

**Village of Skokie  
Town Hall Meeting Minutes  
June 24, 2010**

The Village of Skokie conducted a community meeting at the Niles West High School Auditorium, 5701 Oakton Street, Skokie, Illinois on Thursday, June 24, 2010. Notices about the meeting and informational articles appeared in local publications, the Village newsletter and on flyers distributed throughout the community by the Skokie Voice group. Meeting information also was posted on a number of community events signs. The meeting started at 7 p.m. with Mayor George Van Dusen presiding. Village Clerk Williams and Trustees Bromberg, Lorge, Perille, Roberts, Shah and Sutker were in attendance. There also were approximately 450 people in attendance.

- I. Introductions and Opening Remarks were made by Mayor Van Dusen.
- II. Lisa Lipin thanked those in attendance on behalf of Skokie Voice, a grassroots group of residents who are concerned and care about Skokie. Skokie Voice asked the Village to hold a town hall meeting to provide a forum for open dialogue. Ms. Lipin thanked Mayor Van Dusen, Village Manager Al Rigoni and the Skokie Police Department for hosting the meeting, and also thanked public and private Skokie School districts, the Skokie Park District, businesses, homeowners associations and houses of worship for assisting with meeting publicity. She thanked District 219 Superintendent Nanciann Gatta for use of the high school, and thanked her son Brandon for developing the Skokie Voice web site. She invited people to learn more about Skokie Voice through information at the meeting and through the organization web site. She asked Skokie Voice representatives to stand.
- III. Facts about crime and how the Police Department and neighbors can work together were introduced by Police Chief Barry Silverberg. Following Chief Silverberg's remarks, Deputy Police Chief Anthony Scarpelli gave a Power Point presentation that focused on the following themes:
  - a. Ten-year community crime statistics show stable crime trends.
  - b. Section 8 Public Housing facts and statistics.
    - i. The number of Section 8 units in Skokie has remained stable for the past five years.
    - ii. Of the 440 Section 8 units in Skokie, 200 are occupied by elderly renters.
    - iii. Only 4% of Skokie's approximately 6,000 rental units are occupied by non-elderly Section 8 voucher recipients.
  - c. Skokie Police electronic communications outreach
    - i. [www.skokie.org](http://www.skokie.org) – Police Department web page shows a map of the community and crime alerts for various sections.
    - ii. [www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com) – also accessible from the Police Department web page. Nixle is a free subscription-based community information notification service for sending cell phone text messages and email messages to community members. The Skokie Police send crime alerts and other important information to Nixle subscribers.
  - d. Crime prevention tips such as trimming bushes by windows, having exterior lighting at night and other measures.

*Note: a copy of Deputy Chief Scarpelli's presentation is attached.*

- IV. Information regarding Public Housing was presented by Ms. Lorri Newson, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of Cook County.
- V. A question and answer session began at approximately 8:10 p.m. Mayor Van Dusen moderated. Mayor Van Dusen answered some of the questions, with other questions answered by Village Manager Albert Rigoni, Police Chief Silverberg and Deputy Police Chief Scarpelli.

A total of 31 people addressed the board with comments and questions, as follows;

Speaker one

- Residents have voice now
- Concerned about limited access to individual trustees
- Suggested referendum to elect individual trustees from districts even if it requires full-time, paid trustees that stop weekly garbage pick up and allow citizens greater access to elected officials.

Speaker two

- Is there a comprehensive plan for economic development?
- Nothing to attract/retain young people in town.
- What is being done to attract business?
  - Mayor Van Dusen responded with information on four ways in which the Village is working on revitalizing Downtown Skokie:
    - Increasing access to the area through new Skokie Swift station;
    - Working with Illinois Science + Technology Park on bringing in new businesses and adding jobs;
    - Purchasing significant amounts of property on Downtown Skokie area so that Village controls those areas and can direct redevelopment efforts when economy rebounds; and
    - Village Board considering major changes to Oakton Street to make it more pedestrian friendly by widening sidewalks and other modifications.
  - Mayor Van Dusen also provided information about West Dempster Street:
    - In terrible condition;
    - Transit-oriented development approved a number of years ago;
    - Property owners inflated price of properties which made them impossible to sell for redevelopment;
    - Village has now purchased several major parcels and is razing the buildings, with other purchases pending to ready area for redevelopment when economy improves.
    - Progress beginning; noted shopping area at Gross Point Road and Dempster Street and the new Jewish Funeral Home under construction as examples.

