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SOUTH UTICA - THIRD WARD



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South Utica Newsletter #26.1 from Councilperson Celeste Friend

Did anyone notice that there was a Newsletter #24, and then a Newsletter #26? I accidentally skipped #25! I know how I made the mistake, but it's not an even slightly interesting story... In any case, here is Newsletter #26.1, the 26th one in this series..... Next month I'll send out #27, and then my numbering system will be restored!

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School Board Elections - May 17th

This year's School Board elections are on May 17th. I will be sending a series of Newsletters all about the School Board over the next couple of weeks: one on how the School Board itself works, a Candidates' Forum with contributions from all of this year's candidates, and one urgent but simple reminder to vote on May 17th. The School Board is an extremely important form of local government that oversees our entire school system, and so is responsible, day in, day out for the

quality of our children's lives and therefore for the future success of our City. So be sure to tune in to these Newsletters, and make a plan to vote on May 17th.

Upcoming School Board Candidate Forums:

North Utica: Monday, April 25th, 6:30-8:30, North Utica Community Center, 50 Riverside Drive

South Utica: Wednesday, April 27th, 6-8pm, Ski Chalet at Parkway Rec Center, 220 Memorial Parkway

If more forums are announced, I will be sure to let you know.



Photo: an image of a meeting of a Utica City School District Board meeting.

ARPA Comes to South Utica

Recently, the Mayor announced that of the \$64 million that the Federal Government has sent Utica as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (thank you President Biden!), he is allocating \$200,000 to each Council district. I have assembled a small committee to begin to plan on how best to spend this. I have some general principles that I want to use as we think about how best to spend this one-time allocation. For example, I want it to be good for all of us throughout South Utica. I also think that we should not use it to create something that will take a lot to maintain, so that we don't create a burden to future residents and tax payers.

I will be planning on at least one big community wide meeting to solicit input from as many people across South Utica as possible. That will have to wait a few weeks, until I am done teaching at SUNY for the year. But keep an eye out for that meeting.



Photo: an image of a beautiful green tree.

Keep America & Utica Beautiful - This Saturday, April 23rd

We've got a nice long list of folks who are looking forward to contributing to the beauty of South Utica by participating in a clean up on Saturday morning. But we are still happy to have more folks join us. To do so, just:

Drop me a line, just by replying to this email, to let me know that you want to join us. I'll email you back with the details you need.

Make suggestions for where we need to clean up. Again, just drop me a line.



This photo shows a big, happy team who cleaned up all across South Utica in 2021.



This photo shows that we dragged lots and lots of old trash out of the woods at the end of Lyon Place in 2021.

Take Advantage of the City's Sidewalk Program

As I've said elsewhere, sidewalks are an essential City infrastructure. They provide a basic safe form of transportation that is healthy, good for communities, and sustainable.

The City of Utica recognizes this. We have a Sidewalk Rebate Program to help you with the cost of replacing your sidewalk. Here's how it works:

Due to a change in the rate of reimbursement that I advocated for, home

owners are now eligible for a rebate of \$8 per square foot of mainline sidewalk (this means the sidewalk that runs parallel to the street - not driveway aprons or walkways that run from the sidewalk to a house or to the street).

In order to apply for the City's sidewalk program, homeowners need to:

- 1) fill out a sidewalk permit application from the City Engineering Department, located on the second floor of City Hall
- 2) hire a contractor
- 3) property owner OR contractor then obtains the actual permit
- 4) contractor schedules a pre-pour inspection with the Engineering Department
- 5) once the sidewalk is done, the home owner or contractor returns final paperwork with a copy of the paid bill, or bill for all materials if the homeowner does the work themselves
- 6) the Engineering Department inspects the sidewalk to make sure that it meets all specifications
- 7) the paperwork is processed and reimbursement is processed

It's pretty straightforward - get the work done in the right way, fill out some simple paperwork, get reimbursed. Then you can sit on your porch, and watch the people go buy on your beautiful, new smooth contribution to the community. Questions? Just call Andrew Karas at 315-792-0152. (He's a nice man, and is happy to help you with the process.)



Photo: an image of a young family taking advantage of a city sidewalk by biking and walking together.

