

Councilperson Celeste Friend SOUTH UTICA - THIRD WARD



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South Utica Newsletter #16 from Councilperson Celeste Friend

This monthly newsletter aims to keep you informed of Council business, matters important to the Third Ward, an explanation of my votes, and more. Much of the content is specific to the Third Ward, but some of it is relevant to anyone who lives in Utica. Every month, once I finish the Newsletter, I think to myself "what will I write about next month?" and then a month rolls around, and I find that there is plenty to report on. If you like getting this Newsletter and find it useful, we encourage you to tell your friends and neighbors to sign up for it as well. They can just drop me an email at cfriend@cityofutica.com and I will add them to the list.

The Utica Prosperity Initiative

As we all know, the Federal government has responded to Covid with first the CARES Act and more recently with the American Rescue Plan. Additionally, New York State has allocated extra funds to municipalities to help them recover. (And there may be an infrastructure spending bill before too long.) This puts us at an extremely important inflection point in our history: the opportunity to suddenly have lots of "extra" money to spend in ways that will create long term sustainability and prosperity for ourselves and our neighbors. The American Rescue Plan alone is approximately \$60 million dollars, which is almost as much as our annual city budget. There are guidelines as to how we can spend that money, and some important restrictions. The Mayor is soliciting all and any ideas from any person or organization on how to best spend this money to create a new path forward for all of us. The Utica Prosperity Initiative will create a general framework through which to thoughtfully and carefully spend all this money. But we need your ideas, your input. So the Mayor has created a simple form, readily available on the City website, to solicit the input of anyone or any organization with an idea for how to spend this money. Here's a link to that form: We need your ideas! And I'd like to hear them too. So if you have an idea you'd like to run by me, or you'd like help developing, please, by all means, drop me a line. Let's not let this opportunity to create long term prosperity and happiness for our City slip by us without all of us contributing to it.

The RoCo (Roscoe Conkling) Walkers

A couple of months back, some friends and I started a casual walking group. The idea was and remains simple: we meet at the Oneida Street gate to Roscoe Conkling Park every Sunday morning at 9am. We walk up to the Eagle (that first part is noticeably uphill). Then we continue on Steele Hill Road to the Pavilion at South Woods, where Phil, who is always in need of an outlet for his baking skills, brings homemade treats to share. Then some of us continue on and walk the Switchbacks. So, you can do a little or you can do a lot. (The entire thing takes me almost three hours, but that includes hanging out and socializing at the Pavilion. And I'm not in great shape, so I'm slow on the hills.) The Park is one of Utica's great unsung treasures, and it makes me happy to help more people enjoy it. (I just learned that the hiking club "Tramp and Trail" held their very first hike in Roscoe Conkling Park 100 years ago. So for 100 years, people have enjoyed walking in our beautiful Park.) Anyone is welcome to join us! We meet there rain or shine. Just click here to see the Facebook page.