Speaker three

- Asked Police Department about use of dogs for searches at Lincoln Junior High.
- Whose decision? Was there a need?
- No notice to parents; no option to remove your child from school that day.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli responded. Schools request that police conduct the canine searches; the police do not initiate such searches.

Speaker four

- Concerned about Lee Wright Park, particularly in spring and summer months.
- Three other problem parks: Gross Point Park; Tecumseh Park; Winnebago Park.
- People who hang out in park not from Skokie.
- Quality of life substantially reduced by troubling activities in and around park: threats of violence from adolescents, fence damage, stolen bicycle, littered wine bottles, graffiti, and gang logos etched in curb.
- Other crime at his three buildings on Elm Street: apprehended people trying to break in; adolescents trying to break into storage lockers.

*(Speaker four, continued)*

- One-third to 35% of his gross rent as a property owner goes for real estate taxes.
- Drug activity; cited slow Police response.
- Said Police call problem areas “K-Town” and “Devil’s Triangle”.
- Basketball courts have changed neighborhood.
- Install basketball courts at Dempster Street and Skokie Boulevard.
- Spoke to Park District Executive Director who said he would remove basketball courts if he received a letter requesting the same from Police Chief Silverberg.
- Said he could not get an appointment to speak with Chief Silverberg.
  - Police Chief Silverberg responded and said he was aware of some of the issues raised and not aware of others; also said he would be glad to meet with the speaker. Parks are public property and are overseen by the Skokie Park District. Had not heard from Park District Executive Director Schneiderman about a letter regarding basketball court removal.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli commented that young people who follow the rules should not be penalized because of changes made because of young people who don’t follow the rules.

Speaker five

- Lives near Bronx and Enfield Avenues.
- Concerned about loud bass noise from automobiles.
- Has heard loud radios from McDonald’s drive-thru customers at midnight
- Said he has spoken to police and they say the ordinance isn’t strong enough to allow effective enforcement.
- Recommends stricter ordinance that allow for sizeable fine or impounding vehicle if noise is heard from more than 75 feet away.
  - Police Chief Silverberg said that he’s taking notes and will see what can be done to address the issue.

Speaker six

- Concerned with distressed properties that owners can’t ‘flip’.
- Properties become eye sores, are targets for vandalism and impact neighborhood property values.
- What is Village doing about appearance of these properties?
  - Mayor Van Dusen said that these properties are usually the property of a bank and that the Village’s Property Standards Division is in touch with the banks.
  - Village Manager Rigoni responded by saying that the Village monitors vacant properties. He said that since January 2007, 5% of the Village’s housing stock has gone through a financial hardship. The number of foreclosed properties being purchased exceeded those in foreclosure during May 2010. The Village has a vacant property ordinance to address appearance issues and encouraged residents to contact Terry Oline in the Property Standards Division about specific property concerns.

Speaker seven

- Police Department competent, but should conduct scientific research on resident concerns, issues.
- Should hire professionals to create a new brand image for Skokie.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli responded with information on the Village's triennial survey conducted by the National Research Center that is posted on the Village web site.
  - Mayor Van Dusen responded regarding the image comment. Explained the 4Insights studies for Downtown Skokie and West Dempster Street that are posted in the Village web site. The Village also was a co-founder of the Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau that markets the Village nationally.