Always Pay Your Solid Waste Fee

Your property taxes (City, County, and School) can be paid via Escrow, in other words, by your bank and so included in with your monthly mortgage fee. But by law, because your annual Solid Waste Fee is not a tax, but a fee paid to the OHSWA, it cannot be escrowed. So keep an eye out for that bill (it comes out in March) and be sure to pay it directly. Otherwise it will become a City-owned lien against your property and will accumulate penalties and interest. If that goes long enough, you might even get a foreclosure notice from the City. So be aware of this annual bill and be sure to pay it yourself.

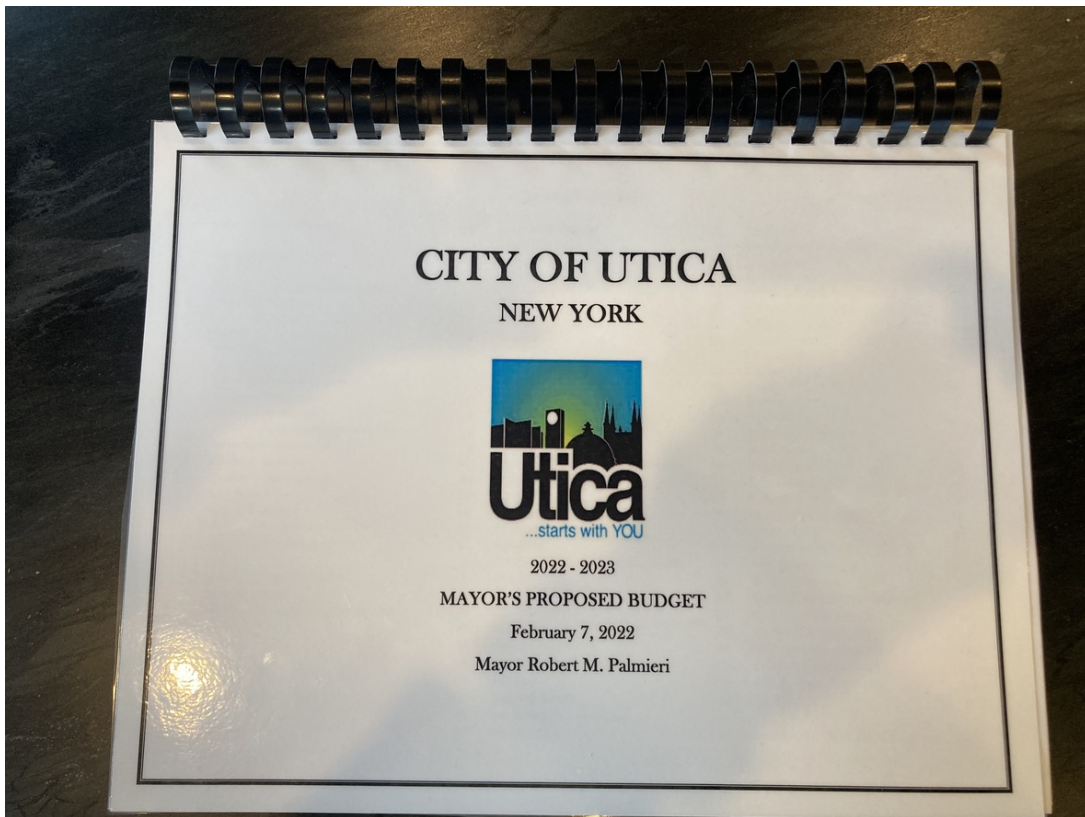


Photo: an image of the bound City Budget for 2022-2023

Watch Common Council Meetings Online

I've always encouraged everyone to attend Common Council meetings. Come and participate in our democratic process, even if only by witnessing the Council as we conduct the City's business. But if you can't come in person, you can always watch the livestream available on YouTube. So, young or old, on a computer or on your phone, even while eating pizza, feel free to tune in.

Regular meetings are held on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Our pre-meeting conference is at 6pm, and the Council meeting is at 7pm.



Photo: an image of a young child watching a Common Council meeting on a phone while eating pizza.

[**Watch Common Council Live on YouTube**](#)

My Votes on the Council in April 2022

Here are all my votes in April. I am going to organize them a little differently from here on. I hope that this will make them easier to follow and understand, and slightly more concise. All votes described below were unanimous unless otherwise noted. But, of course, if there is more you'd like to understand, please let me know.

