

Whittier Alliance Board of Directors
January 28, 2010, 6-8:30pm Whittier Elementary School

Present: Anthony Carchedi, Michael Tupper, Laura Jean, Erin Sjoquist, Elizabeth Grzechowiak, David Bagley, Christina Le, Larry Ludeman, Felino de la Pena, Erica Christ, David Schuster **Absent:** Tom Bissen, Maurice Battle, Jesse Oyervides, Daphna Stromberg, Chris Gottshall, Lisa Vecoli **Staff:** Marian Biehn, Jessica Rosenberg
Guest: Dylan Thomas (Southwest Journal), Henry Silas Grzechowiak (Baby)

Call to Order: Chair Erica Christ called The Board of Director's meeting to order at 6:16pm. The Standard of Conduct was noted. The draft agenda was presented and additions or changes were requested. Laura requested an affordable housing announcement be added to Old and New Business. Marian has a reinstatement to be added to the agenda. A **Motion** to approve the agenda as amended **Carried.**

Comments from the Chair: We're in a phase with very little in the pipeline to respond to, where we can do planning. We'll be having some more meetings and time during meetings for issue discussion. The first goal will be recruiting more people to be involved, so that it isn't the same people all the time.

Secretary' Report: **Elizabeth Grzechowiak** presented the Dec 17th Board Minutes and asked for changes or additions. Hearing none, a **Motion** to approve as written **Carried.** The Board Meeting attendance was reviewed with misses and resignation. Maurice Battle, nonprofit rep from the BA, is missing his third meeting, and has submitted a written request to be reinstated. A **Motion** to reinstate Maurice was made and **Carried.** Board Meeting Attendance: 5-0, 7-1, 5-2, 1-3 misses; 2-resign. Open seat -At Large '10 & '11. We have board openings: a CI Chair, an open 2011 seat, and 5 people whose board terms are expiring at the Annual Meeting. If your seat is up this year, please let Erica or Marian know, and think about how you can help recruit new board members. Larry, Daphna, Tom and Jesse's seats will be up. We could elect or appoint someone for the one year 2011 seat.

Executive Committee: **Erica Christ. Set up Task Forces:** We have been talking about all of the task forces we're going to start; we're having a hard time getting them off the ground. They are all of interest, but don't yet have a clear task. Realistically, we need to figure out who is going to show up to the meetings. Marian wrote job descriptions, and we need people to take different parts of it. We need a new volunteer pool to draw from, or else it will just burn out the already involved people. We need to look at board candidates, think about housing, youth programs, etc., think about who would be good fits for what, and offer an invitation. The housing intern from a few years ago was from CURA? Would it be possible to get someone like that, from outside the n'hood? Yes, some work could be done by interns or expert volunteers from outside Whittier. The task forces and committees that we have or need to develop are **NRP Steering Committee, (Affordable) Housing Task Force, Historic Preservation, Strategic Planning** (developing our follow up to the NRP plan), and **Commercial Revitalization.** CR has a more specific task: what can we do to revitalize Nicollet Ave and the empty storefronts? There is overlap between all of the task forces and the strategic planning. Yes, we have to do some of this work before/while we strategic plan, because things are moving too fast to wait. CR is a good example: we know we want to do a website that lists all of the available properties in the n'hood, and advertise them. But when it comes to who do we pitch it to, and how, and what is the 5-10 year plan for Franklin, Nicollet, etc; that is more of a strategic plan.

What realistically can we do? Liz: committed to exec, might join a CR task force if it focused on Nicollet. LJ: Can commit lots of time, is good at research. Larry: Interested in commercial corridor analysis. (CR) David: Couple of hours every two weeks. Anthony: Clinton Ave task force, a few hours a

month. Mike: quarterly meetings. Not every task force. Erin: Task force every 4-6 weeks. David: 2-4 hours a month. Felino: Could join a task force. It sounds like we don't have enough time for everyone to go to everything; we can negotiate getting some board representation on each task force. We need to keep our ear on the ground for people who have a little bit of time and are interested in any of these issues.

