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First Ward News -- Sabra Briere, Ann Arbor City Council.  
On the agenda, updates and what's on the horizon.

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## Sabra Briere

**First Ward, City Council**

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Dear neighbors,

I've been working on and off on this update for the last three weeks. During that time, the leaves have continued to fall, we've had frost, and I really enjoyed the sunny, cool days of mid-autumn. I know the bleak days of winter will follow, but who can resist a glorious day?

## Transportation

We've all seen some changes in the streets around town. Some of these welcome changes are also nuisances while construction occurs.

It's significant to contemplate proposed changes in our transportation system – AATA, local Bus Rapid Transit, the potential for commuter rail and high speed rail, biking and walking routes. It is difficult to pay attention to all of the various plans and the shifting priorities at the City. So, if you want to know what everyone is contemplating, here's a link to the [2009 Transportation Plan](#). And another link to the [2007 Non-motorized Transportation Plan](#).

The Stadium Bridges will be rebuilt, starting this month. Local streets (Rose, White) are closed to through traffic starting November 7<sup>th</sup>. South State and East Stadium will be closed on

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November 28, 2011. State Street will reopen mid-December.

Here's a [link](#) to the press release. The [de 3 ated website](#) provides updated information about detours, and construction timing.

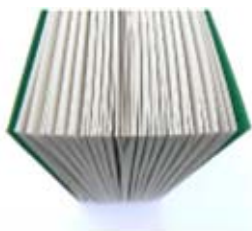


## Coffee wakes some of us up

I hold office hours 7:30 to 9 am on Mondays at the Northside Grill.

While I'm there, I meet with neighbors from all over our community to discuss the issues that concern them -- potholes, parks, trash pickup, construction noise, planning, zoning, City staffing and changes they like or don't like.

The folks at the Northside put up with political talk early in the morning. If you see me there, please wave, and if you have time, please, join me for coffee and a chat.



The plans for the Fuller Road Station continue to move slowly. This item is not on the agenda, but frequently items related to the project appear. Here's a [link](#) to the impact study (from 2009) related to traffic at Fuller, Maiden Lane and East Medical Center Drive, and here's the most current information I could find regarding the [State Rail Plan](#).

Just released (on November 1) is the [draft Washtenaw Area Transportation Study \(WATS\) on Complete Streets](#). Complete Streets is a state-wide initiative to plan all local street and road improvements with consideration for pedestrians, bikers, those with limited mobility and children.

Finally, AATA continues to try to perfect its plan, **Moving You Forward**. Here's a [link](#) to that website.

OK. Not everyone is in favor of the City's **pedestrian crosswalk ordinance**. (You can laugh, here.)

Members of Council and members of the community have been working to consider amendments to the ordinance that can bring clarity to both pedestrian and driver actions. The City staff will present their findings (they were asked to research possible improvements in lighting and signage) on Thursday, November 10.

At the same meeting, Council members may bring forward an amended ordinance for consideration. I've drafted the amendments, and other Council members – along with the legal staff – are making certain the proposed changes are an actual improvement.

## About that election

I'm not here to tell you how to vote (although I remind you [to](#) vote). There are three sections of the ballot: Partisan (Council); Non-Partisan (School Board) and Proposals (charter amendments).

**On the non-partisan section of the ballot**, 6 people are vying for

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So, here's the story. Last year I went to a fundraiser for Common Language Bookstore. As is true of many people at the fundraiser, I bid on a silent auction item. Unusually, I won. What does that have to do with anything? I won the chance to be a character in the next murder mystery by Ellen Hart!

### The book is out -- *The lost ladies of Lost Lake.*

Oh, and the character I won? Think 1968, SDS, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, bombing . . . and a serious secret identity.

I am also reading **Thinking Fast and Slow**, by Daniel Kahneman - about how people make decisions, and what happens when we trust our snap judgement.

2 spots. Two of those people are incumbents; four are challengers. I read the [release](#) of the League of Women Voters debate in the Ann Arbor Chronicle and the coverage in the Ann Arbor Observer. With news reports, it's always valuable to read between the lines, so I also listened to the CTN coverage of the League of Women Voters debate.

During August and September, as the community was coming to grips with the school system's budget decision impacts, [Simone Lightfoot](#) was the only member of the School Board running in this year's election who showed up to listen to parents.