Firing Range Regulation My legislation for the regulation of Firing Ranges in the City of Utica passed on April 6, 2022. I made four minor amendments to it, at the suggestion of both Corporation Counsel and the Chief of Police. These amendments simplified the enforcement of this new law, which was supported by both Corporation and Chief Williams. Both my amendments and the law itself passed on a strict party-line vote. Each Republican, Councilmembers Colosimo-Testa, Betrus, and Williamson voted against each of the amendments and against the law. All the Democrats, Councilmembers Aiello, Burmaster, Meola, Ervin, DiBrango, and myself, together voted for each of the amendments and then voted for the law.

NOTE: There has been some discussion, in various places, about whether this legislation is redundant with various state or federal laws that regulate firing ranges. I extensively and carefully researched this issue. I found absolutely no legislation on either state or federal levels that regulated, in any way, such firing ranges. The closest we could come was to a "Best Practices" document by the EPA. So, this regulation is in fact not redundant to any other law as far as we can tell.

Bond Ordinance: Every year, once the Budget is passed, the Council turns its attentions to the Mayor's proposed capital plan. This means considering legislation to authorize bonds to fund particular long term and short term projects. The Mayor proposed borrowing \$5,515,000 in order to finance all sorts of capital projects, from repairing UFD Stations and parking garages, to buying new plow trucks for the DPW. The Council voted for this Ordinance unanimously, but I qualified my vote. (Qualifying a vote gives each member of the Council the opportunity to express their point of view about a particular piece of legislation prior to voting on it.) Although I agreed with the overall capital project plan, I do object to the fact that the Mayor is not willing to begin substituting electric vehicles for traditional internal combustion vehicles, at least not through his capital plan. We are borrowing money to buy vehicles that are quickly becoming obsolete and that are considerably more expensive to fuel

and to maintain. I believe we ought to get ahead of the curve on the inevitable requirement to electrify our fleet. The Mayor has promised to buy at least two new EVs for City employees this year, but not as part of his capital plan. I am glad that he is willing to do so, but I will continue to push for phasing out our purchases of internal combustion engines whenever we can. (Passing this Bond Ordinance also meant that we had to discharge the earlier one, which was substantially different from the one we did pass.)

Sidewalk Reimbursement Rate. The Council voted unanimously to increase the rate of reimbursement for sidewalks from \$4 a square foot to \$8 a square foot. I was the Sponsor of this legislation, but it went "Full Council" meaning that we all believed in it, so we all sponsored it together. I count this as a big win for all of us, and I really hope that more people will take advantage of this program and repair or replace their sidewalks when necessary.

Convenience Store & Smoke Shop Moratorium Many neighborhoods in the City are negatively affected by various kinds of small "convenience" stores. Figuring out how to regulate them that is both legal and yet protects neighborhoods is tricky. With this Ordinance, we have decided to extend a previous moratorium on these types of stores, for six months, beginning on April 6, 2022. While this moratorium is in effect, we will work together to see how we can better regulate these retail stores. (We first passed this Ordinance to extend the moratorium on April 4th, 2022. We passed a slightly amended version on April 20th, 2022.)

Oneida Herkimer Solid Waste Authority. The Council agreed to extend our agreement with the OHSWA for an additional ten years, so up through March 31, 2033. This Resolution authorizes the Mayor to sign the Extension Agreement with the OHSWA.

Resolution Appointing the Following Members to the Flood Mitigation Task Force

A few meetings back we passed legislation forming a city wide flooding task force. This legislation appointed three residents to this task force:

Paul Romano, 101 First Street, Utica NY 13501

Sarah K. Brower, 134 Kensington Drive, Utica NY 13501

Ron Vincent, 477 Roseclair Ave, Utica NY 13502

Resolution to Honor the Life and Legacy of Patricia Jean Zajac From time to time, the Council uses this sort of legislation to appropriately recognize members of our community. Mrs. Zajac contributed to West Utica for decades, and made Utica a better place for all of us.

Commissioners of Deeds: The Common Council can Resolve that eligible voters who reside in Utica be allowed to become Commissioners of Deeds. This allows those people to collect ballot petition signatures from anyone in the City, regardless of party affiliation. After the Council passes them, these Resolutions are then sent to the County to be finalized. We Resolved that the following people be appointed as Commissioners of Deeds:

Edita Rosic

Marriage Officers Who wants to get married? Anyone? The Council can Resolve that anyone who resides in the City be made into a marriage officer. (All members of the Council are made Marriage Officers at the beginning of their terms.)