Retreat-Strategic Planning: We'll take the first few hours you've got in the form of a board retreat, doing strategic planning for these task forces. Robert Thompson from NRP is willing to facilitate the first part of strategic planning. March 6th, 9:30-2:00. We can start laying out the agenda over email, and at the next board meeting. We usually have a lot of great ideas, but lack for follow through. Now we're trying to say where we're going, map out a timeline. We need vision: what do we have, what do we want to fix, how? If I have an idea, it presumes that my goal is the n'hood goal. But we need to have the other conversation: why do we need to do this, why do we see any of our goals as something we need to do? When David B. does this in business, they'll focus by reading books on similar stories. Does anyone know of any books or materials on what makes a vibrant inner city neighborhood healthy? Erica recommends *Planning to Stay: Learning to See the Physical Features of Your Neighborhood* by William R. Morrish and Catherine R. Brown. One part of the book talks about physical anchors of a neighborhood (ex, the cathedral in Cathedral Hill.) What we have is a black hole: the back of Kmart, sucking the life out of our n'hood. The book comes from a framework of if people are moving to a neighborhood intending to stay, they'll commit and make it healthier. Could we all have come to the meeting having read that, and it would give us a framework. We could agree/disagree, use that to build. There must be research on rental/ownership; single and family, etc. Then we could say here are our numbers, here's what healthy n'hoods look like. So has there been lack of initiative out of board meetings and strategic planning? We've set ourselves up to have to get together and do it again. We might have to budget some big money for someone to facilitate, like we did before NRP Phase II, engaging hundreds of residents. We paid someone to set up focus groups, run meetings on a breadth of topics that became strategies, that became ideas, and that was our NRP plan. If you look at our NRP plan, there's stuff we never did. The money is in strategy, not tasks, so some of the specific tasks didn't happen. Ex. in housing: convert vacant apartments to home ownership. Safety: some things haven't gone forward, because people don't get excited about safety anymore. So if we used the NRP plan to start the next one, would anyone want to put as much money on safety? MB sees a lot of ideas and things to do generated: a whole bag of things to take on. But so much day to day to do, it doesn't allow for the 1,000 ideas. Seems the board thinks it will happen on a staff level, but there's not the time for that. We need to prioritize, and recruit other people in the community to take it own. We have a tentative date for the retreat: Saturday, March 13th. We'll take time at the next meeting to talk more about the agenda.

Annual Meeting: Date Change! The Annual Meeting will be on Thursday, April 8th. We need 50 eligible voting members with their ID's. There will be 6 open seats unless we appoint someone to one of them. We will have an Annual Meeting workgroup. Our bi-laws outline some criteria: public notice has to go out at a certain time frame, etc. If we don't it is an invalid meeting and we have to do it again. The Annual Meeting is an obligatory thing, but we get good feedback: people like the n'hood display, mingling with elected officials, and getting to vote on stuff. For a lot of people it is the only meeting they go to. In your board packets you have the nomination forms for Good Biz and Good Neighbor. We'd like for it to come from the community, not just the Board.

Motions from Standing Committee: Joint BA/CI Mtg. Erica Christ. We had one meeting in Jan, with two similar motions for certificates of non-conforming use. In both it is more expedient than rezoning.

For the Fallout, has to do with the footprint over the building. They want to be an art center, which is allowed in their zoning, but they are smaller than the size city says an art center is supposed to be. The other was for a nail salon at 2610-2612-2614 1st Ave S. It is still zoned residential, even though no one has lived there for many years. It has been commercial for a while; neighbor said it isn't a problem. It isn't an ambitious use of the space, but right now it is storage. It is not slated to be rezoned. There is some sense that that is a buffer property, between C2 and residential. It could be OR. If they were going to rezone, it would be for commercial rezone. It is an imperfect solution to the problem of how do you protect the residential that starts next door. The parking lot accommodates the building, if it was changed to commercial, there wouldn't be parking.

This motion is moved, needs a second.

FYI: MB got one email from a rental property owner next door who was opposed to this CNCU b/c he doesn't like the use of the building as an art education center. And he thinks it is misnamed; that people are using it for overnight studio. **Discussion:** The name of the school is Source Ministries? Source Ministries does street ministries to young adults. They have another house down the street where staff from the Fallout work with homeless youth. They also have homes for young adults. It is questionable whether they are operating a homeless shelter or not. The Fallout is an art center where people can rent studio space: individual studios or performance rooms. Many people rent the individual studios. They also have educational programs for the homeless youth. So the people who rent the space are connected? They might support the mission, but anyone can rent the studio space, even atheists. They have owned that building for quite some time, have used it as an art center for 3-4 years. It just came to their attention that they have something inconsistent with zoning. They have another building down the street: Depending who you ask, it is either a commune or a shelter.

Board Motion: The Whittier Alliance Board of Directors supports the request for a certificate of non-conforming use for 2601 2nd Ave S. for use as an art education facility for the Fallout Art Coop.

Motion Carried 10-0-0.

The nail salon moving onto 1st Avenue: do we know about the business, why it is moving? Nothing wrong with the business: the property they were renting from got foreclosed. Is there any parking? Yes, they paved over a dirt lot there, so there is adequate parking for the business.

BD Motion 2: The Whittier Alliance Board of Directors supports the request for a certificate for non-conforming use for 2610-2612-2614 1st Avenue South, to use the residential space for a business.

Motion passes 10-0-1.

