

Whittier Housing Issues Committee Meeting Minutes
June 16, 2020, 6:30-8:00pm
Zoom Digital Meeting

Attendees: *Stephanie Brown, *Brigid Higgins, *Guin Keith, *Shannon Dotson, *Nate Broadbridge, *Cat Hammond, *Erin Sjoquist, *Matt Ides, *Jo Ann Musumeci, *Emma Sherman, *Zachary Levonian, *Margo Fritz, *Nicole Weiler, *Cyndi Hovey, Aaron Paul Keith, Jonny Moses, Alex Aspell, John Champe

Staff: Kaley Brown

Speakers: William Wells (Wells & Co. Architects), Eric Ollestad (Value Homes, LLC), City Council President/Ward 10 Representative Lisa Bender

**Asterisk indicates they are a registered voter*

Welcome & recognize Standard of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy.

Motion to approve agenda. **Seconded. Motion carries.**

Motion to approve May meeting minutes. **Seconded. Motion carries.**

Introductions.

Development Proposal - 2413 1st Ave S - Value Homes

- 6 unit apartment proposal designed to look like an old house with a pitched roof
- William Wells - architect located in south Mpls that only does housing projects; this is their first project in Whittier
- Eric Ollestad - Value Homes based in Minneapolis; often chooses luxury finishes and layouts with quality materials that last; looking to provide quality living experience including building maintenance and overall management
- The 2040 Comp Plan currently requires them to seek a variance but after zoning is updated it would not be needed
- May 19th & June 16th - 2 presentations to the WA Housing Issues Committee
- Have not been given hearing dates for Heritage Preservation Commission or Planning Commission yet

PROJECT DESIGN

- They designed a building that fits in rather than standing out in the context of the rest of the block
- 20' setback in the front facing west and a 10'6" setback on the south with new trees getting planted to the south
- Enclosed trash and recycling + organic recycling waste area adjacent to the alley on the east side
- Extra long parking spaces to allow for guests or others to pull in behind residents in one space to help alleviate scarce street parking
- The 2 variances on the project: maneuvering variance to turn into the alley into the surface parking because it's more than 4 units; the other is to allow for 6 units on the property under its current zoning classification
- Group discussion on strategies the developer could employ to help retain water onsite and reduce the amount of runoff; it is agreed upon that they will employ some measure of water retention such as pervious pavers, as they have not had success with rain gardens in past projects.

Motion: To approve the project under the condition that the developer continue to explore strategies for including more water filtration considerations such as pervious pavers. **Motion seconded. Motion carries.**

-Request to include mention of drainage and parking concerns in the letter of support we write for the project

Other Development Updates

-CommonBond Communities - Whittier Community Housing Repairs and New Building Construction - 2609 Blaisdell Ave; WA approved letter endorsing Housing Issues decision at May meeting

-Lupe Development - Lake Street Dwelling project at Lake & Harriet: 1 market rate building and 1 affordable building (tax credits); they recommitted on the record to allowing community access to their business center and club room for meetings, events, other uses; we will continue looking into free computer center access for neighbors who could use that service

-North Bay Project on 4th Ave - moving through the City process; this committee thus far has declined to take a position following their two presentations

Reminder about topic-based working groups:

Anti-displacement group - strategies to combat rising rents

Kmart parcel - starting to build a group people with interest in helping to shape how we organize and facilitate conversations on what we want to see on this parcel of land

New development review team - reviewing development proposals with developers beforehand to share our process, set expectations for engaging with the committee, and get a sense of their project

Question: How can we still field and engage with development presentations without it taking up so much of our meeting time each month?

Idea: What about having the developers record their presentation beforehand, allowing people to watch them and develop questions, comments in advance of the meeting time to make the discussion section more efficient? (Idea was seconded; needs more consideration.)

Open Discussion with CP Lisa Bender on intersections of Community Safety and Housing

-Question: How to connect some of the mobilization that has come about the past few weeks into a longer term, sustainable mechanism to connect neighbors, build relationships, and reimagine public safety?

-Lisa Bender: What she's hearing from her residents around public safety is different for the most part across her ward from what she's heard each of the past 6 years which is significant. Council members will be looking to the expertise in our own community and across the country that is interested in supporting Minneapolis in healing and finding a path forward.

-Question: How to work together to take care of unsheltered neighbors, and to support them in taking care of themselves? How to hold elected leaders accountable for turning a blind eye to the problem?

-Lisa Bender: 1st time in 6-7 years in office that we've had budget cuts; working hard to avoid layoffs and center race equity in those decisions; city is stepping up here and across the country, but we are feeling the consequences of federal, state, and county walking away from our communities; City does not have staff to respond and focus on the issue of homelessness; she maintains that having a large encampment in a residential area is never in the interest of good public health; was working very hard to get them into hotels.

Comment: Useful to know that, but it's not equitable to enact a solution only when it's politically convenient

Comment: Interested in creating a subgroup of this committee focused on supporting or advocating for unhoused neighbors; interested in seeing WA put resources and more organized support around this item

-Several committee members indicate interest in working on this subgroup; the group will meet with Lisa Bender to learn more about the pitfalls and landscape of this issue and how/where they could be effective; they will find a time to meet in the coming weeks.

Question for ongoing discussion: How have other cities approached the challenge of reimagining public safety? What are some ways we can borrow or learn from? Creative ideas we can push for with the Housing Issues Committee here?

Comment: Lisa Bender is doing a great job in difficult circumstances. How to find balance in different types of housing to have something for everyone?

Comment/Question: Could there become a point at which new developments are required to play into new neighborhood schematics in terms of community safety, public good.

Lisa Bender: Ward 10 community members have been involved in police abolition programs - Reclaim the Block, Black Visions, and others - long before George was murdered, and she defers to them in terms of leading the way forward; vote on a new charter amendment at the City council in a few weeks is an opportunity to reimagine public safety in the short term. Longer term its about redistribution of investment in violence prevention efforts and alternative ideas of public safety; acknowledging problems in the current system and identifying alternative ways that are rooted in equity and that do not replicate harms in the current policing system.

Lisa Bender: Thank you to all of you for continuing to show up and lending time and energy to these important conversations and letting me listen in.

Meeting adjourned at 8:03 pm.

Minutes submitted by Kaley Brown.