Denise Gregory, 651 James Street

URA Properties Sold: All properties sold by the URA must be approved by the Council. They are approved of in three separate stages: first, we pass a Resolution Calling for a Public Hearing. Second, we we place into Committee the legislation to authorize the sale. And finally, once that Public Hearing has been held, we vote on the Ordinance selling the property. I will only list the legislation authorizing the final sale. So, here are the sales we Ordained in April:

804& 806 John Street to Raul Santos for \$500

513 Bacon Street to Duchane Boyd for \$27,000

956 Saratoga Street to Carmen Trinidad for \$1 (this sales consolidates this property with 956 Saratoga Street, which Ms. Trinidad previously bought from the URA)

Ordinance Authorizing Increase in Solid Waste Charges As of **April 1, 2023**, charges for solid waste will go up:

Large blue bags, from \$1.85 each to \$1.95 each and Small blue bags, from \$1.25 each to \$1.35 each

Solid Waste Service Charge:

Class I Properties: from \$86 a year to \$100 a year

Class II Properties: from \$172 a year to \$200 a year

Class III Properties: from \$258 a year to \$300 a year

These charges are very reasonable, and we have to expect them to go up from time to time, to keep costs with rising costs of providing this invaluable service. We get a lot of value from our solid waste fees, given just how much we are able to put out for curbside pickup week in and week out.

Authorizing Sale of Wine and Beer Nothing says "Summer" in Utica like the Council giving permission to street festivals, fairs, and the like to sell beer and wine outside. So you can expect to see these Resolutions for the next few

months. Here are April's:

American Legion Post, Saturday, August 6th, 4-10pm

Utica Center for Development, Monday, July 4th, 2022, 7-10pm

FX Matt Brewing Company, Saturday, May 21st, 2022, 8-11pm

FX Matt Brewing Company, Thursdays: May 26th, June 2nd, June 9th, June 16th, June 23rd, June 30th, July 7th, 2022, 5:30-8pm

FX Matt Brewing Company, Sunday, July 10th, 7am - 12pm

Street Signs The Council must Ordain all street signs in order for them to be legally enforceable. So from time to time, we amend them as circumstances dictate.

No Parking All Times: Rosemont Place, north side between Mohawk & Clementian Street

Intersection Where Stop Required: Beckwith Place, Southwest Corner of Beckwith and James Place

Transfers of Funds: According to Local Law, anytime that \$15,000 or more is transferred from one budget line to another by E&A, such a transfer must be approved by the Common Council.

There were no transfers of funds approved by the Council in April.

Legislation in Committee: The following pieces of legislation have been placed in committee: (to see any legislation that is in Committee, just follow the link you see below.)

Ordinance Establishing a Vacant Building Registry We have kept this legislation in Committee while we have been busy with Budget legislation.

A Local Law Entitled "Registration and Posting of Owner and Manager Information and Designation of Agent"

Ordinance Amending Composition of the Bureau of Fire

Resolution Requesting Each District Councilperson Allocate Funding to Establish A Business Directory App to Help Support and Revitalize the Business of Utica

This is a Resolution by Councilmember Colosimo-Testa for Councilmembers to pool some of our ARPA funding.

Why Shopping Locally Matters

I have long argued that as much as we can, we should all "Buy Local". When we spend our dollars in our own communities, we support those communities. As a sign I once saw read, "Keep Your Business in Your Community, Keep Your

Community in Business". My go-to example of this is that when we buy our coffee at Cafe Domenico, any profits go no farther than Grant Street, where the Domenico family lives. But when you buy your coffee at a Dunkin Donuts, the profits go to Massachusetts, where that company is headquartered. So I have long advocated for supporting the small, independent businesses that are the heart of our local economy.

But here is another reason for keeping your business right here in Utica: when you shop here in Utica, the sales taxes you pay go to Utica, to help support the services and government that you rely on. And now, due to a 2018 Supreme Court decision, online purchases are subject to the same sales taxes as traditional purchases. So even shopping online, rather than driving to another municipality, contributes to our sales tax revenues. When you pay sales taxes in Utica, you are contributing to one of our major revenue streams. (In the 2022-2023 Budget for the City of Utica, sales taxes are estimated to bring in approximately 15.9 million dollars.) So please keep that in mind when you decide where and how to shop, and help Utica's bottom line by keeping it local when you can.



Photo: an image with a city commercial block in the background and the words "Shop. Eat. Spend. Enjoy. LOCAL"

Report from E&A - March - April 2022

The Board of Estimate and Apportionment is a five person Board, on which I

serve, that oversees the day-to-day budget operations of the City. All transfers of monies from one area of the budget to another must be approved by E&A, as well as all expenditures of supplemental monies that come into the City.

