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Councilperson Celeste Friend



South Utica - Third Ward

cfriend@cityofutica.com

315-725-5987

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South Utica Newsletter #37 from Councilperson Celeste Friend

Spring has finally come and I can't decide which I like more: the warmer weather, or the longer days! (I like to tell myself that they really are longer, because I never have trouble filling my days with lots of things to do...) I hope you find all these newsletters helpful and informative. Please send it along to others who might like it and ask them to sign up.

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Tree City USA

We are on our way to becoming a Tree City USA! This is a designation awarded by the Arbor Day Foundation to communities that demonstrate their commitment to planting and caring for trees in their cities, towns, and villages. Utica already met some of the criteria: we spend enough money on planting and caring for trees, for instance. And we celebrate Arbor Day, which is another

requirement. But we did not have a Tree Ordinance, meaning a City law that regulates how we treat our own trees on City property, including the streets trees in our right-of-way on City streets. And we did not have a Tree Board, made up of volunteers who oversee tree policy. And we did not designate anyone as our City Arborist. Without these, we were not eligible for Tree City USA status.

So, I have been working on a Tree Ordinance for several months. It is the first Ordinance to deal with trees in more than 30 years. It replaces outdated Ordinances passed decades ago to deal with Dutch Elm disease. I had the help of Dave Short our Commissioner of Public Works and of Parks (and now our designated City Arborist!). I also had meetings with the Mayor, Department heads, and Corporation Counsel. The Committee of the Whole of the Common Council met twice and made helpful suggestions that were built into the final draft. I pulled the Ordinance from Committee on April 19th, and it passed 5 to 3. Councilmembers Aiello, Burmaster, Meola, and Ervin joined me in voting for it. Councilmembers Betrus, Colosimo-Testa and DiBrango voted against it. Councilmember Mark Williamson was absent.

Trees provide shade and keep neighborhoods cool as a result of transpiration. They thereby reduce the "heat island effect" that cities tend to suffer from. Trees mitigate against the risk of flooding and store carbon, reducing the risk of climate change. Trees increase our property values and reduce both our heating and cooling costs. And of course trees are beautiful and have even been shown to have positive psychological effects on those who are surrounded by them.

We should commit ourselves as a City to rebuilding our urban canopy and improving our urban forest. Our new Tree Ordinance is a big step in that direction. But let's keep going, and dedicate ourselves to planting even more trees each and every year. Let's work to live up to the designation of Tree City USA!



Photo: a newly planted tree on the Parkway

School Board Candidate Forums

On May 16th, we all get to vote on two important things: for school board members and for the school budget. Polls will be open from 12-9 on that day only and voting locations will be all across the City.

[You can find out where you go to vote by clicking here.](#)

So far there have been two school Board Candidate Forums, one in East Utica and one in North Utica. But there are still at least three more to go. Here are the times and places for these:

South Utica Neighborhood Association: Monday, May 8th, 7pm, The Other Side, 2011 Genesee St.

Cornhill Neighborhood Association: Tuesday, May 9th, 6:30pm, Midtown Utica Community Center, 40 Faxon St. (

West Side Neighborhood Association: Wednesday, May 10th, 6pm, Irish Cultural Center, 623 Columbia St

I've always said, and I'll keep saying it: the success of our City depends on the success of our schools. Moreover, the schools are where our children spend the majority of their time for half the year, so how the schools operate is everyone's business. So I encourage you to come to at least one of these forums, evaluate the candidates, and be sure to vote on May 16th.

Stay tuned for another Newsletter prior to May 16th, in which I will discuss particular candidates.



Photo: a photo of happy school children on a bus on their way to school

Matéflex Sports Flooring of Utica

One of the real perks of my role in Utica is that I get to learn about local, independent businesses that I otherwise might have no idea existed. Learning about these businesses helps to deepen my appreciation and pride for all things Utica, so it is always a win. Recently, I got to visit Matéflex Sports Flooring, located at 901 Broad Street. (This is a big, old warehouse that is full of small businesses.) Matéflex makes flooring tiles that go over preexisting concrete surfaces, and are an efficient, affordable way to make new sports surfaces. So for example, the tiles can be put on top of a tennis court to easily convert it for Pickle Ball. They do installations all over the country. While I was there, they were constructing a floor for a fashion show sponsored by Gucci, and to be held in Los Angeles. The floor was being custom built in their warehouse on Broad St. It will be carefully disassembled and then reassembled in Los Angeles. Matéflex is a completely local business - they are owned and operated out of Utica, and the actual floor tiles are made in a small factory in Waterville. Shout out to Jack Liberty, who gave me a tour, and even sent me home with some cool samples!

