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South Utica Newsletter #32 from Councilperson Celeste Friend

Snow is on the ground and so far it is sticking around. Let's hope for a White Christmas!

As always, please forward this email to anyone you know who might enjoy it. They can easily sign up just by clicking the link below.

[Sign Up for This Newsletter](#)

The very, very latest update on Stewart's Shop on Genesee St

On Monday, November 28th, the Scenic & Historic Preservation District Commission met to review the Stewart's Shops proposal to build a gas station and store on the site of the old Raspberries restaurant, at 2634 Genesee St. Their plan involved demolishing the house at 2632 Genesee St. in order to

combine the two parcels and build their store on a corner. The Commission is authorized to give or deny permission to demolish any building in the District. They had a brief discussion, then I was allowed two minutes to speak, as the Councilmember representing the district. Then they voted 3-2 AGAINST giving a permit to demolish that building. This is important. Nonetheless, because they are a Commission, the Planning Board has the final authority to either approve or disapprove the proposal from Stewart's. The Planning Board can override the Commission's denial of a permit to demolish 2632 Genesee St. So the case is not over yet.

Next, Stewart's will be going to a Zoning Board of Appeals meeting on **Tuesday, December 20th at 5pm, held in Council Chambers at City Hall**. They are going before the Board to request three separate area variances. First they are requesting a variance for the width of one lot. The zone, Neighborhood Mixed Use, allows a maximum of 100 feet width for lots, and Stewart's is asking for a variance to allow a width of 180 feet. Second, they are asking for a considerably larger setback. Our Zoning Ordinance says that setbacks should be the average of the street, but they are asking for a setback that is much farther back than the average. And third, they are requesting a variance for the width of their storefront. Whereas our Code allows buildings in Neighborhood Mixed Use Zones to be up to 60 feet wide, they are asking to build a storefront that would be 75 feet wide. So, in three distinct ways, Stewart's wants to build a gas station and store that will require three variances. So it will be up to the Zoning Board of Appeals to decide whether they should be allowed to do that. Importantly, the Planning Board CANNOT override the Zoning Board of Appeals. I will be there on Tuesday, and plan to speak. I encourage others to do so as well, whether you are for or against the Stewart's proposal.

Note: all meetings of the Zoning Board of Appeals are public hearings. This means that they will be calling on the public to speak for or against any of the variances before them. Anyone can come and speak at this meeting.

Next, depending on the outcome of the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting, Stewart's will be back before the Planning Board in January.



A White Winter Means Snow Removal

I've heard it said: "If you choose not to find joy in the snow, you will have less joy in your life, but the same amount of snow." Some of us love the snow, some of us hate it, and some of us even fly to other parts of the country to avoid it. But in any case, there will be snow. Please be mindful of the fact that sidewalks need to be available and accessible to everyone year round. (For some of our neighbors, sidewalks are their main form of transportation.) Please clear your sidewalk within 24 hours of a snow fall. And if (when?) we get a big storm, do your best to stay off the roads altogether, so that our DPW crew can fully clear the roads as quickly as possible. And in the case of a snow emergency, absolutely keep your car anywhere but on the street.

Last year, Codes was out in force in South Utica issuing citations for property owners who did not clear their sidewalks promptly enough. They will be out there again as soon as there is enough snow to warrant it.