Finance Committee: Erica Christ-December Financial Statements: This is the official December statement, unofficial year end statement. Our cash balance and unrestricted funds are growing at a slow but steady rate. We have two checking accounts: our high yield fund has been disappointingly low. We squirrel money there as we have enough in the regular, accounts payable checking. The sum of those is ____. The reserve is: ____. We don't call it reserve because we write checks from it occasionally. **NRP – Contract of all funds.** We didn't spend as much NRP \$ this year as we planned to. Has to do with how much the NRP Steering committee has met and put out RFPs and started projects. We saved money by not having a CO for 2.5 months, and by not having to pay back unemployment for the five years after we fired lots of people. Some months look like more (ex. the month we pay insurance for the year.) We

ran in the black to almost \$19,000. Good job MB. We attribute as much to NRP as possible. This month, non-NRP is \$84.

FC 1 Motion: The Finance Committee moves to accept the Dec 2009 financial report for the Whittier Alliance. **Passed.**

FC 2 Motion: The Finance Committee moves to accept the end of year 2009 financial report.

Resource Development. Fall Fundraising Report: Still 3 people short of 100% board participation rate. Fall fundraiser was a success, including \$131 from MNGive, and it encouraged more people to give. **May Day Soiree:** We are still in the planning stages. It falls on a Saturday, and we don't have a venue, so things are up in the air. Places are not interested in giving up a Saturday night for free or little. So we might have to step it up on a Saturday night, or move it to Friday. Blind, Inc, Icehouse, CTC are space options. Any big homes, spaces? Old Arizona? 90 people seated, 150 reception. Icehouse can fit 250, with tables wouldn't look too empty. We could project on all the walls. We could have a film competition...

Staff Report: 2700 Stevens Ave. is going back to the bank, but Steve Min held on to enough of it, that the bank is asking if he wants to take it back. He can't do what was planned (5 unit condo), b/c of the economy, so wants to put in more. It was Henn County, but when contract wasn't fulfilled, county took funds. Nicollet storefront action: old Bubble Delight is leased as a gastro pub as of March. Someone from Stillwater. Some interest in Joe's Chicken Shack as a spiritual retreat. Would require overnight parking. Anything new at 26th and Nicollet? MCAD students might do the windows, but no property interest. Blacklist vintage is moving to the corner of 26th and 1st: double the square footage. Head to Toe, BSquad Vintage, Azia, Lost & Found are organizing an event together in February. Somali American Association partnered with WA to submit a grant for up to \$10,000 from Humphrey Institute: N'hood Partnership Initiative Grants, for assimilation education and assistance.

Old/New Business: Rezoning Proposal Update: We submitted our preferred zoning classifications, compared to what city was proposing. CM Lilligren has not called MB back. She has a meeting with him on Monday. **Shovel Shuffle:** Was last Saturday. 50 youth from Plymouth Church volunteered as their service project, with adult supervisors and 5 n'hood volunteers. **Historic Context Study Comments-** Anyone have comments? LJ wanted more history of the businesses, of the workers in the n'hood, not just the rich people. Anthony is curious about the timeframe of the n'hood: 1860's beginning of European development, 1880: n'hood. There were people here before then. There was a lake at Lyndale and 22nd. It would be nice to have some history before white people got here. We asked them to start with white people, so history before then was not in the scope of what we asked them to do. This is one reason for having not only a historic context task force, but also a more casual affinity club, which could look at history before the city, etc. Maybe Hennepin History Museum would want to sponsor. MB is nominating 2008 Pillsbury, and the worker's houses on 29th Street for the 10 most endangered historical sites in MN. "Winning" won't give legal protection, but might slow things down for someone trying to bulldoze. There is less groundswell for the worker homes, because there hasn't been community focus there, or threats for destruction. **Karmel Hotel:** Basim Sabri has submitted plans to add a 3rd and 4th story to Karmel Plaza for a hotel. A letter was received by the WA on Jan 18, mailed on Jan 14 but dated Nov. 30. A letter was received from the City a day later with his planning commission date set for Feb. 8 -- the same night as our CI meeting. There is a new planner on this project, Janelle. It seems that all the previous knowledge and information from prior Sabri proposals

hasn't been passed forward, so we are starting over with questions like have you checked traffic studies? have you checked usage? The site is currently zoned I1; he was denied approval for more residential floors several years ago, but hotel is an approved use in the zoning. He says he has enough parking. MB hasn't gotten anything from the city or Sabri about development partners, funding, size of the hotel, etc. Since there hasn't been a neighborhood presentation, we don't know what the building looks like, the height, setbacks, if it shadows the Greenway, how many hotel rooms, the parking requirement, if there will be a banquet space, etc. She has had a long talk with Tim Springer at Midtown Greenway who also has concerns. Since the neighborhood has not seen this proposal and the PC will meet, it is recommended that the board take a position, ask for a delay, a resolution to traffic congestion, an opportunity for the neighborhood to review the plans, etc. Sabri sued the city to have critical parking nullified and lost. The most neutral thing would be to ask them to postpone so there is time for n'hood process. He could make an argument for a hotel, Somali people come to shop there. So if they deny him, he could sue the city again. With the zoning that is being proposed by the City, the site would be changed to R5. That gives the proposal of a hotel on the site a new twist that could be concerning. Could we ask about business viability? How is he going to manage a hotel in this economy? Does he have a partner? That could come up in a CI process, but isn't a legal reason to prevent approval.