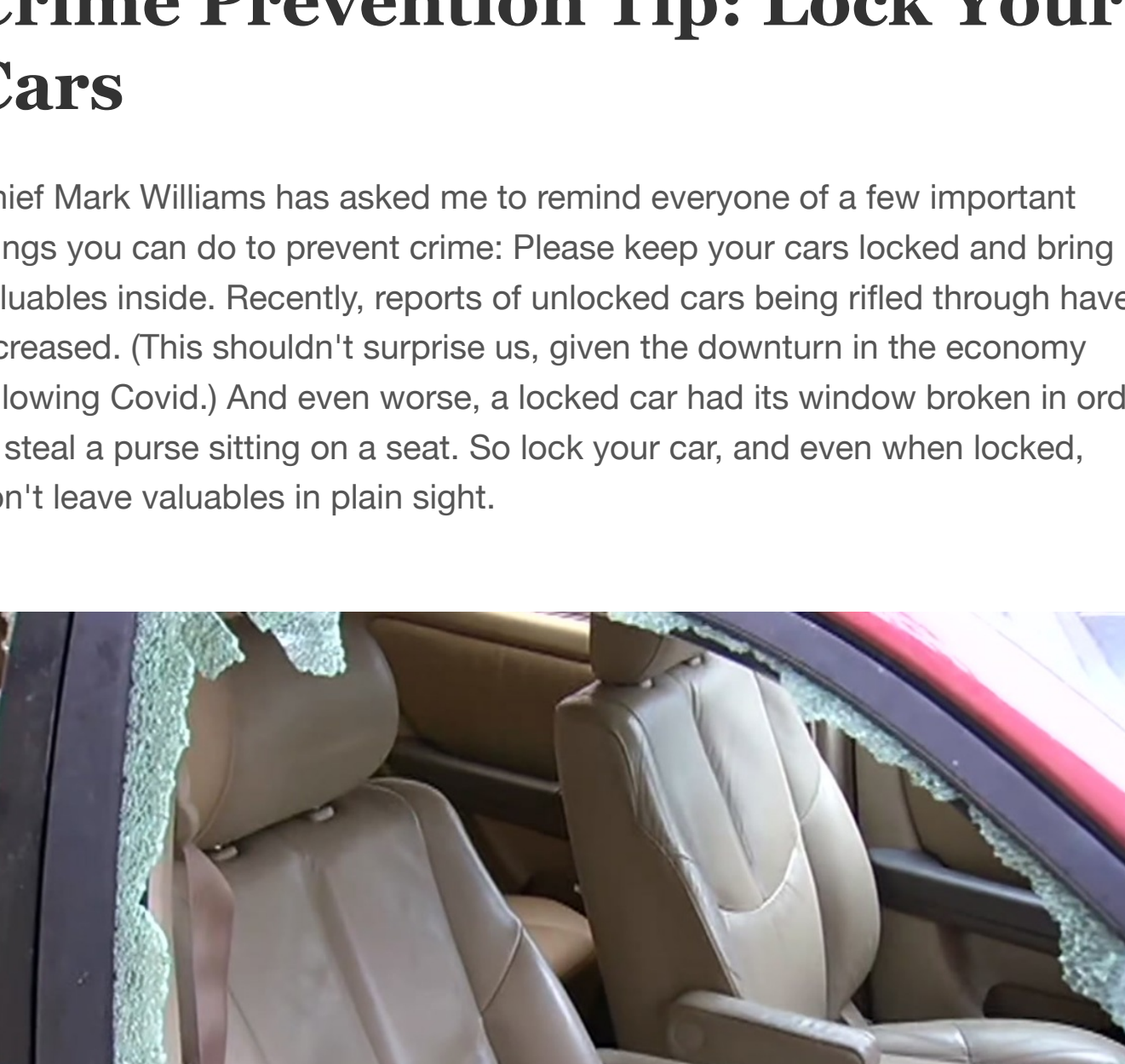
New! South Utica Advisory Board

From the very beginning, when I was running for office in 2019, I had the idea of establishing a citizen advisory board. What I wanted was a diverse group of South Utica residents who could advise me, talk to me about issues in the Ward, and so on. But almost as soon as I took office, Covid hit and it was all any of us could do to keep up as we knew we were going to have a changed world, so the idea did not take shape. But now, it finally has. The new South Utica Advisory Board is headed up by Scott Murray, who lives in the middle of the Ward. He has found an initial group of people willing to serve, although they still have room for more. This will be an independent Board, who answer only to themselves and to South Utica. I hope that they will continue to meet even after I am out office, and that they will meet not only with me, but with other elected officials who also represent them. They have drafted a set of by-laws, and found a regular time and place to meet: the first Thursday of every month, at 6pm, at The Other Side, next to Cafe Domenico. The meetings are open to the public, and I intend to always be there. Scott can be reached at Smm0996@gmail.com.



