

Akron Documenters

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Ward 8 meeting

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Summary

- Keep Akron Beautiful has a new initiative called [Planting Change: 100k Trees for Akron](#). The goal is to restore tree canopy balance, planting 100,000 trees by 2034. Benefits will impact health, create community cohesion and create opportunities for tourism. Community members are encouraged to assist by donating money, planting trees and spreading the word about the program. According to City Council Member [James Hardy](#), when it comes to Planting Change, “Collective impact will be what it takes.”
- Ward 8 monthly crime statistics for May revealed a decline in overall crime with the exception of felonious assault. There was a 2% increase in felonious assault in May. In the wake of the [June 2 mass shooting](#) in East Akron, Officer Aaron Brown recommended citizens use 411 to report any tips to locate the suspects and remain aware of their surroundings.
- The Merriman Valley Train Depot is expected to break ground early next year. The goal is to gather funding by becoming a [Special Improvement District](#). Downtown Akron was able to use the SID model by having property owners tax themselves in order to put money back into the district. Funding will create more pedestrian and cycle-friendly traffic patterns near the depot. Hardy hopes the depot will serve as a catalyst for revitalization of the Merriman Valley Business District.

Follow-Up Questions

- What steps will the mayor’s office take to make an earnest effort to repair their relationship with council members?
- Since many city departments are short-staffed and nuisance complaints are

increasing, is there room in the budget to increase headcount for critical departments such as the Nuisance Compliance Division?

- How can we hold developers accountable for replacing trees that are removed during construction?

Notes:

- The overall tone was casual yet informative during this community coffee meeting
 - There was great signage near the stairs at Acme No. 1 to signify the meeting location
 - Council Member James Hardy extended a friendly greeting to each attendee. (Editor's note, Hardy [announced his resignation](#) after this meeting effective July 1).
 - Approximately 19 community members attended

During a brief introduction, Hardy shared the meeting format: two presentations followed by updates and announcements.

Presentation #1- Planting Change: 100k Trees for Akron

Presented by Keep Akron Beautiful [Executive Director and CEO Jacqui Ricchiuti](#) and [Community Outreach Manager Emma Segedy](#)

- [Planting Change](#) is the new KAB initiative
 - Benefits of planting trees include better air quality to enhance breathing, water management, community cohesion, and tourism opportunities by hosting events such as scavenger hunts.
 - Goal is to lay the groundwork for a more sustainable city by planting 100,00 trees by 2034.
 - Call to action: volunteer to plant trees and raise awareness of the program.
 - Initiative progress will be tracked and reported
- Ricchiuti shared a personal experience about tree trimming vs. tree removal
 - Tree removal would cost approximately \$7,000
 - Tree trimming costs approximately \$500, allowing her to retain a tree
 - This three-year project involved pruning and removing limbs
 - After gathering feedback from her neighbor, she chose the trimming option.
 - She learned the importance of education prior to deciding to remove a tree.
- A fourth grade arborist curriculum update is in the works.
 - Prior to the pandemic, the KAB team taught fourth graders the importance of arborists

- Once approved, they will return to Akron-area fourth grade classrooms for the first time since the pandemic.

Community members had the following questions and comments regarding the presentation:

- A community member voiced the desire to have native trees for the Planting Change initiative. Additionally, they also voiced concerns about citations from planting trees. Questions regarding guidelines arose from this comment. Finally, they also shared the fact that trees can't be planted along the devil strip.
 - Hardy said trees that are considered native now might not be in the next 20 years. He also said that the city has received a grant for tree maintenance on city streets.
 - Segedy suggested contacting [Keep Akron Beautiful](#) with any questions since the initiative is so new.
 - As the initiative website is built out videos will be added regarding guidelines, Ricchiuti said.
- Another community member asked what factors contributed to the canopy decline
 - Hardy said that every 10 years there is an update/report regarding the canopy coverage. He also said that two main factors contributed to the canopy decline.
 - A sewer project mandated by the EPA which caused deforestation and replacements were delayed due to funding.
 - Residents are the second factor that caused the decline. He used an example of a tree removed in his own yard due to potential safety issues.
- There was also a discussion about the White Pond development. Residents wanted to understand why the developer was not mandated to replace trees that were removed during construction. Since developers did not pay for replacement trees, residents voiced concerns about having to pay for replacements using taxpayer funds. Going forward, residents want to offer tax abatements only for developers who replace trees removed during construction. Hardy agreed to work on this initiative.
- First Energy's involvement in tree maintenance was also discussed. Residents said First Energy "butchers" tree limbs to prevent energy disruptions like the blackout that occurred nearly 20 years ago. With education, residents hope that there will be an element of care involved in tree limb maintenance going forward.
 - Ricchiuti said Keep Akron Beautiful is working with many corporations, including First Energy, in an effort to get further funding for the Planting

Change initiative.