As a City, we ought to do more to make sure that our local business, like Matéflex, and like A&P Master Images, have a fair share of our government business. As a municipality, we are bound by State law to accept the lowest qualified bids on our contracts. But there are legal ways to give an advantage to the very businesses that pay property taxes, sales taxes, and the like, in our City. We ought to pursue this.



Photo: a Matéflex installation at Rockefeller Center, NYC.



Photo: Matéflex helped Marcy convert tennis courts into pickle ball courts.

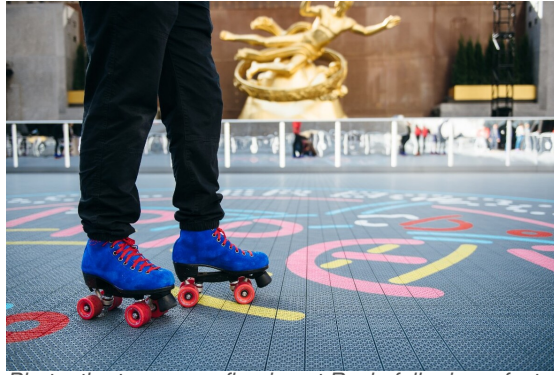


Photo: the temporary flooring at Rockefeller is perfect for roller skates

Green Waste 2023 Schedule

Spring has rolled around, and that means that our DPW will be picking up our green waste until the middle of November. Here are the important dates to keep track of:

Now until May 24th: Green waste can be placed *loose* at the curb (but NEVER in the street). So what we mean by that is place it loose at the edge of the City right-of-way. The DPW can remove it from there.

May 25th til October 3rd: ALL green waste MUST be placed in barrels.

October 4th til November 15: again green waste can be placed loose at the curb.

(These dates are for South Utica, but a very similar calendar applies to the rest of the City.)

Things to be aware of: this practice, of picking up green waste from April through November, is a service that the City provides with no additional fees, despite it being a very expensive service to provide. (Your regular trash and recycling is paid for through the solid waste fee and revenue from the blue bags. And it is a service provided by the Oneida Herkimer Solid Waste Authority, not our own DPW.) Also there is no way of really knowing when trees will finish dropping their leaves, or when the snow will start to fall. So in the Fall especially, this practice of allowing property owners to put green waste out loose can become a problem. We use the same equipment to pick up green waste as we do to plow the streets, and once the plows come on, we can't continue to pick up green waste. There have been years, when the DPW has been **forced to plow up large piles of leaves buried by snow**, which makes a big mess. Furthermore, placing green waste loose in the street, which people always do regardless of being reminded not to do so, **contributes to our flooding problems** - leaves and grass clippings, etc. get washed into the storm

drain system, clogs it up and then the storm water system backs up and our streets and homes flood. It can also create driving hazards, as piles become ever larger. The Mayor has indicated to me that this year the City will be cracking down on violations of the green waste Ordinance that contribute to flooding and make our streets a mess.

And one more thing: please do not pile up your green waste in public parks. There are small public parks throughout South Utica, such as on Douglas Crescent, Talcott Rd, and Crestway. This makes it difficult for people to use these lovely little parks. The City will be monitoring these parks and citing violators when appropriate.



CITY OF UTICA 2023 GREEN WASTE PICK-UP SCHEDULE

Place items loose at curb, **NOT** in the street.
(See reverse side for a list of allowable items.)

NORTH (Broad St. and NYC & HR Railroad north to city line)

Spring: STARTS April 10 – May 22 FINAL PICK-UP

Fall: STARTS Oct. 2 – Nov. 13 FINAL PICK-UP

UPPER EAST (Eagle St./Welshbush Rd. south to the city line and east of Genesee St./Memorial Parkway/Oneida St.)

Spring: STARTS April 11 – May 23 FINAL PICK-UP

Fall: STARTS Oct. 3 – Nov. 14 FINAL PICK-UP

SOUTH (Burrstone Rd. south to the city line and west of Oneida St.)