Speaker eight

- True interest in working together. Wants to get ideas on the table.
- Community needs to make a strong statement that gangs are not allowed in parks.
- Said the four parks are known as 'bad' areas.
- How do we let people in the parks know that we don't want them in the parks doing what they're doing?
- We live in a nice neighborhood and town.
- Not asking for an answer tonight, just asking for help and wants to raise awareness.
  - Police Chief Silverberg responded that just about every park gets a foot patrol three times daily. The Police Department focuses on the problem parks with bicycle patrols, unmarked cars and other resources. Certain individuals who live in Skokie are banned from the parks.

Speaker nine

- New business owner in Downtown Skokie; cited increase in business since coming to Skokie.
- Complimented police service with assistance received when his store door was unlocked after hours.
- Great place to open a business.

Speaker 10

- Concerned about Lee Wright Park; get gangs out.
- Fresh gang signs at gas stations.
- Doesn't blame police; complimentary of police services.
- Concerned as a resident, building owner and mom.
- Attended camps at these parks when she was a kid in Skokie.
- Suggested on-site Park District staff to supervise problem parks; possibly offer activities.
- Need a better partnership with the Park District.

Speaker 11

- Safety important.
- Cited police officer sitting in front of Elizabeth Meyer School and not responding/intervening with numerous small children not properly restrained in safety seats in vehicles.
- Should educate the community and enforce child safety laws.
  - Police Chief Silverberg asked for additional information about the day and time the incident occurred.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli said that a large workforce includes some people who perform very well and others who don't. Agrees that the officer should have dealt with problem.

Speaker 12

- Shared responsibility for solving problems, not just Village's problem.
- Everyone should take an active role to make Skokie safe.

Speaker 13

- Property owner who lives across from Lee Wright Park.
- Neighborhood changed for the worse.
- Gangs present.
- Recommends closing park at dusk instead of 10 p.m.
- Don't just focus on the four problem parks as problem could spread to other areas.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli said that officers are responsible for patrolling all parks in their area, with a special emphasis on problem parks. No park goes unpatrolled.
  - Police Chief Silverberg responded by saying that he hears the concerns about the parks. Agrees that addressing a problem in one area might make the problem move to another park. He said that residents will see an increased police presence in the parks and that the police will do their best to make residents feel better about the parks. Can't arrest a youth for swearing unless a resident signs a complaint. Needs residents to call the police. He also said that the police would begin holding roll calls in the parks.

Speaker 14

- Police should spend more time fighting crime and less time giving tickets on Oakton Street.

Speaker 15

- Skokie is not the same as it was 14 years ago.
- Crime problem is being sugar-coated.
- Why are police needed in the junior high schools?
- Last year's public hearing on possible CTA expansion took people by surprise.
- Going forward, how will the Village communicate with residents on important issues?
  - Mayor Van Dusen said there won't be expansion of CTA train service to the north end of Skokie. The Village features important information in the Village newsletter, *NewSkokie*, and on the Village web site. He invited citizen phone calls to his office and provided the number. He said that all major decisions are published and discussed at Village Board meetings, such as the possible Oakton Street modifications that are posted on the Village web site and that will be discussed at the July 19 Village board meeting.
- Does the Village have \$6.5 million for sidewalks on Oakton Street when we're down police officers?
- Huge changes in Skokie in the past 10 years.
- Wants Skokie to continue as a great place.
  - Village Manager Rigoni responded by explaining that restrictions on Tax Increment Finance funds only allow the Village to use the funds for economic development purposes and that they cannot be used to hire police officers.

Speaker 16

- Why are programs such as police roll call only in some areas?
- Have police officers in all schools.
- Hire more police officers.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli said that roll calls started in the northeast section of Skokie but are now in every neighborhood and in some parks.
- Has not seen roll calls near Gross Point Park and other areas.
- Coaches baseball in parks throughout Skokie nearly every evening.
- Need to reclaim parks for residents and kids.

