



**McANA**

Your Independent Resource for Maintaining and Improving Neighborhoods

# COMMON GROUND

Marion County Alliance of  
Neighborhood Associations

September 2005

## Indianapolis Playing Shell Game with Finances

### **PRESIDENT'S FORUM**

*This is a forum for the McANA President to share some personal views on matters that affect neighborhoods and life in Indianapolis. However, readers and members should know that these are personal opinions and that the issues portrayed in the President's column do not necessarily reflect official positions taken by either the McANA Board of Directors or the member organizations of McANA.*

*by Cathy Burton  
McANA President*

We, as a city, must stop playing a shell game with our finances and face up to a straightforward accounting of our long-term financial obligations.

For years, we have been hearing dire predictions of Indianapolis' looming financial crisis. Many times, when it seems those claims of gloom and doom come out primarily during election campaigns, we want to dismiss them as political rhetoric. Unfortunately, amidst "the sky is falling" tactics, there is a reality we can no longer avoid. Indianapolis is the twelfth largest city in the United States, and it is time for our government to treat us like grownups.

There has been little in the recent hearings and discussions on the 2006 budget for Indianapolis that make me feel like we are doing anything more than getting out the Band-Aid box once again. Certainly there has been a lot of press about whether the Mayor's plan, dubbed "Indianapolis Works," would have provided a boost to our bank account. There certainly seems to be

a plethora of information from proponents and opponents of Works that shows intelligent people are not always going to agree on the best solution to any problem. But from my perspective, our financial crisis is a lot bigger than Indianapolis Works, and maybe we have all gotten so hung up on whether the law enforcement and fire departments should combine that we can't see the forest for the trees. Certainly the debate over Indianapolis Works is one worth having, (and I for one remain unconvinced that Works makes sense, although I am still willing to listen), but we need to remember that our financial woes are much bigger than this one proposal can fix.

The financial crisis we are facing was not created overnight; it is an amalgam of decisions made over many years. Trying to lay the blame solely on the current administration diverts our attention from the reality that whomever may have made those decisions, we are still left with the aftermath. We are facing serious deficits in funding for critical services and a decay of infrastructure that threaten the very quality of life in our city. We are hundreds of millions of dollars in debt to our



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## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

McANA is a 501©(3) organization.  
All contributions are tax deductible.  
Send to McANA, P.O. Box 1082, Indianapolis, 46206.

McANA is fully independent. It is dedicated to the improvement of all neighborhoods in Marion County through cooperation, sharing and advocacy. All neighborhood groups are joined for the common good.

### ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

New \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

or

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Association Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Person

\_\_\_\_\_  
Township

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address or P.O. Box

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip Code

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Telephone

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Fax

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E-Mail Address

Memberships are invited from every neighborhood group registered with the city, and others approved by the Board of Directors.

Dues are January through December.

\_\_\_\_\_ Regular \$20 \_\_\_\_\_ Silver \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Gold \$100

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU!**

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WELCOME

## New McANA Director for Decatur Township

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Paul G. Fox to the McANA board representing Decatur Township. Paul Fox is a lifelong Indianapolis resident, and has lived in Decatur Township for 10 years. He is a former journalist. He has also worked at Marian College in the public relations department. He is active in Decatur Township's community affairs. Welcome to the McANA Board!

Paul can be reached at 856-1692 or  
[pgfoxindy@aol.com](mailto:pgfoxindy@aol.com)



# IPL's Tactics Spark Tree Trimming Ordinance

by Jeanette Robertson  
Pike Township Director

Since the chainsaws and wood chippers have begun work in the Trader's Point area, it seems appropriate to provide a followup to the "IPL Tree Cutting Prompts Policy Talks" article in the June Common Ground newsletter. To recap, the residents in the Trader's Point area in northwest Pike Township had deep concerns about Indianapolis Power & Light's plans for clearing the trees that bordered their transmission lines along the south side of West 86th Street from Lafayette Road to I-465. Originally, IPL intended to remove all tall-growing tree species--from saplings to mature trees--along a 50-foot wide right-of-way easement on West 86th Street. When the community learned of this plan, it retained legal counsel, enlisted the help of Indy Parks & Recreation (which has the sole authority to issue permits for tree planting, pruning and removal on the city right-of-way), and asked City-County Councilor Isaac Randolph to assist in negotiating a compromise that would reduce the impact to the wooded areas and the mature trees.