Spring: STARTS April 12 – May 24 FINAL PICK-UP

Fall: STARTS Oct. 4 – Nov. 15 FINAL PICK-UP

LOWER EAST (Broad St. to Eagle St. and east of Genesee St.)

Spring: STARTS April 13 – May 25 FINAL PICK-UP

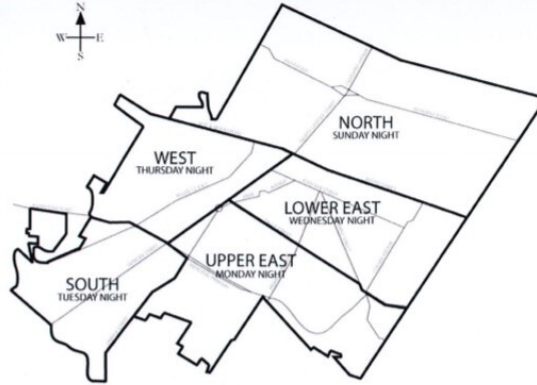
Fall: STARTS Oct. 5 – Nov. 16 FINAL PICK-UP

WEST (Oriskany St to Burrstone Rd. and west of Genesee St.)

Spring: STARTS April 14 – May 26 FINAL PICK-UP

Fall: STARTS Oct. 6 – Nov. 17 FINAL PICK-UP

Dates subject to change due to weather at the DPW Commissioner's discretion. Your FINAL PICK-UP is the last day to put out bulk green waste. Heavy volume of green waste in certain areas of the city may cause delays. Please be patient with crews.



CITY OF UTICA GREEN WASTE COLLECTION ROUTES

Between May 29 – September 29,
green waste **MUST** be in containers.

Each household is allowed (5) – 32 gallon barrels no more than 50 lbs each. Branches must be bundled, no longer than 4' and weigh no more than 50 lbs.

**BULK GREEN WASTE PILES PUT OUT DURING
THE REST OF THE YEAR WILL BE CITED.**

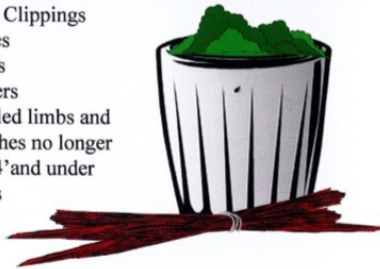


CITY OF UTICA 2023 GREEN WASTE PICK-UP SCHEDULE

ALLOWABLE GREEN WASTE ITEMS

ALL GREEN WASTE MUST BE IN BARRELS

- Grass Clippings
- Leaves
- Weeds
- Flowers
- Bundled limbs and branches no longer than 4' and under 50 lbs



ITEMS NOT ALLOWED

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| NO Household garbage | NO Plastic |
| NO Plant Pots | NO Bricks |
| NO Soil | NO Cement |
| NO Shrubs | NO Lumber |
| NO Stumps | NO Construction Debris |
| NO Logs | NO Hazardous Waste |
| NO TREES | NO Chemicals |

The City of Utica **DOES NOT** pick up large green waste items such as trees, shrubs, logs and stumps. If you have large green waste items to be removed, call Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority at (315) 731-0238 to schedule a pick-up. A nominal fee is charged for this service.

NOTE: Landscaping and construction contractors are mandated by the City of Utica Code Sec. 2-22-41 to remove all green waste from any city property at which they have provided services.

City of Utica
1 Kennedy Plaza
Utica, NY 13502

Photo: the mailer that the City sent every resident, outlining the green waste rules and schedule

Vote for Your Favorite Mural!

Back before Covid, the City was awarded a \$10,000,000 grant from the State for a **Downtown Revitalization Initiative**. The City has used this money in several ways, and our Downtown is absolutely benefitting from it. One aspect of this revitalization is the redesign of **Liberty Bell Park**, including extensive repairs to the large wall that has been home to the Sunburst mural since 1999 when Mayor Hanna hired an artist from NYC to paint it. (And, for what it's worth,

he did that without any sort of input from the people of Utica.) The City is spending some of that money (\$100,000 to be exact) on a new mural for that wall. (So, to be clear, the money for the new mural is money that can only be used to revitalize Downtown in accordance with the grant from the State. We are not using ARPA funds for this project.) And that is the entire pot of money for the mural. Whoever ends up painting that mural will use that money to pay for food, lodging, paint, scaffolding, everything.

