Minutes

Merced Sunrise Rotary

Special Meeting of May 11, 2016

Meeting convened at 5:28 PM

Members Present: Cathy Paskin, Rich Miller, Galen Chastain, Tim O’Neill, Theresa Cesar, Dortha Chu, Butch Hughes, Mike Cuchna, Betsy Donovan, Stuart Rawling, Bob Casey and Mike Altomare by proxy.

Members Absent: Mark Lutz

Guests Present: Ross Simonet

**Purpose of Special Meeting:** In light of the issues that have arisen surrounding our proposal for renaming M Street to Veterans Boulevard, the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the ramifications of our current course of action for Honoring Our Veterans and to reach a consensus on a course of action.

**MINUTES:**

**Cathy** asked Bob Casey to open the meeting by sketching the historical background of the issues surrounding the proposal to rename M Street to Veterans Boulevard. Bob stated that the biggest issue for him resulted from his recent conversation with Susan Walsh in which she informed him that the proposal to rename M Street was a bad idea, the cost for which would be $500,000 for Merced College and that working through that could result in the loss of the Field of Honor. Susan also alluded to PG&E litigation and other legal matters that might play into the costs.

**Betsy** summarized a telephone call she had received from Amie Marchini in which she recounted that Amie was circulating petitions to garner support for opposing the name change. She said that her knowledge of Amie leads her to believe that Amie will follow through on this matter with continued resistance to our project. Betsy also reiterated that the widespread belief is that the project is a Rotary project. This belief was reflected by Amie and is evident in the Facebook page that Amie has created.

**Stuar**t opined that “costs” do not weigh heavily against this project; the campaign is against Sunrise Rotary more than it is against the costs.

**Rich** traced his efforts to promote the project as a community effort to honor veterans. Toward this end, he reported that he arranged for a radio interview with Roger Wood, an Atwater Rotarian who was supportive. He recounted that when he appeared for the interview, in Roger’s place was Kory Billings, also an Atwater Rotarian, but coincidentally, Amie Marchini’s husband; therefore, the outcome was not as favorable as Rich had hoped.

**Ross** reported that he had had a recent conversation with Dennis Jordon, current President of the Merced College Board of Trustees. He reported that Dennis was opposed to the project due to the estimated $500,000 cost to the college. Ross stated that he did not want to compromise the relationship we have with Merced College by going against its wishes and thereby risking the loss of its co-sponsorship of the Field of Honor.

**Butch** stated that his was initially very enthusiastic about the project, but it is now a “buzzword” at Park Merced where he visits weekly and is not viewed there in a favorable light. He stated that he now has reservations about supporting the project as originally conceived and suggested that we look at other alternatives to honor veterans.

**Theresa** stated that there is nearly universal agreement that the pursuit of a project to honor veterans is a noble one, but that the Field of Honor is a big issue. She opined that the project may not be fair to all concerned, and that the associated expenses have become more than we had ever imagined. She stated that it is no small matter that the project is perceived to be a Rotary project, not a community project as we had originally considered it.

In an exchange between **Rich** and **Theresa**, Rich stated that we can remove the objections raised by Amie, but can we remove the objections raised by the college? Theresa replied that we will certainly tarnish our image if we proceed.

**Tim** queried rhetorically, from where do the numbers come? He stated that postal deliver is not a problem. While we can’t mitigate potential legal costs the college may incur, he questions the validity of the numbers being tossed around.

**Betsy** brought up the fact that any dollars the college expends to support the project are public funds and that using public funds for such a project may not be easy to justify, especially given that funds for instructional purposes are always in short supply.

**Theresa** asked rhetorically: what is included in the $500,000 estimate?

**Stuart** opined that the costs were probably inflated, but that it doesn’t really matter. He mentioned the ½ ₵ sales tax coming up on a tax measure and opined that it is hard to justify expending dollars on signs when money is needed for deteriorating roads. He stated that Rich never said this would be easy and had never intended this to be a Rotary project, but rather had expected it to be a community project.

**Bob** reiterated that the issues related to the college may never be resolved. He said that the Board of Trustees is firmly opposed and that compromise is not on the table. He said that at a recent meet and greet function, his assessment of the consensus among attendees was for opposition.

**Tim** summarized by stating that the only way to proceed is with Merced College’s support, i.e. its M Street change or Field of Honor. We can’t have both.

**Theresa** praised Rich for his efforts to move forward with this project and thanked him for his dedication to the purpose of honoring veterans. She asked rhetorically if perhaps we could or should consider another means by which to honor veterans, but answered her own question by stating that if we were to move to another project, Rich would probably not be willing to lead it, especially if the community were not supportive.

**Bob**, recognizing that Theresa’s input posed a new set of issues, said that he could not provide any answers to hypothetical questions that might arise from the new issues.

**Rich** reminded us that it would be seven more weeks before he could meet with Susan Walsh.

**Bob** reminded us that Susan has multiple groups that are supporting her position.

**Rich** said that he viewed Susan’s position on this matter a threat, i.e. the risk of losing the college’s co-sponsorship of the Field of Honor if we proceed. He said that her position as unacceptable to him.

**Galen** re-stated that, in his opinion, the college’s objection is not about money; it’s about a resistance to a course of action affecting the college but about which it was not timely consulted. He opined that the risk of losing the college’s co-sponsorship of the Field of Honor was too real to continue on our present course of action and that his opinion was to bail out of the project as it currently exists.

**Dortha** stated that she was also fearful of jeopardizing our relationship with the College if we proceeded with our present course of action and to her, given that the Field of Honor has been a huge success and well received by the community, it is paramount that we preserve it.

**Mike** **C.** stated the following: Veterans are a noble cause, the perception is that this is a Rotary project as opposed to a community project and perception is reality. We have too many positives to ignore the consequences of losing the support of Merced College. To put the Field of Honor in jeopardy runs counter to our purposes. If Susan has her foot down, it’s not going to move. In a sense, the well has already been poisoned. Dennis is a strong personality and is not likely to change his position of opposition. Is it possible to delay? If we do, it’s hard to go back and correct something that has turned negative. I like the idea, but can we afford to do it?

**Mike A.** stated the following: I interpret the 4-way test differently than Amie and believe that we have abided by it in this process. People love to throw numbers out, but oftentimes there is no validity to them. The high speed rail is a good example of this. Why should we bow to Susan Walsh? This is a community project, not a Rotary project. Why should we suffer because of a few? Park Merced is opposed because Amie is opposed. Mike had other things to say, but generally supported the theme of moving ahead with the project.

**Tim** asked Rich to summarize before he made his motion.

**Rich**, when asked if this project will wind down or go away, he responded that it may do both. He said this is hard and then quoted Etienne de Grellet, a Quaker Missionary who said: I shall pass this way but once; any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being; let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again. He closed by reminding us that we have skin in the game.

**Tim** made the following motion, seconded by Butch: Move to defer any further action until after meeting with Susan Walsh; to hold off on Op. Ed. piece and any community meeting and to re-evaluate our strategy after the meeting. Motion carried. Rich abstained and Galen voted no.

**Next Meeting Date:** May 18, 2016

Meeting adjourned summarily be Cathy at 6:35 PM

 Respectfully Submitted,

Galen Chastain

Secretary