On the proposals section of the ballot, Ann Arbor Public Schools is asking for a millage to upgrade technology. Perhaps you would rather upgrade classroom experience, or teacher quality and/or compensation. You might even want to improve the busing system. Unfortunately, state law prohibits going to the voters to ask for millages that would pay for classroom books, teacher salaries, and even buses. The schools can ask for a millage that would fund upgrades to school and classroom technology. If the millage passes, these upgrades won't come from those funds limited by state law, and the school system should be able to broaden the use of their general fund dollars.

I've had a number of residents ask me about **Proposal #3**. This proposal implements the [2005 Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission](#) report on the retirement board.

In 2005, the City received a report from the Blue Ribbon Committee with the charge of reviewing the policies, administration, and management of the City of Ann Arbor Employees' Retirement System. That committee made several recommendations for improving the accountability and independence of the City's Employees Retirement Board of Trustees. Among those recommendations were to remove the City Administrator from the Board and to increase the number of *non-employees* as trustees.

Although it's been six years since this report was presented to Council, the report in general and these recommendations in particular are routinely supported by those concerned with the City's retirement program. It's past time that these

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recommendations were followed.

In order to do this, it's necessary to amend the City Charter. That's what Proposal 3 does.

And if you are interested, here's a [link](#) to the Blue Ribbon Report.

## Millages

Other members of Council have voiced concern about both the streets millage or the sidewalk millage. I have thoughts about the millages, both pro and con.

For instance, I've looked closely at what the City is doing with the millage dollars from the [current millage](#). I have talked with staff members about the City's expectation for future years, too.

I know that City staff members were told to increase the fund balance in the streets millage fund, so that this money could be used (if necessary) for rebuilding the Stadium Bridges. The City received notification [last October](#) that we would receive nearly \$17 million to rebuild these bridges. This year the City has begun spending the accumulated dollars on long-delayed street reconstruction projects. (See the Stadium Bridge section, above, for updates on the construction.) I am confident that the City is working on the streets, because there are days when I just cannot get around. Beakes Street, Fuller Road, Summit Street, Miller Road, and Stadium have all been improved, at least in part, over the last few months. I cannot tell you that all the funds the City saved -- and doesn't need -- for the Stadium Bridges will be spent by the end of June, 2012. , but the plans for next year's construction season are already being finalized.

I wish I could count the many complaints I've heard in the last four years about the sidewalk repair program. Individual property owners, confronted by the City's demand that they repair their sidewalks, have voiced concerns about notification, whether they should be responsible for 'that' walkway, the quality of work done by the 'recommended' construction companies, having the City tear out the work they just completed to install curb ramps -- and most

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especially, that the cost was too major a burden on people just trying to make ends meet.

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The Council has been assured that all of the sidewalks currently marked will be repaired – at the expense of the adjacent property owner. Even if the marks have worn off, the City has photographs and addresses, and the plan is to get everything fixed before the end of June, 2012. Period.

For me, this means the sidewalk on North Main will be repaired. The sidewalk adjacent to the empty lot at the corner of Broadway and Maiden Lane will be repaired. Your neighbors' sidewalks will be repaired, too. Period. (So, if you think some sidewalk is being missed, please tell me [sabra.briere@gmail.com](mailto:sabra.briere@gmail.com).)

This will be done whether or not the sidewalk millage passes.

When I was elected to Council in 2007, the sidewalk repair program was not working well. In the spring of 2008 the City held a number of meetings with residents to explain the program and hear concerns. I attended all of these meetings, but at the first one I asked why we hadn't funded this program through a millage, with the City doing all the work. The answer was that there was concern a millage wouldn't pass.

I've confronted the need to repair the sidewalk in front of my house, as many others have done. I don't know whether 1/8 mill is the right amount for the millage, too much or too little. But I would still rather have the City maintain all the sidewalks and leave me out of the process – finding a contractor, making phone calls, getting permits, arranging inspections – not what I want to spend my time on. Is it what you want to keep doing in the future?

(The City never was responsible for fixing sidewalks in the past – they just didn't enforce the ordinance often before 2006.)

On October 17th the Council passed a [Resolution of Intent](#) that spelled out exactly how the City expects to use the streets and bridges and the sidewalk millages. I drafted this resolution.