These discussions culminated in a meeting in late August where key revisions to the plan specific to this area were presented. With Indy Parks & Recreation's permission, right-of-way trees that are a current or imminent hazard within three years would be removed to provide for a 20-foot clearance radius along the transmission lines. Right-of-way trees that pose a hazard or potential hazard would be pruned according to ANSI A300 (Part 1) standards to achieve the necessary clearance. Only pruning would occur on private property unless the 20-foot clearance could not be achieved by ANSI A300 standards, in which case the tree could be removed with the property owner's approval. Lastly, arborists from both Indy Parks & Recreation and IPL would be on site at all times and would individually

inspect each tree to determine whether pruning or removal should be used.

These changes are a definite improvement from the original plan, and although IPL rescinded its offer to fund planting \$10,000 worth of low-growing species, there is the potential for tree mitigation on a case-by-case basis through Indy Parks and its partners. However, the implementation of this plan has still been very distressing to the neighbors, and tensions have been exacerbated by the poor public relations skills exhibited by IPL's subcontractors. These insensitive interactions with the residents include a smiley face tree marking, rude behavior by a Wright Tree Service representative, unsolicited and inappropriate opinions expressed by an off-duty IPD officer hired for security, and finally, handcuffing an elderly homeowner as detailed in an [Indianapolis Star](#) article on Friday, September 2. These breaches of good faith efforts and earnest interactions have soured the community's view of IPL and its willingness to work with the community. As one resident in the area put it, he felt that throughout this entire process he had met very few sincere people.



Although it may appear that the residents have gained little by this course of action, the issue of a countywide tree-trimming ordinance as it relates to utility easements is now being pursued by Councilor Randolph. The McANA Board of Directors recently voted to support and participate in Councilor Randolph's efforts. McANA hopes that this issue will be the necessary catalyst for the county to pursue a comprehensive tree preservation and conservation ordinance. Maybe through these efforts, we can all feel that we have truly earned the distinction of calling Indianapolis a "Tree City USA" community.

# Indianapolis Playing Shell Game with Finances

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police and fire funds. We are facing hundreds of billions of dollars in costs to bring our sanitary sewers into compliance with EPA standards and to ensure the health of our city's population. We are in debt to the state for our child welfare obligations for tens of millions of dollars. Our criminal justice system is unable to adequately handle, house and rehabilitate offenders to ensure the safety of our residents. We have committed serious dollars to expanding our convention center and building a new stadium. We have neighborhoods that face flooding every time it rains and sidewalks that are no longer safe for foot traffic. We have a deficit in park ground, we have roadways that cannot handle the rapid growth in our suburbs, and we are ranked as having some of the worst levels of air quality in the country. We are anticipating investing critical dollars in developing a truly functional mass transit system.

This dire picture is not news. So why can't we get a true accounting of the dollars needed to fix the problems? Instead, we seem intent on shifting burden and blame, and we continue to rob Peter to pay Paul. We continue to borrow money against future revenues, extending our long-term debt, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest and borrowing costs. The latest round on this was recently passed by the City County Council on August 22, and yet we did not hear how that income was going to be recovered in order to fund the following year's budget--or is the plan to just keep borrowing?

How are we ever going to catch up with our bills if we just keep adding to what we owe without really bringing in any more money? Recently, we learned that there may be a proposal to move \$9 million from our sanitary sewer funds to the police pension fund. If this is the case, I fail to see how diverting money from what I thought was a desperately needed dedicated fund to fix another equally desperate problem is really a sound fiscal response.

Apparently, it may not be the first time this has happened, so one might assume we have an excess amount of money sitting in our sewer funds--yet according to recent comments by elected officials, we may soon be seeing an increase in monthly sewer fees.

