

# Sixty Years Of Neighborhood Activism: The McKownville Improvement Association

(Note: The Enterprise originally intended to publish histories of not-for-profit local organizations in its centennial commemorative issue. The article below was submitted by Don Reeb, past president of the McKownville Improvement Association. (B. H.)

## By DON REEB

When the McKownville Improvement Association first met in the schoolhouse at Schoolhouse Road and Western Ave. in May 1924, the issue was to get trackless trolley service into McKownville. The association was successful and the founding meeting set the pattern for the next 60 years — neighbors meeting to make sure that McKownville becomes a better place to live.

The particular issues that the association members discussed are nearly as fascinating as the names of the people who participated in the discussions. No complete record of either exists and association records prior to 1955 are especially scarce. If any reader has copies of minutes of meetings prior to 1955, the association's president, Jim Lane, would like to have the opportunity to make copies.

The first president was Walter Marden. Other presidents (or officers) were: John Feldman,

Walter Seim, Ainsworth Scott, Justin Tiernan, C. J. Knoener, August Lux, Mrs. Van Loan, Mr. Roach, Wendell Holmes, Fred Abele, William Mohr, William Nelson, Harry W. Reynders, Gerald Hamm, Charles Maneri, Hugh Prytherch, Andrew Valenti, Donald Munn, James Barber, John Purdy, Mel Behn, John Esler, Tim Cohan, myself (Don Reeb), Lindsay Childs and Jim Lane.

Discussions which appear in the association's records are:

1924: Trackless trolley service for McKownville.

1933: A firehouse for McKownville and sidewalks on Western Ave. (there are still no sidewalks on the south side of Western Ave.).

1934: Sewer problems on Arcadia and Hillcrest.

1937: The formation of a water and sewer district was requested but not achieved.

1940: Association worked to get Western Ave. widened to four lanes.

1945: Tracey, Providence, Warren and Mercer Sts. added to McKownville.

1946: Another attempt to get a sewer and water district was again not successful.

1947: Association gets town to form zoning commission.

1948: Association holds bazaar to redecorate firehall.

1949: First of many requests for a traffic signal at Fuller and Western and another at Schoolhouse and Western; threat to cut back bus service thwarted by association.

1950: Traffic signal again requested for Fuller Road and at Schoolhouse Road and again denied; new water service becomes available.

1951: Traffic signal for Fuller Road approved; Thruway construction silts reservoir; traffic lights for McKown Road and Arcadia requested but not successful.

1953: Thruway Authority agrees to dredge reservoir.

1955: Stuyvesant Plaza property rezoned.

1956: Test wells to augment reservoir drilled.

1957: Arterial highway system for Albany discussed.

1960: Water problems discussed.  
1962: Quadrini's construction near Hillcrest and sewer problems discussed.

1963: State university construction begins.

1964: Traffic light at McKown Road approved after a child living on Ayre Drive was killed crossing Western Ave.; parking on Fuller Road banned due to university construction; McKownville Water Advisory Board formed; association requests town to take steps to protect church pond (pond behind McKownville Methodist Church) as water source for McKownville.

1965: The severe drought is discussed at the annual meeting; a new firehouse is approved by referendum (357 to 64); Republican primary between Gordon Robinson and Carl Walters is discussed; village incorporation of McKownville is proposed.

1966: Apartment house on Fuller Road opposed along with rezoning of Schoolhouse Road corner property.

1967: The construction of 1450 Western Ave. is announced; letters are sent complaining about the heating plant of the state university; the association requests that a lease of the church pond property be entered into.

1968: Another commercial development, Dunkin' Donuts, is opposed by the association.

1970: Flouridation of the water system begins and McKown Grove closes.

1971: New sewers for McKownville are announced.

1972: Parking problems on Elmwood caused by doctor's offices lead to petition drive.

1973: Rezoning on Western Ave. properties opposed.

1975: Church pond dam is destroyed, flooding Western Ave.; arsonist burns several garages in McKownville.

1976: Association successfully opposes the widening of Western Ave.

1978: Pyramid announces its plans to construct shopping center on church pond site; association expresses concern; consolidation of water district is defeated.

1979: Hearing on Pyramid proposal delayed; association hires attorney to fight Pyramid.

1980: Numerous community groups vote to oppose Pyramid; village incorporation for McKownville again discussed; water district consolidation approved.

1982: Neighborhood Watch is instituted and Pyramid battle continues.

1983: Commercial rezoning of 50 Fuller Road is successfully opposed by the association; Pyramid-Crossgates is opened.

1984: The town establishes a park on Schoolhouse Road; the pump house for the reservoir becomes a community hall and a visitors center.

The association's concerns have hardly varied from the beginning; water and sewer service, commercial zoning and sidewalks, traffic signals and bus service. The issues are endlessly repeated in the association's records. It is often difficult to tell which year the records are for, the issues are so similar year after year.

For 60 years, the McKownville Improvement Association has been an active voice in the community. We are proud to salute The Altamont Enterprise in its 100 years of service to the community.