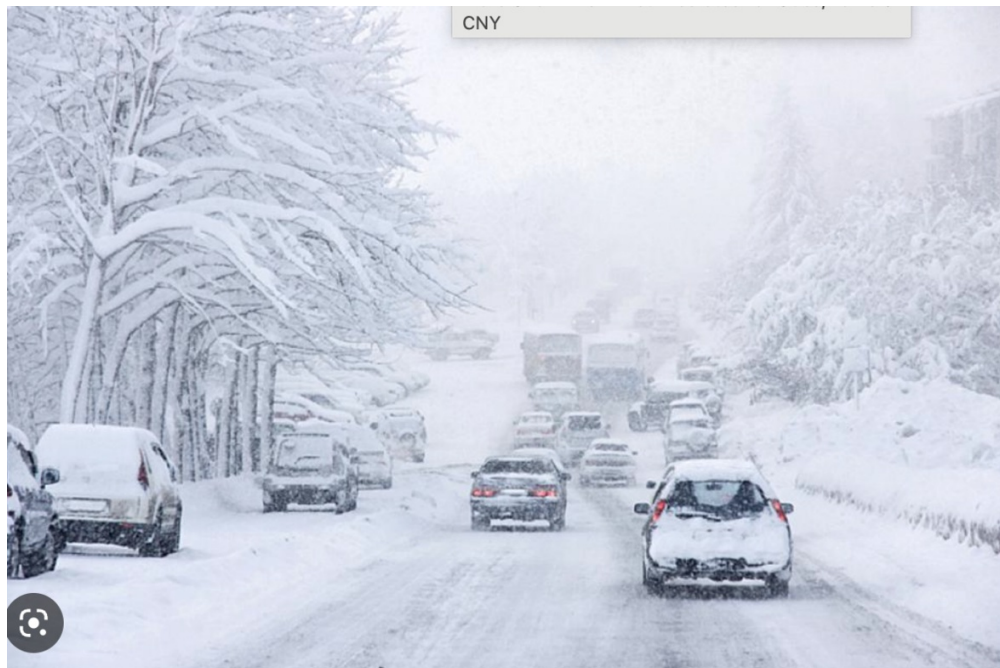


Photo: snow covered trees, roadway, and cars

Toy Drive for Event this Sunday, December 18th, 12-5pm

It's not too late to drop off a new, unwrapped toy to my porch for this weekend's upcoming toy drive. There is a yellow lidded box on my porch - if you drop your toy in there, I will happily, merrily, cheerfully, deliver it to the organizers of this event! I am at 37 Emerson Ave in South Utica.