- One resident asked for an update regarding litter concerns on the Smith Road hill.
 - Hardy said Summit Metro Parks has an initiative to clear any litter along the road. It has been improving.
- Due to a resident's concern about junk in front yards, Ricchiuti and Segedy shared information for reporting [Nuisance Complaints](#).
 - Call 311, then provide the exact location and detail the issue (if the department receives three or more calls they respond faster)
 - Each ward has a nuisance inspector who will investigate the issue
 - If the issue is related to junk outside of a residential address, typically the city will give the property owner a citation and two weeks to resolve the issue.
 - After two weeks, if the issue is not resolved, they will be charged for the use of city personnel to resolve the issue.

Presentation #2- Akron Police Department Monthly Crime Stats Update

Presented by Officer Aaron Brown, Ward 8 community engagement team member

- Updates from the Akron Police Department
 - Brown said that overall crime stats have decreased with the exception of felonious assaults, which have increased 2%.
 - Brian Harding was sworn in as the [new police chief](#).
 - As of Tuesday, many people have applied to join the APD
 - Several applicants are considered lateral transfers, meaning that due to their Ohio state residency status, they will enter a fast-tracked training program.
 - There are no updates regarding the last two shootings. Brown said, "We haven't seen anything of this size." He also said residents should be aware of their surroundings.
 - APD tried to speak with a shooting victim's father but officials said he is too afraid to talk.
 - Residents can send any tips regarding either incident to APD:
 - [Here](#) or text TIPSCO with your tips to 274637
 - Aug. 6 is the [National Nite Out](#) in all 10 wards
 - Allows Akronites to engage and get information from APD
 - Brown also reminded residents that fireworks are illegal in Akron
 - Typically the phone lines are flooded with concerned residents requesting assistance, but the department is understaffed.

Community members had the following questions and comments:

- A community member asked if there are additional details regarding the make/model of the white SUV involved in the June 2 [mass shooting](#).
 - Brown said that the Flock cameras did not capture additional details.
- There was also a discussion about crime stats in downtown Akron.
 - Brown said, “Crime is not rampant downtown.”
 - He also shared details about city-wide crime stats by using the LexisNexis system [here](#)
- Residents also had concerns about break-ins.
 - Brown said valuables should not be left in cars or sheds and garage doors should be locked.
- The NextDoor app was another topic of concern. Community members talked about an increase in reported neighborhood incidents daily.
 - Brown reminded community members, “On social media, take it with a grain of salt.”
- One resident asked about the rules for shooting firearms.
 - Brown said, “In the City of Akron, it is illegal to discharge a firearm.”
 - He also said many issues stem from illegal firearm use.

Announcements and updates

Presented by Hardy

- A local resident requested feedback regarding the response to Mayor Shammass Malik’s email canceling city Juneteenth events.
 - Hardy said there are feelings of frustration between City Council members and the mayor’s staff.
 - He said, “There is a fear and concern, particularly in the Black community, about safety.”
 - A major lack of communication regarding canceled events led to 1,000 attendees arriving at the Heart Walk only to hear that the event had been canceled.
- The landscape of local businesses in Merriman Valley was an important topic.
 - Hardy shared details about legislation that will require vape stores to file for conditional use and present their plans before stores are approved.
 - A public-private partnership might provide a solution for funding to create a more aesthetically pleasing business district.
 - Hardy used downtown’s [Special Improvement District](#) as an example
 - Early next year, the train depot construction should start in the valley
 - According to Hardy, this can be a catalyst to encourage business

development.

- Frank Boulevard update
 - The [construction fence is down](#)
 - By the end of July, demolition and clean-up should be completed
- [Pickleball and tennis courts](#) are open at [1730 Shatto Ave](#), near One of a Kind Pets.

Notes to reader: Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at documenters@signalakron.org with "Correction Request" in the subject line.