

**Whittier Alliance Board Meeting**  
**April 23, 2015 6-8:30pm**  
**Whittier Park**

**Present:** Erica Christ, Andy Cohen, Ted Irgens, Laura Jean, Christina Le, Charles Nguyen, Mike O'Dell, Jesse Oyervides, Araceli Perez, Natascha Shawver, Erin Sjoquist, Daphna Stromberg, Brett Vandebussche **Absent:** David Bagley, Grayson Carr, Joan Vorderbruggen, Kenya Weathers  
**Staff:** Marian Biehn, Rita Stodolka, Camilla Jamal  
**Guests:** Wade McLaughlin, Dylan Thomas

**Call to Order, Erica Christ**

The Board meeting was called to order by Board Chair **Erica Christ at 6:09** with the establishment of a quorum. Standard of Conduct/Conflict of Interest policy was noted. The April agenda was reviewed and a **Motion** to approve with the addition of three topics under Old/New Business: Black Forest anniversary party, Pleasant Ave house, death in the neighborhood **Carried**.

**Comments from the Chair:** The chair welcomed newly elected and renewed board members, including reps from the Business Association (BA). The Executive Committee roles (Board Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) will be elected at this meeting. Attendees introduced themselves. The new Community Outreach person for the Somali community, Camilla Fartun Jamal, introduced herself and gave the group a little background info – she is new to Minnesota, moving from Fargo, ND. Getting to know the neighborhood, meeting a lot of people and identifying the needs of the Somali families. She is at Whittier two days per week, at Lyndale three.

Board meetings typically follow Robert's Rules of Order. Motions need a second and are only forwarded if passed. The board receives motions from the CI and BA, which require final action from the board to become a neighborhood position. Processes can be explained as they come up. Any member of the board can call for the meeting to go to Executive Session. During an Executive Session, guests and sometimes staff are asked to leave the room and minutes are not taken. Typically Executive Session is called to discuss sensitive and confidential information. The Whittier Alliance values all points of view, not consensus. Diverse opinions are important to the process. The WA Board is advisory only – the board motions are taken into consideration by governing bodies but are not binding. The hope is to influence things, start conversation and have the n'hood perspective considered in a decision. An acronym guide was developed and distributed to new board members. Copies available on request.

Board members may comment on social media, etc. as a resident but only Erica or Marian can comment on the record on behalf of the Whittier Alliance.

**Secretary's Report, Natascha Shawver**

It's the start of the board year, so attendance starts fresh. The minutes from the March board meeting were presented and a **Motion** to approve the as written **Carried**.

**Executive Committee member elections:** The Executive Committee is made up of the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Being on the Executive Committee requires two additional meetings per month: Executive Committee and Finance Committee, typically running back-to-back. Occasionally the Executive Committee takes action on items of urgency that happen before the regularly scheduled board meeting. Any actions taken outside the regular board meeting are reported back to the board. Erica Christ was nominated for and accepted nomination for Board Chair. Three calls for nominations were made for additional nominations. Erica Christ **elected to Board Chair 12-0-1**

Laura Jean was nominated for and accepted nomination for Board Vice-Chair. Three calls for nominations were made for additional nominations. Laura Jean **elected to Board Vice-Chair 12-0-1**

Natascha Shawver was nominated for and accepted nomination for Board Secretary. Three calls for nominations were made for additional nominations. Natascha Shawver was **elected to Board Secretary 12-0-1**

The current Board Treasurer, Tom Bissen, was absent and unable to accept a nomination for the position. A **Motion** to table the election of Board Treasurer until next month **Carried. 13-0-0**

**Board roster and meeting dates (2015-2016):** The board meets the fourth Thursday of each month except November and December, which will be finalized later. The Board Roster is for internal contact purposes only and should not be shared with anyone outside the board. The WA staff does not give out contact information. A copy of the roster was passed around for any corrections or additions.

#### **Executive Committee**

**Affordable Housing Complaint:** The Whittier Alliance signed on to a complaint against the Met Council and the City of Minneapolis along with several other neighborhoods. The complaint was initiated by Myron Orfield and filed by Washington DC attorney Michael Allen who is doing it pro bono, and is a call for policy changes. The complaint outlines several policies that have led to a concentration of poverty in certain areas and the resulting consequences, like poor school performance. The Whittier Alliance is supporting the complaint as the Whittier Neighborhood has one of the highest concentrations of subsidized housing and poverty in the city. The desired outcome of the complaint is that policies would change for more equitable housing choice throughout the city for any future development. It would not force any existing buildings out of the neighborhood.