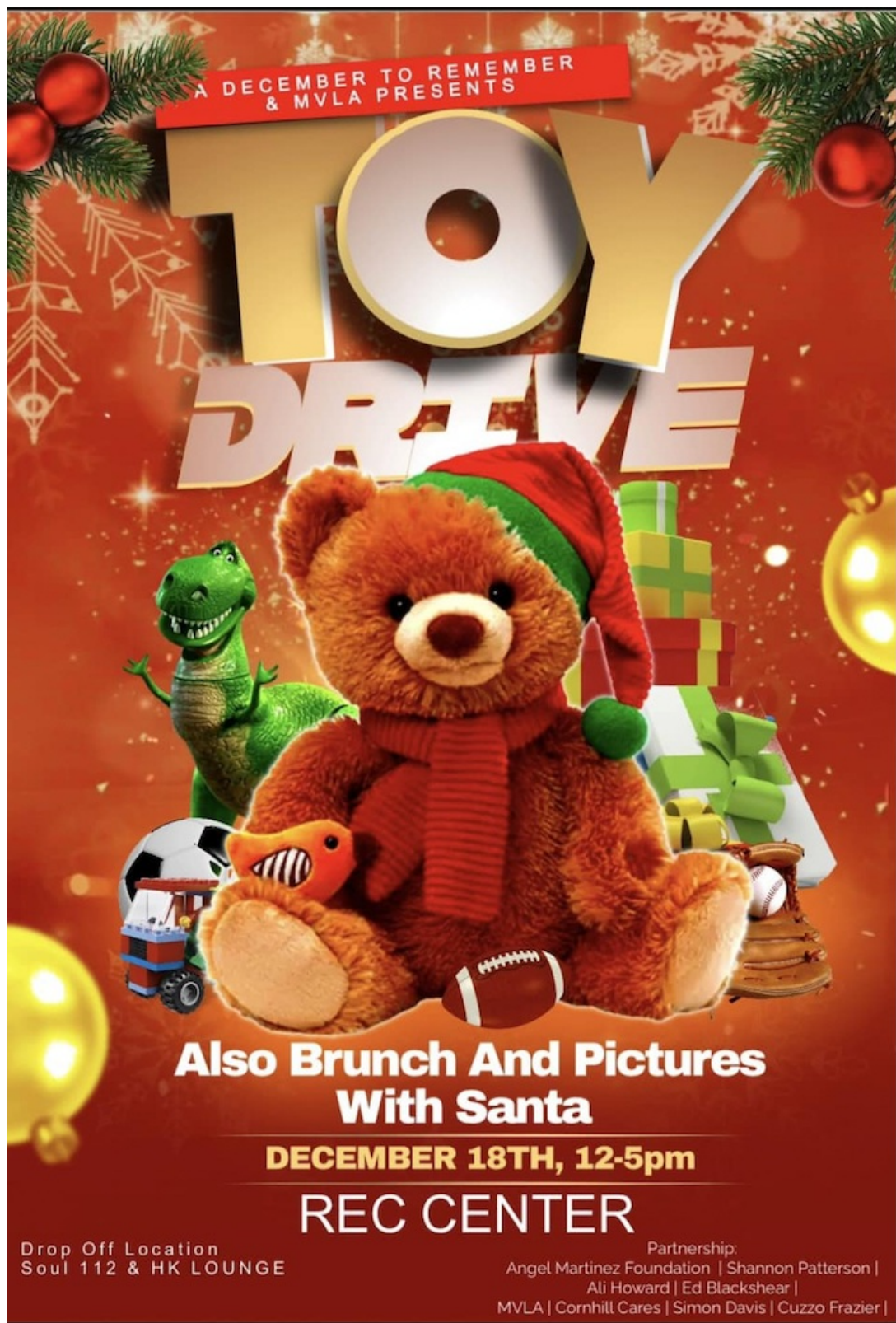


Photo: a flyer of a Toy Drive and event at the Parkway Rec Center, Sunday, December 18th - featuring a jolly Teddy Bear!

Tech Support at the Parkway Rec Center

In addition to all the other services at 50 Forward Mohawk Valley offers, here is another: tech support! So if you need help with your mobile phone, or laptop, setting up your email or accessing the internet, you can simply drop in to the Parkway Center every Friday from 9am til 11am. There will be someone from the Utica Public Library there to help you.

Of course, there are all other great service and programs available there as well. Just check out their website below to see what they have to offer.



50 Forward Mohawk Valley at the Parkway Rec Center

Support Utica Businesses and Make Us All Proud

The City's Department of Urban & Economic Development recently released a brand new APP that helps you support local businesses AND get rewards while you do so. The APP is called "Utica Proud" and is easy to find and free to download. Just download it to your phone or mobile device. Once it is downloaded, it is easy to set up. This will mean linking it to a credit card or bank account, just as you would with lots of other APPs (such as Venmo, CashApp). Once you set it up, you can start using it at any of many local Utica participating businesses. You will receive rewards as you go ("Half Moons"!) which you can cash in for discounts. So our local businesses get more of our dollars, and you get rewards for shopping through the APP.



Complete Streets - Genesee from Cottage Place to Oriskany Blvd

Complete Streets is an important idea whose time has finally come for Utica. The basic idea of Complete Streets is that streets should accommodate all forms of transportation that humans use to move around: bikes, walking, public transportation, and cars. ([Read all about Complete Streets here.](#)) So, rather than making streets just for cars and forcing other forms of transportation to compete with those cars, Complete Streets makes room for everyone. Complete Streets are safer and more equitable. People in Utica have been advocating for Complete Streets for at least a decade. And in 2016, the Common Council passed a Complete Street policy, which was at the time championed by Samantha Colosimo-Testa. A couple of years ago, the Mayor did a very small trial run of a Complete Streets redesign south of Oneida Square. They put Genesee on a "diet", meaning narrowing the traffic to a single lane in each direction, and added bike lanes and turning lanes. The City ran a survey, and the results were overwhelmingly positive. But the Council at the time shot it down. So that trial run, which the public approved of, didn't go anywhere

Now it is time to try again. On October 19th, Katie Aiello introduced a Resolution

to authorize the Mayor to conduct a trial run of Complete Streets on the section of Genesee from Cottage Place to Oriskany Blvd. Frank Meola and I joined her as co-sponsors. (The section of Genesee from Oneida Square to Cottage Place is already almost a Complete Street. It became so when we changed Oneida Square into Oneida Circle.) The time is now because this section of Genesee has just been repaved and needs to be striped anyway. (The only physical change involved in this instance is to place the stripes in different places than they were before.) The Council as a whole disagreed. Some members really believed that our Resolution should go to Committee. But others (including me) argued that after years and years of debating the merits of Complete Streets, the time had come to give it a try. Councilmembers DiBrango, Betrus, Williams, and Colosimo-Testa made a motion to place the Resolution in Committee. We voted on that motion and it failed. We then moved for a vote on the Resolution itself, and it passed, 5 to 4. Again, DiBrango, Betrus, Williams, and Colosimo-Testa voted against allowing the City to move forward with Complete Streets, even as a temporary trial run.