Indianapolis residents are also being asked to agree to a raise in the storm water utility fee from the current \$1.94 a month to \$3 a month--even though the nearly \$35 million in stormwater fees that have been collected in the last couple of years have not yielded the anticipated results, nor have they been spent in a way that most residents thought would happen when supporting the original concept.



Are we the victims of political posturing, or a desperate but ill-advised attempt to run from the flood instead of fixing the levee?

How about some honest answers here? Give us credit for understanding how to add and subtract. Tell us what Indianapolis really needs--don't give us piecemeal information and slight-of-hand budget balancing. What are our long-term debts and government mandates? What peril do our neighborhoods face if failing infrastructure is not bolstered to meet the demands of the public? What is the plan to address these needs? We want to know the whole story of our financial situation before we are asked to write

the ending.

I do not envy this Mayor and this City County Council the daunting task of unraveling decades of financial missteps, some of which may have seemed like a good idea at the time. Certainly recent changes in property tax assessments have left people stinging from the financial hit. And the nationwide economic slump our country found itself in after 9/11 has hit everyone hard in ways no one could predict. There's no doubt that these are tough financial times, and many of us find ourselves wondering how we are going to pay next month's bills. But perhaps the legacy this administration could leave behind is a full and honest accounting of where we really are and how we got there. And by making sure that when money gets collected from our citizenry, whether it is called a fee, an assessment, or a tax, that it gets spent on what we were told it would fund.

Because we've been playing the shell game long enough, and I'm beginning to wonder if we are securing our future or just gambling with it.

# The Comp Plan and Neighborhood Responsibility

by Pat Andrews  
McANA Vice President

I was sitting, waiting for a zoning petition from Decatur Township to be heard one Thursday in August. In the few cases before ours, there were two that made me want to write this article for Common Ground. These two petitions had the backing of the affected neighborhood associations but were opposed by staff. Staff's grounds? The petitions did not comply with the Comprehensive Plan.

First, let me congratulate staff on standing by the Plan just as McANA and neighborhood groups throughout the county have been imploring you to do.

Second, let me talk turkey with neighborhood leaders. We cannot seek real support of the Comprehensive Plan from the members of the BZA's and the MDC and discard it ourselves. That tack will only offer comfort to those individuals who, in truth, couldn't care less about community input and the wishes of neighborhoods.

Now, I am completely cognizant of the fact that I do not know why the neighborhood associations on that particular day chose to support rezonings that did not comply with the Comp Plan. I don't know because no neighborhood leaders came to speak. If a letter was submitted to the file, no mention was made of it.

Here are two suggestions I believe will help us keep faith with the Comprehensive Plan. When your

neighborhood association decides it is time to support a zoning or variance request that does not comply with the Comp Plan, send someone to speak to that issue. What has changed that makes this use or intensity of use fit? Did the recommendation of the Comp Plan ever make sense? Let's not leave staff twisting slowly in the wind by themselves, doing exactly what we asked them to do.

When the time comes for your township's new Comprehensive Plan to be adopted, be sure you appear at the MDC to specify what you do not agree with and why. Keep that document and make sure that those who rise to leadership positions know about it. This new Plan will likely operate for a decade or more. When a petition does not comply with the Comp Plan but does comply with what you wanted the Comp Plan to reflect, then you will have a cogent argument at the hearing. If the MDC and BZAs erode the new Plan, much as they have the old ones, you will also have good arguments for changes.

The toughest part will truly be abiding by the Comp Plan ourselves. But, if we are to seek implementation of the Comprehensive Plan from others, we must make sure it is a priority with us, as well.

Now is the time to look your proposed Plans over with a fine tooth comb and decide what you are willing to live with and what you are not.

## Plant a Million Trees

American Forests recommends that communities should strive for an overall tree canopy coverage of 40 percent for livable, sustainable communities. Yet central Indiana is far below that average! In response, the Hoosier Heartland RC&D Council has launched its Plant a Million Trees project.

Trees reduce stormwater runoff, convert carbon dioxide to oxygen, reduce energy costs by providing shade, and even reduce acts of aggression and crime.