Common Council Open to Public and Public Comment is Back

As of June 1st, City Hall is open to the public again, which is a good thing in and of itself, but is also a hopeful sign that we are well on our way to a normal world. Common Council opened its chambers to the public at our last meeting, on May 19th. With that, we also returned to our normal public comment. I encourage everyone to use public comment - we need to hear from you. Expected protocols will remain in place for the time being: wear a mask, sign in, and socially distance. But democracy is calling you!



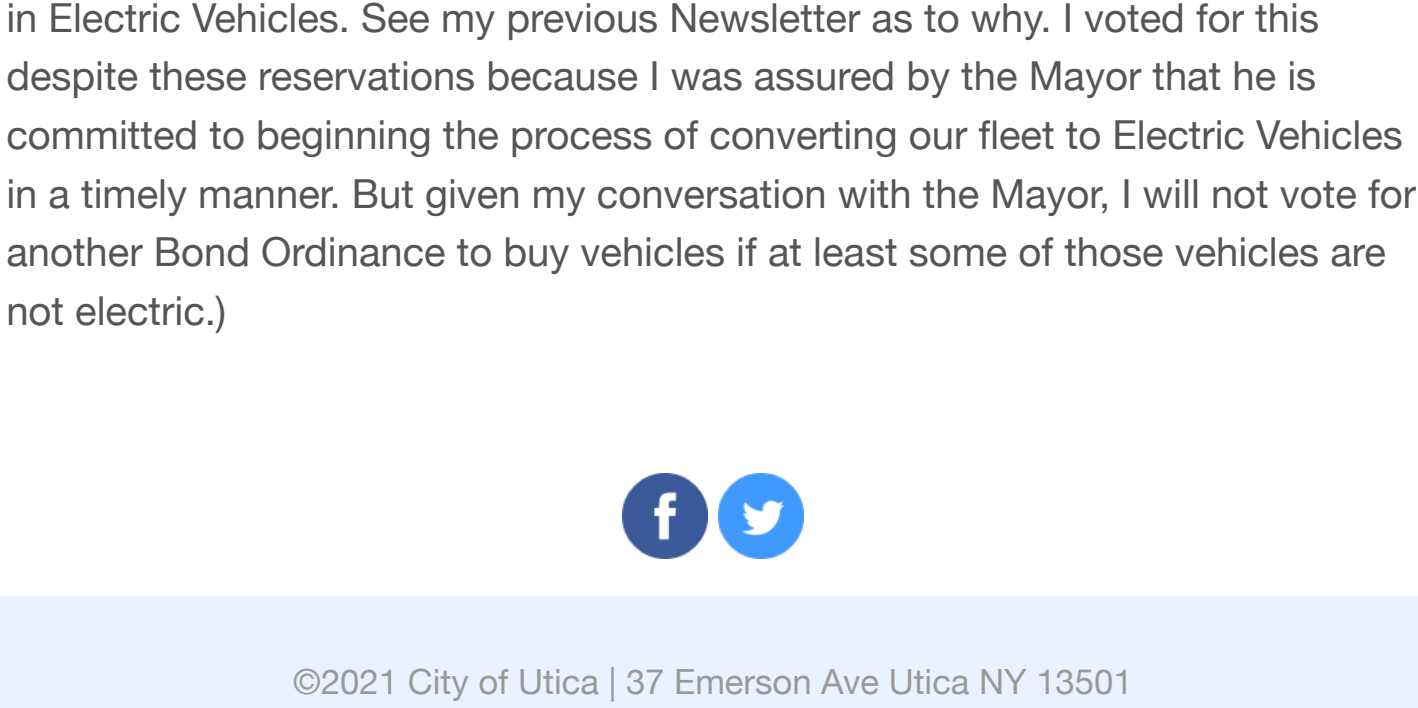
First Annual Utica Garden Walk and Flower Show

An exciting new event is coming to Utica: The Utica Garden Tour and Flower Show. It will be held on July 9&10, 2021. The Garden Tour will be of residents' gardens and the Flower Show will be held at the Utica Library. Similar events have been huge successes in other cities, and the organizers of this event have high hopes that it can be as good for Utica. (You can see what they do in Buffalo by following this link.) The organizers of this event are in the process of signing up Volunteers to show off their gardens. You can click this link to sign up. This project is being promoted by the Utica Common Council, The Oneida County Board of Tourism, The Cornell Cooperative Extension, The CNY Conservancy and District V of the Federated Garden Clubs of New York.