The trial run will last for at least 90 days. So you can expect to hear more from me about this soon. To learn much more about this now, just head over to Katie's website, where she has it all mapped out. (You get it? "Mapped out"!)

You can also take the official City survey. I've provided a link to that below.

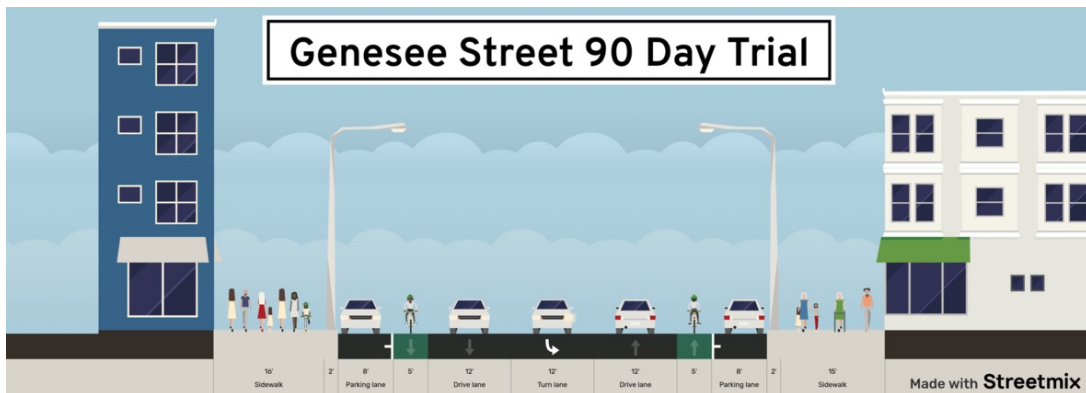


Photo: an illustration of Complete Streets on Genesee, with cars, bikes, pedestrians. Katie Aiello made this graphic for us!

[**Katie Aiello's Website for Complete Streets**](#)

[**Take Utica's Survey on Complete Streets**](#)

My Votes on the Council in November 2022

Here are all my votes in November. 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.

Ordinance Accepting Property in Harbor Point:

The Council voted to accept from the Harbor Point Development Corporation property that the City will use to create a public street.

Ordinances for Various Streets:

Stop Required:

Winner Ave & Erie St., Northeast corner

Winner Ave & Whitesboro St., Southwest corner

South St. at Tilden Ave, Southwest corner

South St. at Tilden Ave, Northeast corner

Tilden Ave at South St, Northwest corner

Resolution Recognizing the Staff at Watson Williams Elementary School:

This Resolution was introduced by Councilmember Samantha Colosimo-Testa, and written by her 5th grade class. The Resolution was sponsored by the full Council.

Ordinance to Amend Section 2-29-346 of the Code of Ordinances:

This Ordinance shall prohibit convenience stores from opening within 2,000 linear feet of another pre-existing convenience store

Proclamation for Patrick Johnson:

Patrick Johnson was an invaluable member of the community, who worked hard his whole life to combat injustice and bring the community together. This Proclamation was sponsored by the full Council.

URA Properties sold:

after holding Public Hearings, we passed the necessary legislation to sell the following properties:

1122 Miller St to Impact Cornhill LLC for \$0

313 James St to Impact Cornhill LLC for \$0

Resolution to Fill Vacancy on Greater Mohawk Valley Land Bank:

I was reappointed to a 2 year term on the GMVLB, for which I now serve as

Treasurer, and therefore on the Executive Committee

Authorizing Sale of Wine and Beer:

Bank of Utica on 12/31/2022, 222 Genesee St

Resolutions for Commissioners of Deeds:

Joe Betrus, 524 Reels Drive, Utica NY

Frank Meola, 33 Nob Rd, Utica NY

Venice Ervin, 22 Johnson Park, Utica NY

Robert Burmaster, 1426 City St, Utica NY

Frank DiBrango, 1008 Beckwith Place, Utica, NY

Andrew Castilla, 1410 Floral Court, Utica NY

Martha Anne Markovics, 7429 East Main St, Westmoreland

Resolution Referring "Paper Street" to City Engineer for Review:

This Resolution calls on the City Engineer to study an empty lot that on paper is part of Deerfield Drive West. This would allow this lot to then be sold at auction, and become taxable property in the City.