Speaker 17

- Has children ages four and nine and is concerned about drug use.
- Worried about drug activity in schools.
- People afraid to contact police through cell phones.
- Should be able to contact police anonymously.
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli provided a phone number on which anonymous information regarding narcotics and crime can be left. The number is 847/982-5973 and is that of Sgt. Bob Libit who supervises the tactical mission team. Residents can also leave anonymous information on the Action Line on the Village web site. Police Department does not see address or phone number for calls that come to the general Police Department number, 847/982-5900.
- Too many numbers hard to remember. Suggested establishing a 3-1-1 call in line or other dedicated public line.

Speaker 18

- Suggested meeting every 60 to 90 days until issues are resolved.
- Concerned about residential property values; questioned where they rank in terms of Village priorities.
- Has heard of real estate professionals steering buyers away from Skokie.
  - Mayor Van Dusen said that he has not heard of real estate professionals steering buyers from Skokie and cited several recent sales in his neighborhood. Village would like to know about this activity. Village is trying to maintain the streets and resurfacing to keep up the appearance of the neighborhoods and property values. Unemployment has risen in Skokie due to the economy and has had a ripple effect on the community. Other people in financial trouble or two-income families are now down to one income; this doesn't always show in statistics. Skokie is not alone with these problems, all area communities facing this due to the worst economy since the Great Depression. Promised that the Village is listening to resident comments and will try its best to take action and translate comments into action.

Speaker 19

- Mayor does listen and answer calls.
- PTA president at Old Orchard Junior High.
- Knows of six families that moved out of Skokie.
- Lives in Devonshire Park area.
- Village survey headline said, "Life is Good in Skokie"
- Services are great.
- Citizen comments from survey hidden.
- One comment said, "Parks are scary".

*(Speaker 19, continued)*

- Nothing in Skokie should be scary.
- Skokie Voice conducted a survey for \$40; Village survey costs thousands of dollars and only includes a small number of people.
- Need to communicate better.
- Everyone wants to be surveyed and want an input in the community.
- Hopes more meetings are held for ongoing communication.

Speaker 20

- Value of diversity stressed while growing up in Skokie.
- Shouldn't put people on the 'outside' of Skokie whether they come from Iraq or the south side of Chicago.
- People come to Skokie because they share our values and they want to be part of our community.

Speaker 21

- New resident; moved to Skokie from Chicago three weeks ago.
- Lives by Lee-Wright Park.
- Since moving here she has had to explain to her children what a 'dime bag' is, what gang symbols are, why people urinate at the alley by the park and why her children can't go to the park alone.
- Please do something about the gangs.
- Wonders if she did the right thing by moving to Skokie.

Speaker 22

- Recommends that the Village Board hear citizen comments at the beginning of each board meeting instead of at the end.
  - Mayor Van Dusen responded that the reason citizen comments are at the end is to allow residents to get home from work and have dinner with their family before attending the meeting. Said he would talk to his colleagues about shifting the citizen comment section to earlier in the meetings.
- What is Village doing to reduce the budget? Hiring freeze? Furlough days?
- Concerned about utility tax and pension issues.
  - Mayor Van Dusen responded by giving details of the 20-year property tax freeze in place in the Village. He provided information about the utility tax being a temporary tax that will need board action, with a public hearing required to continue the tax. He explained that approximately half of the utility tax revenues will go to satisfy pension requirements, the funds for which are reduced due to market conditions and unfunded mandates promulgated by the state legislature. The remainder of the utility tax revenues will go to fund the Village's first budget deficit in 30 years.
- Asked about more recent budget cutting measures.
  - Village Manager Rigoni responded with details on the hiring freeze that impacts 20 positions and has allowed the Village to save over \$1 million over the past two years. The Village Board has also been prudent with wage adjustments, giving only 1% for each of the past two years, and also has been prudent with health care management.

Speaker 23

- How to go from tonight's event to process? How to perpetuate?
- Move citizen comments to the beginning of Village Board meetings.
- Suggested that an informal resident advisory committee meet regularly with the police department about issues of concern.
  - Police Chief Silverberg responded that he would work with a resident advisory committee.