Transfers:

In March & April , E&A passed the following Resolutions, authorizing transfers:

\$800 from "Mayor Computer Supplies" to "Mayor Contractual"

\$42 from "Common Council Subscriptions" to "Common Council Overtime"

\$1,000 from "City Hall Maintenance Other Supplies" to "City Hall Maintenance - Contractual"

\$134 from "City Clerk Printing" to "City Clerk Overtime Pay"

\$8,000 from "Fire Training Travel & Education" to "Fire Communication - Telephone"

\$2,100 from "Building Codes" (4 lines) to "Codes" (3 lines)

\$7,451 from "Youth" (several lines) to "Youth" (2 lines)

\$2,300 from "Bertolini Clubhouse - Repairs" to "Bertolini Clubhouse - Water"

\$618 from "Infrastructure - Social Security" to "Infrastructure - Overtime, Gas & Oil"

\$822 from "Off-Street Parking - Water" to "Parking Administration"

\$4,300 from "DPW Central Garage - Auto Materials" to "DPW Central Garage - Gas & Oil"

\$215 from "DPW Administration - Travel" to "DPW Administration - Contractual"

\$660 from "Law - Travel" to "Civil Service - Service Fees"

\$2,808 from "IT Education & Training" to "IT Computer Equipment"

\$1,499 from "Fire Line - Misc" to "Fire Line - Custodial Supplies"

\$13,000 from "Assessor Salaries" to "Fire Mechanic - Gas & Oil"

\$21,737 from "Off Street Parking" & "Ski Chalet Wages" to 5 separate lines in "Parks Maintenance"

\$600 from "Parkway Rec Center - Custodial Supplies" to "Parkway Rec Center - Contractual"

\$3,242 from "Codes - Salaries" to "Codes Computer Equipment"

\$385 from "Street Cleaning - Misc" to "Street Cleaning - Clothing Expense"

\$1,503 from "Assessment - Contractual" to "Comptroller - Printing"

NOTE on Transfers: So far this year, we have had to make 8 transfers to account for increases in energy costs (gas, oil, & electric). While those prices may come down a little, there is no good reason to expect them to come down to pre-pandemic levels. This is especially true of gasoline. Gas is derived from petroleum, and petroleum is an increasingly rare commodity. This is one of the reasons that I believe we must move as quickly as we can to electrify our fleet.

Table of Organization:

We added 5 police officers to the 2022-2023 Budget. We also adjusted the pay

for the Secretary to the Police Chief from \$42,097 to \$49,013. We also added one temporary laborer at \$30 an hour to the Department of Engineering.

Supplemental Appropriations:

Also, in March, the Board of E&A authorized the Comptroller to make a large number of Supplemental Appropriations:

\$25,656 to two separate Police budget lines to account for insurance proceeds for the total loss of a police vehicle

\$161,526 from Police drug seizure and federal asset sharing - to be used for police building reconstruction

Legal Settlements:

E&A is authorized to settle lawsuits against the City. In March, we authorized a settlement of \$215,000 in a lawsuit against the City. Given the facts of the lawsuit, which were discussed in Executive Session, it was clear to me that this was a reasonable amount to settle for.

South Utica Advisory Committee

The South Utica Advisory Committee, or SUAC, continues to meet on the first Thursday of every 2nd month. (So, in 2022, this means January 6, March 3, May 5, July 7, September 1, and November 3.) It is always an interesting meeting, with plenty to talk about, and I get a lot from the advice of the committee. Force of circumstance led us to meet at my home at 37 Emerson Ave in March, and we've decided to simply carry on meeting here. Anyone is welcome to join us at any meeting. Email the Committee Chair, Scott Murray at smm0996@gmail.com if you are interested in joining the Committee.



Photo: an image of the SUAC group sitting in Celeste Friend's living room.

Regular SUNA Meetings

The South Utica Neighborhood Association continues to meet on the second Monday of every month at 6pm in the Ski Chalet at the Parkway Recreation Center. You can sign up for their regular newsletter just by following the link below. The April meeting included hearing from the Commissioner of Codes, Marques Phillips, who explained the legality of enforcing Codes, and answered questions. I am there every month by 5:30 to listen to constituents and learn about issues of concern to them.



Photo: an image of a SUNA meeting at the Ski Chalet at the Parkway Rec Center

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