Temporary Moratorium on Convenience Stores and Smoke Shops:

We placed yet another temporary moratorium on Smoke Shops, Convenience Stores, and Neighborhood Retail Stores. This moratorium will be in effect for 90 days, starting on November 16, 2022.

Utica Fire Academy Graduation

I've always been a sucker for graduations. I love that we create ceremonies to mark our having completed something difficult, and I love how our families and friends come to cheer us on at these important milestones. So I was very happy to be at the Utica Fire Academy Graduation today, December 15th. The Academy is run by our own certified instructors and serves municipalities throughout New York State. Today, Chiefs and new Firefighters came to Utica from Amsterdam, Cedarville, Corinth, Deerfield, Frankfort, Ilion, Norwich, Saratoga Springs, Sauquoit, Schenectady, Troy, Watertown, and of course, Utica. Twenty-three men and women went through the arduous Academy this Fall. Congratulations to all of them, and hats off to our own Chief, Captains, Lieutenants, and Firefighters, who trained them all.



Photo: today's new Firefighters - 23 men and women ready to serve

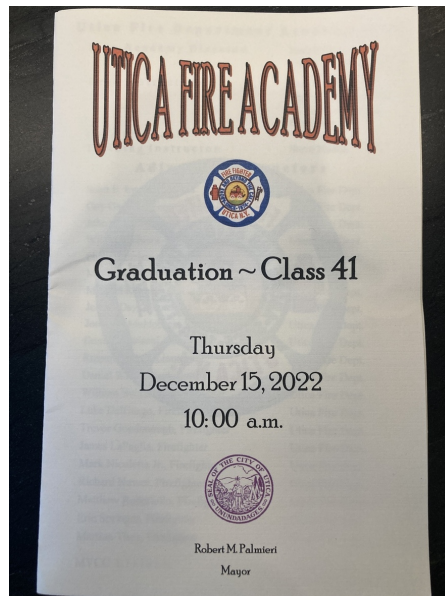


Photo - the front cover for the program for the 41st Utica Fire Academy Graduation



Photo: ceremonial flags and axes being carried to the stage

Help Me To Beautify Utica!

There are so many little pockets of beautiful gardens around Utica that are always in need of some attention. And I just can't drive by them without wanting to stop and pull weeds, clean things up, and so on. But I can't do it alone! I cleaned up the garden in the middle of Oneida Circle recently, once with just a couple of friends, and then with a group of volunteers from Hamilton College.

The Central New York Conservancy does a great job of tending to the Parkway and its various gardens in front of statues. And Olmsted City has its own brigade of Volunteers who have been helping them to restore F. T. Proctor Park. But there are other little gardens that need our help too. And then there are the large planters that the City placed downtown this past Summer. I would like to have a list of people I can call on to help me now and again to clean up small gardens around the City. Want to join in? Just write a quick reply to this email, I'll add your name to my list, and then you will hear from me when I'm ready to spend a few hours cleaning something up. Signing up doesn't mean committing to anything. It just means that on occasion I will send you an email because I am looking for a few people to join me in making some little corner of Utica even more beautiful than it already is.



Photo: a group of Hamilton College students clean up the garden at Oneida Circle

Report from E&A - November - December 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, as well as any and all changes to the Table of Organization, which lists all employees of the City. E&A is also authorized to settle lawsuits brought against the City.

Listing every transfer we make is turning out to be very time consuming. So from here on out, I will give a general summary of the work of E&A, and also provide a link where all of the minutes of E&A can be found.

E&A has met six times since my last Newsletter: November 10th, 14th, 21st, December 1st, 5th, and 12th. The Board has run the full gamut of its various responsibilities. We've made budgetary transfers, amended the Table of Organization, allocated supplemental appropriations, approved of agreements between the City and CSEA, and authorized Corporation Counsel to make offers to settle lawsuits.

Full minutes of the Board of Estimate & Apportionment can be found at the link below.

[Minutes for Board of Estimate & Apportionment](#)

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.

[Watch Common Council Live on YouTube](#)

Go to SUNA and Stay Informed

The South Utica Neighborhood Association meets every month at the Parkway Rec Center. Sign up for their Newsletter so you can stay informed of what's going on in South Utica.



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

[Sign up for the SUNA Newsletter](#)

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