

AQCA Monthly Membership Meeting Notes

Wednesday, March 19, 2008, 7:00pm (Classical Condos)

Guest speaker:

Dominic Sarno, Mayor, City of Springfield

Robert Louder, Co-President of AQCA, called the meeting to order and made several announcements, including reminders about:

- April 2nd Sector E Police Team meeting, to be held at Maple Commons, 60 School Street (6:00 pm)
- April 3rd Historic Commission meeting (6:30 pm), at which the demolition request for 27 Elliott Street will be reviewed.
- May 3rd "Keep Springfield Beautiful" City-wide pick-up (stay tuned for how to get involved with the AQCA team) Visit <www.keepspringfieldbeautiful.org> for more information.
- May 17th Pancake Breakfast - AQCA will have a table again
- Reopening of Spring Street Drug - is now Spring Street Super Grocery [see attached photo: produce aisle has been added; deli soon to come]

Carol Costa spoke about her involvement with the Court Square project, as the AQCA representative on the review committee. The group of applicants have been narrowed down to 4 highly qualified companies (Details are posted on the City Hall website).

Mayor Sarno was introduced along with **Thomas Walsh**, Director of Constituent Services, and liaison between AQCA and the mayor's office.

The mayor spoke about his whirlwind first few months in office, and praised his staff, in particular Thomas Walsh, for their hard work thus far. Following is a summary of some of the topics that were covered:

- **Safety issues** - The mayor still considers safety to be his area of "frontal attack." He spoke of his support for William Fitchet for the position of Police Commissioner [Fitchet's appointment was approved by the Finance Control Board on March 26th]. He spoke of the variety of recent high-profile events held Downtown recently, and how there have not been any major incidents [this meeting was held before the March 21 stabbing incident at the Zone Lounge on Worthington Street]. He attributes this to the increased police presence and coordination between the police and the Springfield Guides / Business Improvement District.
- **Quality of Life** - The mayor is very proud of the communication / collaboration going on between city departments, and the amount of follow-up / response that has been made in regards

to code violations and other complaints coming from the neighborhoods. He feels strongly about the need for quick turn-around and follow-up calls to residents.

- **Education** - As the City moves towards a search for a new superintendent of schools, Sarno said that he is willing to "get creative" and entertain a broad search for this position, and suggested the possibility of considering candidates with strong experience in fields other than education, such as business. He spoke of the need for more emphasis on pre-K education. Also spoke about the recent involvement of retired principals returning to some schools to assist current administrators.

- **Downtown / economic development** - Sarno spoke about the Court Square and State Street projects, thanking Carol Costa for her involvement and reporting on the possibility of a large grocery store moving into the block near Burger King. He also expressed support of a speedy decision and movement on the construction of a new Mason Square Library. He was happy to report that AIC has plans to expand their "footprint" to the West, towards Downtown, instead of in the other direction. When questioned about the Tech High, Sarno admitted that he is in a very tough position regarding this issue, as the building is at the center of disagreements between our state and federal representatives (regarding the potential location of the state "Data Center"). Sarno's main concern right now is that the Data Center be positioned in Springfield at all, and not be lost to another city.

Sarno also spoke about Union Station, that he has "moved the meetings into his office," and is pushing for action on this site.

The mayor also spoke about the importance of keeping the Falcons in downtown Springfield, and about his hope of developing some sort of "Court of Dreams" near the Basketball Hall of Fame, something akin to Cooperstown's "Field of Dreams."

There was discussion / complaints about the downtown parking situation - there has been some experimentation with on-street parking recently, and some people are confused about the situation. Jeff Keck of the BID assured everyone that this is a transitional phase and that much discussion and planning is going into improving the situation. There are new orange "OOPS" flyers being left on cars in place of parking tickets, during this transitional phase.

The mayor fielded some other questions and encouraged AQCA's continued involvement and advocacy for Downtown improvements.

Next monthly meeting will be Thursday, April 17th, at 7:00 pm, at 122 Chestnut Street. Guest speakers Mary Kay Wydra of the Tourism/Convention Bureau and Todd Greenwood of the Mass Mutual Center, who will speak on "Tourism in the Pioneer Valley."

Notes submitted by Anna Brandenburg, AQCA Secretary