The Department of Urban and Economic Development published a **Request For Qualifications** (RFQ), and made sure to advertise that RFQ locally as well as across the country. An RFQ is a request for applications not for a specific proposal for the painting itself, but rather, is a request for qualified artists to apply. Two of the essential qualifications were that the artist show that they are qualified to paint a mural on that scale (i.e., HUGE) and that they could do so in one Summer. So, scale and timeline were crucial qualifications, which is more than reasonable. We need artists who know how to do such a large project, which is a very specific skill set, and we need artists who can do it at one go, so that the project is done before Winter returns.

The City received 28 responses to the RFQ. Two were from local based artists. But of the 28 responses, only 4 in fact met the qualifications. Those four artists (in one case, it is two artists who work together) had each successfully painted several murals on this scale. They are artists who have a proven track record of painting these kinds of very large murals, and they know how to do it quickly enough to fit it into our short window of appropriate weather.

Those four artists (again, one is a pair of artists who work together) were then asked to submit proposals for actual murals. All four murals make reference to Utica in one way or another. And once the chosen artist settles into Utica and starts on the actual mural, I believe the those Utica elements will change and grow. And now we, the public, get to weigh in and choose which ones we like the best. We get to vote for them by [ranked choice voting](#), meaning that we don't just vote for one, but get to vote for our preferences in a ranked order. (So, I can vote for my favorite, but also my second preference, and so on.) You can vote at Munson or at City Hall. Voting closes on May 5th.

So, to sum it up: the City found us qualified artists, and now we, the people get to choose which mural we want! I hope you'll vote!



Photo: a proposal for a mural that shows a historical photos of Utica, and a rising stream of colorful roses

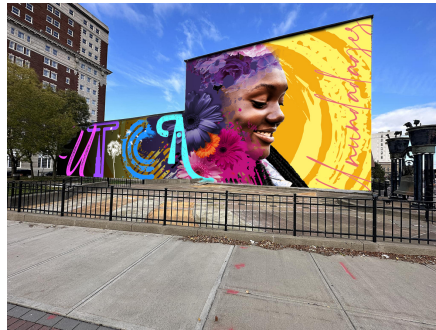


Photo: this mural has a colorful "UTICA" spelled out, and a smiling happy woman looking towards the future



Photo: a mural with a modern, abstracted view of our beloved Adirondack mountains



Photo: this mural show Utica's diverse and growing population, with a reference to the previous mural in the background

My Votes on the Council in April 2023

Here are all my votes in April. 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.

Resolutions for Commissioners of Deeds: These keep coming in!

Anne R. Jenkins 307 Lomond Place, Utica

Joseph Betar, 167 Victoria Drive, Utica

Kevin Revere, 11 Beverly Place, Utica

Lisa Cieplenski, 44 Country Club Drive, New York Mills

Matthew Black, 90 Clinton St, Whitesboro

Lisa M. Weeks Finegan, 9609 Pinnacle Rd, Sauquoit

Mariah C. Angerosa 467 Trenton Ave, #1, Utica

Board of Assessment Review Appointment

We reappointed David Williams, our former Assessor, to the Board of Assessment Review.

Intersections Where Stop Required in March, the Council passed many Ordinances that codify STOP signs already in place. This is a very good thing to do, and I intend to do the same thing for South Utica.

Mohawk St. & Catherine St

Hubbell St & Broad St

Memorial Sign for Thomas M. Lindsey UPD Police Officer Thomas Lindsey was killed while on duty in 2007. He was only 32 years old. This Resolution authorized and endorsed the placement of a sign in his honor at the Mary S. Hendricks Police and Fire Memorial Park.

Ordinance Waiving Residency Requirement for the Position of Paving Inspector

We granted a residency waiver for Britney Tucker, who works as a Junior Engineer for the City.

Proclamation Honoring Adirondack Bank Center Staff, Fans, UFD and UPD Officers for Their Heroic Actions and Care

On March 18th, 2023, at the Adirondack Bank Center, a young child suddenly needed medical help due to a seizure. Everyone came to his aid and comforted and calmed his parents and siblings.

