**Mayors Forum Recap**

LWV South Tonka and Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Chamber of Commerce sponsored the Mayors Forum at the Southshore Center on Wednesday January 21st at 7:00 p.m. All six mayors participated:  Jim Doak from Woodland, Debra Kind from Greenwood, Gerry De LaVega from Tonka Bay, Scott Zerby from Shorewood, Paul Skrede from Deephaven, and Mark Gaylord from Excelsior. Sue Hnastchenko introduced the forum; Joe Schwartz, Chamber President, spoke on behalf of the chamber; and Susan Batchelder moderated. The mayors discussed issues specific to their cities and then answered question from the audience.

Mayor Jim Doak of Woodland said road conditions in Woodland remain an ongoing issue because they are in need of constant repair, and the road construction on County Road 101N is having an impact on the city’s residents. The city’s expenses have risen 8% since last year. Building and remodeling permit requests have also risen. Woodland receives a lot of revenue from building permits. Since building and remodeling are on the rise, zoning conflicts regarding subdivisions and remodeling have also increased. The city is now home to 437 residents and some of the new residents are families with young children.  Overall, the city remains reasonably quiet.

Mayor Debra Kind of Greenwood announced two key building projects the city had recently completed: the renovation at the Old Log Theatre and completion of the prominent home construction on St. Alban’s Bay Island. Greenwood will partner with Excelsior to repair the Mill Street Bridge. A committee working with engineers is discussing preliminary plans for the five-year project. Greenwood is working on improvements to clean St. Albans Bay of any invasive species.

Mayor Gerry De La Vega of Tonka Bay said the city tax levee saw a 0% increase from last year. The city has been working with the county on possible solutions to the fishing problem on County Road 19. A committee has also been created to help minimize the activity. Building and remodeling permits are increasing. Tonka Bay is experiencing an increase of large homes on small lots and as a result, the city has experienced an increase of variance requests. Mayor De La Vega also said the city council is working on solutions to the problem of over population of deer and wild turkey.

Mayor Scott Zerby of Shorewood discussed the latest in the city’s development. Shorewood is working closely with a consultant and developer to design the building plans. The plans are for 121 homes set on top of 117 acres. The home values will be between $600,000.00 and $800,000.00. The new development will increase the usage of the city’s water system by 6%.  Shorewood also continues to strive to remain environmentally conscious. The city supports League member Patricia Hauser and the Bee Safe movement. Mayor Zerby mentioned plans for Shorewood to become a Green Step City and a Tree City, and the city is working with a consultant to develop alternative energy plans. In addition, Shorewood and the Minnehaha Watershed District have isolated the location of the zebra muscles in Christmas Lake, and they are clearing out the invasive species.

Mayor Paul Skrede of Deephaven said Deephaven Elementary is doing well. Enrollment is up and the Spanish emersion program is still very popular. Recently young families have moved into the area, and Deephaven Woods Elder Care saw a 67% increase of residents from last year.

Mayor Mark Gaylord of Excelsior noted that all the spaces in the new Kowalski’s building have been rented, with a restaurant being one of the tenants. He also addressed concerns about the Excelsior Commons. Winter activities are up and the city is very lively.

After all the mayors concluded their statements, the Q&A session began.

Question: Does your city have plans to address the issue of teardowns being replaced by mega mansions and what that does to the character of neighborhoods and the encroachment on smaller houses?

\* Debra Kind: The city has ordinances in place to take care of encroachment and zoning issues.

\* Gerry De LaVega: Tonka Bay sees a similar issue with mega mansions on smaller lots. The city realizes as communities grow, growth management would be the best solution.

\* Scott Zerby: The city has ordinances set in place to address this issue.

\* Paul Skrede: The city ordinances are set to take care of this issue.

\* Mark Gaylord: Excelsior has a similar problem with older homes being replaced by mega mansions. There are ordinances in place that restrict large homes on smaller lots. There are plans to build a residential community behind the Excelsior Mill that is within zoning restrictions. The development will have 18 units; they are detached homes with an 1880’s Italian feel.

\* Jim Doak: The city maintains the openness of the natural environment. The city zoning protects the trees and typography.

Question: What are the current feelings on merging the cities, specifically Excelsior, Shorewood, and Tonka Bay. If not merging the cities, then what are your feelings on merging the public works?

\* Gerry De LaVega: The cities utilities are merged to some capacity. They help keep costs low for citizens. It would be difficult to merge all the cities. They would lose their individual charm and character.

\* Scott Zerby: A merge would not be a bad idea. Calls for residents to step up and look into the possibilities.

\* Paul Skrede: The cities will lose their individual charm. Public works are shared within the lake’s cities.

\* Mark Gaylord: The city has conducted studies on merging cities. They received pushback from the council.

\* Jim Doak: The city of Woodland has many shared amenities, like Wayzata’s police department. Their roads are also repaired and maintained by private donors.

\* Debra Kind: Greenwood is already sharing many amenities with Deephaven.

Question: What are your opinions on keeping the Southshore Center open and fully staffed?

\* Scott Zerby: The Southshore Center should remain open and operated. Shorewood has reached out to other cities for help, but have not received response.

\* Paul Skrede: Declined to answer. He was at a meeting regarding the topic, and did not want to accidently disclose anything.

\* Mark Gaylord: The Council would like the center to remain open, yet funding is a concern. Funding would increase taxes on a small amount of residents.

\* Jim Doak: Pass.

\* Debra Kind: Declined to answer. She was also at a meeting regarding the topic and does not want to disclose anything too early.

\* Gerry De LaVega: Pass.

Question: For Mark Gaylord specifically: what do you plan to do about parking in Excelsior?

\* Mark Gaylord: The city currently does parking tests four times a week in the summer. There actually isn’t a parking problem. The council has looked into ideas such as a parking ramp, but that could take up to five years of planning with the Met council.

The meeting ended around 8:30, and the mayors stayed after to answer questions informally. The meeting was recorded by LMCC.