Crime Prevention Tip: Lock Your Cars

Chief Mark Williams has asked me to remind everyone of a few important things you can do to prevent crime: Please keep your cars locked and bring valuables inside. Recently, reports of unlocked cars being rifled through have increased. (This shouldn't surprise us, given the downturn in the economy following Covid.) And even worse, a locked car had its window broken in order to steal a purse sitting on a seat. So lock your car, and even when locked, don't leave valuables in plain sight.



Uptown Theater: Save A Seat Now

The Uptown Theater is a precious South Utica landmark and has the potential to be a major economic driver for both South Utica and Utica in general. A few years ago, after years of neglect and mismanagement, it was bought by Briana and Devin Mahoney who have turned it into a non-profit dedicated to a variety of performing arts. They jumped right in and converted the old jewelry shop into a small studio and began offering a variety of stand up and improvisation classes. They were gaining momentum when Covid hit. But they stuck with it, and are hanging in there, but they need our help. They have just begun an ambitious capital campaign, called Save A Seat Now. Please chip in and invest not just in this landmark institution in South Utica, but in the future of Utica. You can learn all about the campaign and how to donate by clicking here.

Facebook Common Council Page

At our next Common Council meeting, I will be introducing a Resolution to establish a Facebook page for the Utica Common Council. This Resolution is sponsored by myself and Jack LoMedico, and is intended simply to establish an official Facebook page for the Council, similar to what other cities have done and what the Mayor has done. It will be an additional way to communicate with the public about upcoming meetings, as well as provide links to public documents and share official announcements. It will not substitute for other ways of communicating with the public, such as notifications in the Observer-Dispatch, and the City website. But I do think that is is important to engage and inform the public in as many ways as possible. Facebook is simply one more way to do this. So follow what happens on Wednesday and then look for us on Facebook, and give us a like or a follow.

My Votes on the Council in May

Resolutions I Voted For:
May 5th: Commissioner of Deeds for Lawrence Joseph and Rosemarie Joseph; Resolution for a Public Hearing on the Discontinuance of a portion of Ash Street
May 19th: Resolution to Appoint Celeste Friend to the Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank; Commissioner of Deeds for Dennis Bova;

Ordinances I Voted to Place in Committee:
May 5th: Ordinance for No Parking At All Times for a portion of Eagle Street; Ordinance to Discontinue a Portion of Ash Street;

Ordinances I Voted For:
May 5th: Ordinance for No Parking At All Times, for a portion of Ludlow Avenue; Ordinance for "Car-Free Sundays in Roscoe Conkling Park" (it failed, with Moody, McNeil, and myself voting for it. Burmaster, Meola, Betrus, Williamson, LoMedico, and DiBrango all voted against it.)
May 19th: Ordinance Amending Fees and Charges for Use of City Bandshell; Ordinance Prohibiting Use of ATVs and Other Off-Road Vehicles; Bond Ordinance Authorizing the Issuance of \$11,570,000 Serial Bonds to Finance Various Capital Projects (I voted for this despite my firm belief that we should not borrow money to buy gas-powered vehicles. It is time for the city to invest in Electric Vehicles. See my previous Newsletter as to why. I voted for this despite these reservations because I was assured by the Mayor that he is committed to beginning the process of converting our fleet to Electric Vehicles in a timely manner. But given my conversation with the Mayor, I will not vote for another Bond Ordinance to buy vehicles if at least some of those vehicles are not electric.)