BD Motion 3: The Whittier Alliance Board of Directors requests a postponement on any decision on the Karmel Hotel proposal at 2910 Pillsbury Ave until the proposed development has gone through the neighborhood process, a study of traffic counts, patterns and parking and a plan for mitigation and resolution to the current and potential traffic and parking is in place; the height and shadow effects are determined, and the effects of the intensified usage on the surrounding area is evaluated.

Motion Passes 11-0-1.

Why has the city and n'hood had no ability to curbe the destructive influence of his projects? With other developers and with other issues with the City, we've been able to have our points heard. With Basim Sabri, we've had no ability to even be heard. The number of criminal allegations at Karmel Village alone, for none of them to turn into a case, is suspicious. Former business owner tenants report that he hires his own security people with criminal records who they believe are complicit in robbing the businesses, the business owners report it to the police, nothing happens. It would be nice if we could get a Somali community contact who isn't involved with Sabri to communicate. Tenants pay Sabri in cash, no leases on paper. When they come to the city for licenses, the city says don't pay him cash, write a check. And they continue to give him cash. On one hand, it's not okay to try to change someones culture. On the other hand, it explains the fluidity of the situation: he's got fistfuls of cash, doesn't even need to go through a bank. When Erica and Marian met with city officials, they were enraged that anyone could have the perception that city is on the take. In the past it was elected officials, not paid city staff, and they investigated for years. The point is that since a whole list of police issues and ordinance issues related to Basim seem to be disregared, its not so hard to see how people might see why the city is involved. The City sold the Karmel site for \$130k or so, can they explain why they sold a whole city block for this amount? The City admits it took them a while to catch on: at first it seemed like they were investing in minority owned businesses, in this part of the city that needs development, and that seemed great. It took them a while to catch on to what kind of developer Sabri is. They admit that businesses have gone into Karmel Plaza licensed under the conditional use of the farmer's market. They allowed the prayer room, and then it turned into a mosque that draws from multiple areas. They admit that they made mistakes in allowing some things, but won't go back and correct. They were supposed to do a report on the businesses that are there, haven't yet. They say that for every angry phone call they get from us, city gets 10 from Sabri and his people. It is interesting to see the extreme of seeing what is

allowed under the zoning law. And he's always threatening law suits, and following through. Through the zoning law he can play out all the way to the end of his property rights. What are these loopholes, and how can we close them? A lot of the cities power comes from threatening that you do not want to run afoul of the city. Sabri doesn't care. He's paid tens of thousands of dollars in fines, he doesn't care. City is not used to this. We're trying to keep it high on the radar. Licensing has more discretion than zoning. There are conditions on the approval of the additional sqft on Karmel Village—we'll see what the City does to enforce them and how the new proposal plays out. So many of the issues that were concerns with KV are still unresolved. A flier for Karmel Village advertises "Islamic housing." There are fair housing issues with advertising like that, but only if someone is denied housing -- they would have to take the torch and run with it.

Vacant Lot Purchase-Preemptive Move-Search for partner

WA moves that no property within the W n'hood boundaries... would receive approval for...

Laura Jean presented this motion, essentially a moratorium on additional affordable housing in the n'hood w/o our approval. If we could get it passed at city council, would slow down development. David B. is concerned that without a full explanation or data to back this up, we could be easily painted as doing this for the wrong reasons. He'd like to present this with some inescapable reasoning, so that we don't get painted as hating poor people, which someone is going to say. The affordable housing trust fund process that was explained to us, we left thinking 'no wonder it doesn't work.' We need to write out the reasoning so that other people understand. The idea for this motion is out there, from Wes Butler, from CM RL. This motion is very concise, but maybe we can add to it so that people get the context. We do have reasons, and it's not "we hate poor people." LJ thinks we wouldn't move here if that was true. Have we talked about going to Klobuchar or Franken? It is federal money that's causing the problem. They might be surprised to hear that a n'hood like ours would say this, might be interested in the issue. MB: we are impacted for new building, is trick around purchasing building, and then applying for funds.

Motion to Adjourn 8:28. Next Meeting: Thursday, Feb. 25

Minutes Respectfully Submitted: Jessica Rosenberg, Administrative Assistant

Erica Christ, Chair

Elizabeth Grzechowiak, Secretary