Speaker 24

- Thanked Village and Library for excellent services.
- Is seeking out other places to live, though, because of fear of walking down the street.
- Lives on Crawford Avenue on which people drive fast, traffic is busy and it's dark.
- Concerned that we can take back Skokie from gangs.
- Neighbors should unite to work together.
- Would like to see police cars on Crawford Avenue instead of sitting in speed traps.
- Community should be proactive instead of reactive
- Thanked the Village again for providing services, especially H1N1 and flu immunization clinics.
  - Mayor Van Dusen responded that Crawford Avenue is a Cook County roadway and that the Village is working with the County on possible changes to Crawford Avenue. He said that the Village continues to also discuss Old Orchard Road with Cook County.

Speaker 25

- Concerned over the use of the phrase 'paddy wagon' earlier in the meeting due to derogatory origin and mentioned that the proper term for such a vehicle is 'squad roll'.
- How are police reporting on crime?
- Are police covering up crime?
- Cited recent robbery in which dangerous firearms were used that was not published in the *Skokie Review*.
- Called Deputy Chief Scarpelli to discuss the matter.
- What is the process for putting a crime in the newspaper?
  - Deputy Chief Scarpelli responded that all crime reports are public information and that the newspapers choose what they publish. All of the robberies are under investigation, and some have been solved, as recently as the previous Friday.
- Complimented Police Department on their services and community roll calls.

Speaker 26

- Would like to know Village's plans for the soon-to-be-vacated police station and two adjacent parking lots.
- Likes the sense of security the station provides.
- Would like the Village to keep the residential area in mind.
  - Village Manager Rigoni responded that the Village has instructed him to seek appraisals on the property and that they will then review options for its use. The decision is up to the Village Board, and they will consider the residential area around the site. He said the Village has not initiated any marketing for the site.

Speaker 27

- Parents came to Skokie in 1961 due to schools and parks.
- Is currently PTA president at Jane Stenson School.
- Test scores dropping due to student turn-over.
- Should encourage people to stabilize schools.
- Need better educated children.
- Concerned with multiple families living in one home.
  - Mayor Van Dusen said that problems can be reported to Property Standards the limit depends on the square footage of the structure. He said that Property Standards, Police and the Village Manager's Office staff will soon meet with school superintendents on this and other issues. For life safety reasons the Village can enforce limits. Can contact him, Village Manger Rigoni or Terry Oline, Property Standards Supervisor, regarding problems with this issue.

Speaker 28

- Lived in Devonshire for 24 or 25 years and grew up in Skokie.
- Community has changed.
- Skokie survey shows that community is under national levels for citizen participation.
- Encouraged the Village to "use us".
- Communicate with us.
- What comes next with communications to solve safety issues and other concerns?
- Wants 'old Skokie' back where she can take a walk at midnight.
- Afraid to walk at night with her husband and dog, which is not okay.
- Need leadership to help figure it all out and move forward.

Speaker 29

- Loves Skokie; is like 'heaven' due to neighbors, access to information and officials.
- District 219 holds town hall meeting each spring regarding youth issues and has a low turn out.
- Suggested collaborating with District 219 to help promote their town hall meeting.
- Knows some of the school resource officers and they act appropriately and add to the quality of education.
- Skokie is an excellent, viable community and has a great school district.

Speaker 30

- Runs a publication formerly called Morton Grove Voice and now called North Shore Voice
- National animal and human rights activist.
- Commends police; parks are park board issue.
- Skokie is constructive.
- Let's all work together to create good quality of life.

Speaker 31

- President of Skokie Park District Board.
- Proud of all 42 parks.
- Wants safe environment in all parks.
- Park board has public comments at the beginning of their meetings held on the third Tuesday evening of each month and no residents come or comment.
- Invites people to share their concerns.

VI. Mayor Van Dusen said that the group has done themselves and the Village proud.

He announced that both District 219 high schools were ranked in the top 6% of all high schools in the United States. He congratulated the school district and thanked them for hosting tonight's meeting.

Mayor Van Dusen said that the Village will review the issues that were raised.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:35 p.m.

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June 24, 2010 Meeting Minutes prepared by  
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Village of Skokie