The Affordable Housing referred to in the complaint is available only to individuals under a certain income level through tax subsidies. A whole building could be considered under this definition even if all of the units aren't subsidized. The owners of these buildings usually have to agree to keep the affordable housing for a specified period of time, and they get tax credits in return. One policy sought for change is the application of points to determine where to place housing. Currently, access to transportation gets the highest number of points, basically taking places like Eden Prairie out of the running to build affordable housing. The argument is being made that they are investing in the areas of poverty. And somehow the investment itself is a good thing. But, there isn't job creation, etc. Also, studies have shown that people living in affordable housing aren't dependent on public transportation; they typically own a car. Several legislatures, including Karen Clarke, have signed onto the complaint as they see that change is needed. Another concern is how the city is able to self-report their success to the Federal Government to continue receiving funding for the affordable housing projects. The complaint does not address issues of affordability in the general housing market. Although the complaint deals with the Fair Housing Act and concentration, it doesn't address the same issues with sober/supportive housing being addressed with NuWay.

**Board Meet & Greet:** Sat. May 30, 10 am at Glam Doll Donuts. A casual gathering; find out what's going on in the neighborhood; invite neighbors. The last one had a good turnout.

**Board Training:** Board training is available through MAP for Nonprofits. A schedule of upcoming training was handed out. They have training for new and experienced board members. Call the WA office to register – it will be paid for by the WA. The Accountant will be at a future board meeting to discuss finances, NRP financing, etc.

**US District Court Complaint:** The Whittier Alliance is being sued in Federal court by Basim Sabri, et al. In March 2015, Sabri filed an injunction in an attempt to stop the WA Annual Meeting from taking place on March 26, 2015. The injunction was denied and the Annual Meeting took place as scheduled but required a response to the court by the WA by April 1. The Whittier Alliance has legal representation, which should be covered under the WA Directors and Officers insurance policy. One of the claims is that the WA is an active arm of the City and therefore subject to broader compliances. The WA is an automatus non-profit in the St of MN. Sabri is also suing the City on the same grounds. The court date is May 19, 2015.

This is somewhat of a retreading of the grievance (which went through the full process and was found not to have merit) early in the year. Board membership has legal and fiduciary responsibilities; board membership can be qualified. By-Laws were updated to make the criteria clearer. Jesse filled in

that Sabri claims to be the spokesperson and defender of the Somali community and that WA isn't, however, the Somali media had a major story about this stating no-one represents the Somali community but themselves.

**Executive session 7:15 p.m. – 8 p.m.**

**Treasurer's Report, Erica Christ**

The March balance sheet shows we are due money from Citizen Participation Program. The funding should be coming soon since we filed the 2014 Annual Report. Unrestricted funds amount is all the money earned through fundraising, etc. that hasn't been spent. This is an important category as this is fully WA money without restrictions. The May Day Soirée will bring in around \$15,000 – it's a lot of work, but also a community event and a lot of fun. Expenses are low thanks to donations and volunteers. The budget column amounts are the anticipated income or expense for each row item.

The single family and 3R loan guidelines are nearly ready to launch. Interest rates will be 2%. Limit will be \$25,000 for single family, higher for multi depending on # of units. Once the loans are paid back, the funds become unrestricted. Jesse mentioned the city has 0% loans available for people who may not be permitted to pay interest for religious reasons. A business loan and historic preservation loan documents will be drafted soon. It's uncertain, but probably likely, that someone could get both a single family and historic preservation loan – the purpose being historic rehab is usually more costly. The 2% interest just covers loan expenses. The WA pays GMHC for marketing.

**FC Motion 1:** The Finance Committee accepts the Whittier Alliance March 2015 financial report

**Motion Carried**

**Acting Committee Reports & Motions**

**Community Issues – Brett Vandebussche, Chair:** Brett summarized the presentation from Beth Dryden regarding her property at 2200 Harriet. Ms. Dryden was looking for support for a parking variance to legalize the 6th unit. The motion to support the variance passed, but there were objections from attendees, one being a neighbor didn't think she was keeping up the property. It's common for apartments to have units that are not on record with the city. The city is starting to crack down, however. The board discussed how the city is moving toward a zero parking requirement anyway, so it's a matter of formality. Most agreed that the building upkeep, etc. were irrelevant to the motion however it is the only opportunity the neighborhood has to bring attention to other issues and general livability of a property. The info might not be relevant to the request but it is relevant to the quality of the neighborhood. A friendly amendment to the board motion to require conditions was not accepted.

