair Scott Cramer, Seward Civic and Commerce Association President Jim Welna, Southeast Business Association Executive Director Mike McLaughlin and representatives of the West Bank Business Association for a conversation about the vital role of small businesses and business associations in our local economy.
- 2) The Heritage Preservation ordinance that was presented at the public meeting early in this month has gone before the Zoning and Planning Committee. I voted to send it forward without recommendation, to give the Council time to review some of the concerns and ideas brought forward at the community meeting and public hearing. I am considering making amendments to ensure that what passes is as strong as it can be, to clarify what is considered "destruction," and to possibly expand the notice provided when a potentially historic property is to be demolished. I expect the ordinance, with possible amendments, to pass the full Council next Friday, March 27th.
- 3) Based on the success of the last two years, the City has funded another round of climate change grants. These grants have been quite successful in mobilizing citizens to take measurable actions to reduce their carbon emissions. I encourage SNG to apply for this funding. See here for more information: www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/sustainability/ClimateChangeGrants2009.asp.
- 4) The City has also partnered again with Tree Trust to offer trees to residents for only \$25. If you're interested, you should visit www.treetrust.org/orderhere after the trees become available on April 3rd, but don't wait too long: there are only 1,000 trees being offered, and last year they went very quickly.
- 5) The City of Minneapolis is again participating in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund in Earth Hour, a global statement of concern about climate change and of our commitment to finding solutions. We will turn off the lights on the Stone Arch Bridge and the external lights on City Hall. Several downtown buildings will also go dark. I encourage everyone in the Ward to participate by turning your lights out this **Saturday, March 28th, from 8:30-9:30pm**.

- 6) The City's Regulatory Services department has put in place a new policy that will require all single family dwellings that are relative homesteaded to obtain a rental license. Affected property owners are being provided with a rental license application and instructions for how to submit the application and fee to Housing Inspection Services. Fully homesteaded single family dwellings will not be required to have a rental license. The effected properties are not subject to the \$1,000 fee for transfer of a property from owner-occupied to rental. I am supportive of this move, as relative homesteaded properties have been highlighted as a major issue for many U-area neighborhoods. Because these houses have been rented without a license, they have been significantly harder to control. I do have some concerns about covering all relative homesteads, rather than just those collecting rent, and I am working with staff to address these concerns.
- 7) The City is launching a new citywide program designed to reduce domestic violence. Officers who arrive at a misdemeanor domestic violence call will now do more investigative work at the scene, giving prosecutors more information to prosecute a case. These new strategies have been successful in increasing the conviction rate of misdemeanor domestic violence-related cases from 54% to 76% in the 5th Precinct. I am very supportive of this program, which offers the opportunity to interrupt the cycle of violence.
- 8) Over my objections and dissenting vote, the Council has voted to put in place the Commercial Building Inspections Program and associated fee that many Second Ward business owners have contacted me to oppose. The program will now charge businesses from \$50 - \$910 every year for a comprehensive fire inspection once every five years. This passed the Council in large part because the revenue it is expected to raise – approximately \$950,000 every year – will prevent laying off about 21 firefighters. While I support finding funding to retain all of our firefighters, I have opposed this program since it first came to the Council, for three main reasons. First, no one has been able to make a convincing case that this program is necessary to prevent fires. This makes it very clear that the program is being put in place simply to fill an existing budget hole, and I do not believe this is responsible or fair. Second, I am opposed to the increasing reliance of government on fees and fines for our revenue, rather than relying on progressive taxation. Third, and most importantly, the fee structure passed by the Council puts a much, much larger burden on small businesses than large ones. In fact, the smallest building owners will pay almost **40 times** as much per square foot as the largest building owners. Even if the fees will be less that \$100 a year for the smaller businesses, this is simply the wrong time and the wrong way to add to the costs of doing business in Minneapolis.
- 9) As directed, City staff has produced a good report on the changing nature of the City's financial relationship with the State of Minnesota. The State continues to take a larger and larger amount of money from property and sales taxes in Minneapolis while reducing the amount they return to the City in Local Government Aid. To learn more, see here: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/2009-meetings/20090306/Docs/State_Fiscal_Relations_Staff_Dir.pdf.
- 10) Transit for Livable Communities has decided to award federal non-motorized transportation dollars to two projects that are very important to Ward 2. They allocated \$1.75 million to the Bicycle Sharing program, which will include the University area. Second, they gave the University of Minnesota \$525,000 for a bike center in the Oak Street Parking Ramp, as well as a Radio Frequency Identification program to validate bicycle commuters. I'm thrilled that both of these great projects are moving forward, and hope to see them up and running soon.
- 11) The Council has voted to formally oppose, through our legislative agenda, the attempt by supporters of Crown Hydro to circumvent the local control of the City and Park Board over the use of public lands for the proposed small hydropower facility. While I am generally supportive of small hydro, I have concerns about this specific project and strongly support the principle of local, democratic control, so I voted for this legislative agenda change.
- 12) Council Member Scott Benson has introduced an ordinance establishing new regulations to allow people to keep bees in the city. I believe that the regulations will be similar to the current ordinance on chickens in the city, which require that a large majority of neighbors agree to having this activity nearby. Allowing bees could bring two main benefits to the city: locally-produced honey, and an increase in pollination, which can help increase the yields of gardens.
- 13) There are openings on the Public Health Advisory Committee (closes 4/10) and Rental Dwelling License Board of Appeals (closes 4/24). To apply, call (612) 673-3358 or email cityclerk@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.