Here's what you can do:

- Residents can plant trees in their yards
- Businesses can green up property with shrubs and trees

- Corporations can fund tree plantings and provide volunteers to plant and/or organize a local event
- Communities can plant trees in public spaces, and help measure benefits by conducting inventories and surveys
- Civic clubs can conduct fundraisers and tree plantings
- Personal donations can be made to purchase and plant trees

For more information contact Hoosier Heartland at 317-290-3250 or [hhrcc@hhrcc.org](mailto:hhrcc@hhrcc.org).

# Neighborhood Evacuation and Assistance Plans

by Ike Randolph, Jr.  
City-County Council  
District 1

Every neighborhood should have one!

We need to prepare to save ourselves and neighbors in the event of a major disaster. Remember, a catastrophe will be halfway across Indianapolis before a bureaucrat gets his pants on.

The purpose of a NEAT plan is to encourage leaders in each neighborhood or community to organize themselves to identify:

- Potential traffic choke points and developing alternate means of egress from your neighborhood in the event of a natural or manmade emergency
- Individuals and families who made need special assistance or accommodations (seniors, physically or mentally impaired, large groups of children)
- Critical Human Assets within your community, i.e., doctors, nurses, firefighters, law enforcement officers, chemists and others who are accustomed to working in emergency situations and who could assist with their professional talents in the event of an emergency



• Potential resources and agencies within a neighborhood that can be designated as Safe Zones or points-of-contact for separated family members, public safety officials, and others acting in a relief capacity

• Agencies that can immediately provide emergency supplies such as food, water, clothes and items for infants and children

Your NEAT plans can be updated regularly and distributed to new residents, and local governmental and agency leaders so that there is better coordination between fire, police, public works and relief agencies and of course, your neighbors.

As an Indianapolis firefighter and city councilor, I'm more than willing to sit down with any neighborhood or community to assist in developing a NEAT plan. For more information please feel free to attend my Pike Township Townhall Meeting on Saturday, October 8 from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Greater New Hope Church, 3444 West 71st Street. We will have professionals on a panel to offer valuable information to assist in developing your NEAT plans.

## Property Owners can File Permits Online

Property owners looking to make home improvements can now apply for permits with the Department of Metropolitan Development without leaving the house. As a way to improve customer service and streamline the permitting process for residents, DMD has launched a web-based application that allows property owners to conveniently apply, pay for and receive permits for renovations or remodeling any time, day or night, by visiting [www.Permits.IndyGov.org](http://www.Permits.IndyGov.org).

Property owners will be able to tap into the online service to pull permits for home repair and other renovation work being performed on an existing structure. Once the permit review is complete, property owners will receive an email that allows them to download and print the permit instantly. However, any building

additions or new construction will require the owner to file in person.

Online permitting has proven to make the permit review process more efficient and effective. Applying for permits on the Internet helps prevent applicant filing errors that can increase wait times, and all of the data is automatically entered into a tracking database.

Local and state building laws require permits to be filed for most all construction activity, from building a large-scale housing development, to erecting a corporate headquarters, to replacing shingles on a roof. For residents who are not familiar with the permit process, the web site includes user-friendly directions and an online demo. For more information about DMD's online permitting service, or to apply for a permit online, visit [www.Permits.IndyGov.org](http://www.Permits.IndyGov.org).

## HOW TO CONTACT THE McANA BOARD

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[www.mcanaindy.org](http://www.mcanaindy.org)

Read about the new Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committees.

Learn about McANA's efforts to understand the benefits and pitfalls of the proposed Indianapolis Works consolidation plan.

Keep up on the latest news about mining, I-69, billboards and other topics of interest to Indy's neighborhoods by logging on to [www.mcanaindy.org](http://www.mcanaindy.org).

If you would like to be notified when Common Ground is posted, send an email to [webmaster@mcanaindy.org](mailto:webmaster@mcanaindy.org) with "sign me up" in the subject line.

## ~What's On Tap~

**Saturday, September 17, 9-11 a.m.**  
**General McANA membership meeting**  
North United Methodist Church, 38th and Meridian

Panel discussion by  
Criminal Justice Planning Council

**October 15:**  
Jim Gerrard, Director  
Indianapolis Department of Public Works



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