**BD Motion 1:** The Whittier Alliance Board of Directors supports the request for a parking variance for 2200 Harriet Ave. **Motion Carried. 10-1-2**

Other comments regarding the property will be included in the letter that gets sent to the property owner and the City.

**Business Association – Andy Cohen, Chair:** The BA met at the Wedge Table. The group discussed potential requirements for the Commercial Revolving Loan Fund, as the underwriting for this program hasn't begun. The group agreed that preference should be given for projects aimed at job growth. The board also added that it could be equally important to consider loans to save jobs.

**Strategic Plan**

**Housing – NuWay:** Ted Irgens gave a recap of the history and WA position for 2118 Blaisdell Ave, purchased by NuWay over a year ago. The city granted NuWay the variance they requested to waive the ¼ mile requirement. Ted led an appeal, along with more than 450 and the support of the WA, which was denied. Ted spent several hours in discussion with City Council but it isn't a priority – Whittier is ideal for these facilities as it has large housing for cheap. The ¼ mile requirement exists to disallow supportive/sober housing to be within a ¼ mile of similar housing. The city continues to grant the requests, which has created a high concentration of this type of housing in Whittier. The City continues

to cite Federal Fair Housing Laws as the reason. However, it's the WA position that concentrating the housing is against fair housing laws by not allowing people in recovery or with other disabilities options for housing choice elsewhere. It essentially institutionalizes the residents, which studies have shown does not support recovery as well as being around more people outside the recovery community. NuWay itself has five other facilities within ¼ mile of 2118. Although the accommodation was granted, if NuWay moves ahead with their facility they would need to apply for a conditional use permit.

The WA requested a historic designation for 2118, which requires a study. The study could take up to a year, during which time NuWay cannot move ahead with renovations. The city also has other zoning laws that make only certain areas of the city eligible for this type of housing – less than 7%. So, even if Linden Hills wanted to open a home to individuals in recovery they couldn't. The city is talking about getting rid of the ¼ mile requirement as well – neighborhoods couldn't complain, then.

**Organizational Sustainability--Fund Development, Laura Jean:** The task force met and decided on three areas of focus: grants, earned income, expanding donor base. Each priority will form a task force, meet a few times and report back to the group with recommendations in July/August 2015. A sign-up was passed around. Laura Jean will provide additional details at the next meeting.

Marian noted that Lyndale wants to create a multi-neighborhood discount card for members. Details unknown

#### **Staff Reports**

Marian's report was handed out. The Manager of Community Engagement position was reposted. Haven't received the higher caliber résumés. Would like to make it more of a career instead of entry-level position. Might break up some responsibilities into other positions.

**Old and New Business: May Day Soirée:** Always a fun event with lots of good support from Whittier businesses and residents. Lots of work but the only event we charge for and it is a good party. The board was reminded to sell tickets. **Earth Day Cleanup:** April 25 - Whittier Park, 9:30 a.m. – noon

**World of Whittier:** Date, time, location TBD. A group of youth serving organizations met for initial planning. Might not happen until September. **Annual Meeting mailings:** a summary of mailing data was distributed. The data shows that WA mailing for Annual Meeting went to about 50% +/- households with unit numbers (rental, condo). 40% of attendees were from same. High percentage of returned postcards were from apartments. Shows the outreach is there; gets difficult because of rental turnover.

**Black Forest Inn Anniversary Party:** weekend of May 15. Assembling volunteers to sell wrist bands (needed to purchase alcohol). There will be entertainment, ghost hunting with twin cities paranormal society, food drink, etc. Sign-up to sell wrist bands – contact Marian or Erica. Proceeds benefit Whittier Alliance.

**Houses:** LHENA offered to sell us three houses for \$1 each, but WA would have to pay to move them. Marian inquired and the cost would be prohibitive, \$200,000+. Cost to move includes moving electrical lines and cutting down ancient elm trees. The home at 2427 Pleasant is being rehabilitated by the Veteran's, who were named to own the home in Carl Vander Branden's will.

**Death:** 2015 calendar featured immigrants from all over the world. Our January feature, Nina Bulavitsky sadly passed away. Her story is interesting and printed in the calendar.

**Adjourn:** 8:39 Minutes respectfully submitted by Rita Stodolka, Admin Assistant

Meeting Minutes Approved on \_\_\_\_\_

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Erica Christ, Board Chair

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Natascha Shawver, Board Secretary