I'm not really comfortable with the [Percent for Art program](#) receiving

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funds from crack filling, resurfacing, and sidewalk ramps. I understand that all infrastructure projects to the Council are considered capital improvements, but I'd like to see some brakes on the funding for public art. To this end, I proposed a [change to the ordinance](#) (postponed from the October 3rd meeting) regarding funding from the (proposed) streets and bridges millage and the sidewalk millage. The Council will consider this ordinance amendment on November 21 – after the AAPAC presentation at the working session on November 14, and after the vote on the millage.

## On the Agenda

Because the election will be held on Tuesday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, the regular Council meeting has been postponed to Thursday, November 10<sup>th</sup>. Here's a [link](#) to the documents that support the agenda.

## Public Hearings

The Council will hold a public hearing on the Varsity Planned Project. Planned Projects differ from Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). There is no proposed change in zoning, and so this vote doesn't require two readings and an ordinance change. The vote on the Varsity (a student-oriented building on East Washington (running through the block to East Huron) is a vote on a resolution. The public hearing and vote will be on the same night. This will be the only time the Council will vote on the project as a whole.

There will be two public hearings on amending the retiree health benefits plan and the retirement system to accommodate changes to the contracts of the Police Officer's Association and AFSCME union members.

There will be a public hearing on a proposed change to the Taxicab ordinance – outlining some improvements to the ordinance.

## Ordinances

The Council will vote on the ordinances that would alter retiree health benefits and the retirement system so as to accommodate

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new contracts with AAPOA and AFSCME. The amendments to the Taxicab Ordinance will be considered

There may be a proposed amendment to the Pedestrians in Crosswalks ordinance. I drafted the amendment, and other members of Council (and the legal staff) are checking it for clarity and whether it improves the ordinance. If all the editing is completed, that amendment should be added to the agenda on Monday. Because the Council meeting is delayed, this should still provide at least three full days before the Council considers the amendment.

If everything works as I imagine, the Council will pass the ordinance amendment at First Reading, and have a public hearing on the amendment either Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup> or Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>.

## Resolutions

In addition to the resolution to approve the Varsity planned project, the Council will vote on two land acquisitions (in Ann Arbor and Northfield townships, costs to be shared with various other funding sources).

The Council will also vote on a revised contract with RecycleBank. In July I asked you to respond to a survey about recycling. The [link](#) takes you to the responses.




I shared these responses with members of Council and the City staff members who work with recycling. The Council voted to request an amendment to the contract, decreasing the amount paid annually and retaining the right to cancel the contract during the next budget cycle. This proposed contract amendment is the result of that decision at Council.

Now the City is running its own [survey](#). Please feel comfortable giving your feedback to the City on this issue. **The survey will close on November 30, 2011.**

Another resolution of interest – at least, to me – is an amendment

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to the contract for civil engineers to continue working on the West  
 Park hydraulic system (see air concentra  s faded after  Like  C

installation, and there have been reports of significant upstream  
 damage during heavy rain events). The [documents](#) in support of  
 this resolution include a revised contract (draft), a scope of work,  
 and a detailed itemization for the cost of the additional work.

As always, please share this newsletter as widely as you choose.  
 You can always call or [email](#), and I'd be happy to talk with you.



### Take a Survey for the City

The City is running its own [survey](#) on RecycleBank. Please give your feedback to the City on this issue.

**The survey will close on November 30, 2011.**



### Small steps

**The budget difficulties continue, and those problems affect many in our community.** I've been to listen to those engaged in **Occupy Ann Arbor**. I agree that there's a lot



The City Council will hear more about the Percent for Art program on November 14 (Monday) at a working session. The Council will vote on whether to amend the Percent for Art ordinance on November 21.

There will be a [public meeting](#) on November 15th at Wines Elementary School about ideas for improving Newport Road north of Sunset. The meeting starts at 6:30 pm. Please come, see what the staff has proposed, and offer your comments and suggestions.



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of economic disparity in our country, but still think that Ann Arbor's residents are generous and tolerant.

At the October 17th Council meeting, the Council approved a budget amendment (\$25,000) that will help to fund the Warming Center at the Delonis Center this winter. The Chief of Police and the new City Administrator expect to present a plan that will allow the City to rehire police. The first police hired will be those who were laid off on July 1.

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