URA Properties sold: After holding Public Hearings, we passed the necessary legislation to sell the following properties:

120-136, 142-146, 150, & 222-228 Liberty St. to Mohawk Valley Garden

Corporation (Rob Esche) for \$80,000.

822 Waverly Place to Musheer Alzndani for \$40,000

720-722 Warren St. to Water Capital Mgt (George Waters) for \$250

1215 Warren St to Maria Nunez & Francisco Valdez for \$15,000

Ordinance Designating Name for Johnson Park

Since everyone refers to a street as "Johnson Park" despite the fact that it is officially known as "Johnson Square", it was decided to give it an official name that conforms to the practice. So, what was "Johnson Square" will now be known as "Johnson Park".

Resolution Recognizing PJ Green for 95 Years of Business PJ Green has been operating for 95 yers. It is a fourth generation locally owned and operated business!

Transfers from the Board of Estimate & Apportionment

All transfers of \$15,000 or more from one budget line to another must be authorized by the Common Council after first being approved by E&A. There were four such transfers in April:

\$23,947 between budget lines for the City Clerk office

\$33,802 between City Hall Maintenance and Facilities lines

\$28,132 from Contingency to Insurances to cover increased costs in insuring our City fleet

\$42,213 between Codes lines to cover increased gas prices

Ordinance Increasing the Rebate for Sidewalks

Last year we increased the rate at which residential properties can be reimbursed for sidewalk repairs and replacements. This Ordinance does the same thing for Commercial properties, raising the maximum from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Tree Ordinance

This is an Ordinance I first started to work on last year. It is the first new Ordinance to deal with trees in over 30 years. You can see my full description of it above. It had been in Committee for months while I continued to work on it. On April 19th, I made a motion to pull it from Committee. Councilmembers Colosimo-Testa and Betrus voted against bringing it to the floor for a vote. The other six of us at the meeting voted to pull it from Committee. We then voted on it and it passed 5-3. **Councilmembers Colosimo-Testa, Betrus, and Frank DiBrango voted against this Ordinance. In other words, they voted against the Ordinance required for being a Tree City USA.** (Councilmember Mark Williamson was absent from the meeting.)

Complete Streets

A special edition of my Newsletter, dealing just with Complete Streets, will be published very soon. Stay tuned!

Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

For well over a year now, the Common Council has been discussing and considering various ways to carefully amend our relatively new Zoning Ordinance. At issue is how best to regulate small retail shops, including neighborhood convenience stores. Meanwhile, we had placed a moratorium on new convenience stores which we had to extend more than once. And so, after multiple Committee meetings and consulting with Corporation Counsel, on April 5th we decided to adopt a number of amendments proposed by the Administration. There were a total of nine pieces of legislation we passed in order to accomplish these changes. Most of them dealt with definitions of different types of small retail stores. We also amended the "Zoning Code Use Table", which specifies which kinds of business are allowed in which kinds of zoned districts. All of these Ordinances passed unanimously.

One of these Ordinances involved where "Smoke Shops" could be located, according to the Zoning Code Use Table. As the legislation was written by Corporation Counsel, it allowed these Smoke Shops to be located in Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMU) districts, which includes the Ridgewood Plaza on Genesee between Kensington and Eastwood. I made a motion on the floor to amend this piece of legislation to NOT permit these smoke shops in these districts. I made the case that these shops often become nuisances for the neighborhoods in which they are located, and that NMU, because they abut Residential districts, and are in part residential themselves should not be home to these retail stores. Councilmember Betrus seconded my motion to amend this legislation and the amendment passed unanimously.

This means that the small convenience store at Ridgewood Plaza CANNOT be converted into a Smoke Shop.

Report from E&A - April 2023

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. Also, all transfers of \$15,000 or more must be authorized by the Common Council, so those are listed above in my Council votes.

E&A has only met twice since my last Newsletter. We did lots of the usual transfers, cleaning up the budget from the previous fiscal year of 2022-2023. We also transferred some land from the URA to the City, land where the new housing development, ArtSpace, will be built. We made some minor changes to the Table of Organization, to account for minor personnel changes. All in all, a pretty uneventful pair of E&A meetings.

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. We meet on the first and third Wednesdays of every month, except over the Summer, when we usually only meet once in July and once in August. The "pre-meeting" starts at 6, and the regular meeting starts at 7pm. 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.

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

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