

## Whittier Business Assn.

### DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday, October 12, 2011 11:30- 1:00 pm  
Black Forest Inn 1 E. 26<sup>th</sup> St.

**Present:** Gil Bassard (Tasks Unlimited), Geraldine Burns (AAUW), Erica Christ (Black Forest Inn), Ian Halker (Welsh Companies), Paul Jablonski (Nicollet Car Wash), Christian Johnson (Bad Waitress/Spyhouse), Katie Kyle (Bad Waitress), Dana Scarlett (Tasks Unlimited), John Tran (Caravelle Restaurant/ Pho 79), Tammy Wong (Rainbow Chinese, Joanne Christ (Black Forest Inn) **Presenter:** Andy Carlson, City of Mpls- Spec. Service Dist. **Staff:** Marian Biehn, Lisa Hermanson

Call to order at 12:02 by Erica Christ, WA BA Chair, who noted the Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies. A motion to **approve the agenda** was made, and carried. The September BA minutes were **approved**.

**Spotlight on Business – Black Forest Inn - Erica Christ:** The Black Forest Inn was opened by the Christ brothers in 1965. In 1970 the lot next door was bought and they knocked down the dilapidated building to create an outdoor beer garden which they didn't expect to be as popular as it has become. There is also a banquet space and at one point there was a deli. One asset to Black Forest Inn is that it has its own parking lot. They make all of the food from scratch, and fresh products including whole veal are bought directly from a farmer in New Prague. The owner having a background in butchering, Black Forest Inn cuts all its own meat. In recent years, the restaurant has become a hot spot for authentic German cuisine and a destination for those looking to experience German celebrations such as the recent Oktoberfest festivities, which included 10 activities in 10 days. The business is now gearing up for holiday celebrations by, among other things, preparing to craft a large variety of authentic German Christmas cookies.

**Nicollet Ave and Lyn-Lake Special Service Districts – Andrew Carlson:** Nicollet Ave. has a Special Service District (SSD) running from the back of Kmart to the convention center and a little bit on 26<sup>th</sup> St. It is the 16<sup>th</sup> SSD in the city, with four or five new districts looking to develop. SSD provides services above and beyond what city provides as standard public works service. It is a menu of additional services such as trash pick-up, graffiti removal, planters, turf and lawn maintenance, and streetscape, tree maintenance, snow and ice removal and decorative holiday lighting depending district preferences. All members of the SSD Advisory Board are property owners within the district. The SSD has recently been conducting field inspections and repairing as needed, such as the district-wide graffiti and cleanup sweep last Aug. There are also new banners hung along 26<sup>th</sup> at MCAD campus intended to entice students to take advantage of community businesses. A fall cleanup has been planned for November as well. With the new budget has come new contracts; S & T Services is the new streetscape maintenance vendor. The Lake and Lyndale District, like every other district, is unique. Their advisory board prioritizes things differently such as trees, lighting systems, etc. A business owner felt that there is a lot more money and influence on Hennepin than on Nicollet, and the Hennepin SSD comparatively looks nicer. He also asserted that the Nicollet SSD is defunct and not operating properly, particularly because no one has taken the responsibility to ensure quality services. Jeff Johnson the former City contact for the Nicollet SSD retired one and a half yrs. ago, and Michael McLaughlin stepped in for Jeff. Michael's contract runs through the end of the year. Recently, and last year in particular, there have been several issues with special services such as ineffective snow removal, dirty tree wells, non-functioning holiday lights and trash on the streets. In one instance, it took years to get a tattered Eat Street Banner replace. Snow removal has become hazardous as excess snow is piled on curbs leaving no room to see or walk around. (*note: snow removal was not part of the service contracted by the Nicollet SSD in 2010-11. It is the business owner's responsibility*) It is now Mr. Carlson's responsibility to manage these contracts and field complaints to the appropriate contractor. Snow removal, especially last year, is a particularly large issue as every n'hood is pushed to its limit. It is also by far the most expensive special service. Last year, every vendor doubled its budget for snow removal. Contracts have not been attended to in years and have become completely negligent. Also, trash is not being removed in a timely manner in response to the needs on Nicollet Ave. Some business owners are trying hard to keep their storefronts clean and inviting, but they are not getting the help they need from SSD. Another resounding issue was the state of bus stops. Metro Transit is responsible for cleaning the ones they own; an outdoor bus shelter company located in New York owns several of them as well. Mr. Carlson will need to be in contact with them and make sure they are brought to compliance, particularly since trash is also left on adjacent property. Mr. Carlson will look into the possibility of placing trash cans next to the bus stops to avoid trash overflow. Much of the flaws in the SSD lie in governance. Some felt that the advisory board may be biased due to its level of willingness to pay property taxes. Because the board sets the budget based on constituency and availability, its members are given much power over their own property taxes. The last few years have shown a particular unwillingness to pay high taxes and surcharges. The opinion was stated that those who do not want their taxes increased need to take responsibility in other ways such as keeping their property clean and maintained. In many cases—particularly since this is not a wealthy district. Special Services are ordered a la carte and can therefore be

purchased at varying levels of service depending on availability of funds and board discretion. This may include frequency of snow or trash removal as well as amount of holiday lighting or hanging baskets. Furthermore, if frequency of services is not high enough to meet the district's demand, things such as trash removal will not happen often enough and therefore leave large amounts of trash to sit. Once the budget is set, the amount of money allocated to a particular line item can be adjusted, but line items cannot be added or removed from the budget. Other SSD budgets range from \$4,000-\$300,000 per year depending on the level of services requested. Another option is to order services independent from the city. The disadvantage is that this takes a large amount of up-front capital that most districts do not have. All property owners on the tax register are sent an annual summary outlining the budget and line items. In the future, Mr. Carlson will work with WA to make sure that everyone understands the depth and breadth of the decisions. Regardless of service levels, businesses need to also take responsibility by making sure their storefronts are clean and inviting as well as participating in discussions for SSD services including attending meetings, prioritizing needs and informing the city about deficiencies. It can be difficult for owners to align in this way because there are so many interested parties, so little participation in community issues and particularly when individual needs are taking precedence over the needs of the district. A checklist of district priorities was taken before the 2012 budget was set. Cleanliness and Safety were listed as top priorities, but snow removal was excluded. The sentiment was shared that the Nicollet SSD should be one of the cleanest streets because a large portion of its economy depends in dining and therefore safety. It's more important that city focuses more on these streets because its consumers come from all over to enjoy them; they need to be inviting, not intimidating. Mr. Carlson agreed to forward all decisions to WA to help him follow up with deficient contractors as well as coordinate activities such as the fall cleanup between special services and the n'hood. Furthermore, contractors will now be required to wear t-shirts saying "Special Services" on the front and back so that they are easily identifiable. This ties in with Mr. Carlson who will begin to inspect vendor performance more closely, including daily contact with vendors and weekly visits to the district. Property owners should not hesitate to call Mr. Carlson to report and ask about deficiencies.

**Façade Improvement Grant:** The Façade Improvement grant is for the commercial corridors of Nicollet, Lake, and Lyndale that will match other contributions up to \$5,000. Nicollet is the preferred location because the match is 1:1, meaning that the grant will contribute \$5,000 toward a \$10,000 project. The other corridors are match 2:1 meaning that the grant will give \$5,000 toward a \$15,000 project. Approved improvements include repainting, windows and landscaping if the landscaping is permanent and graffiti preventative. BA funds were used to pay an architect to do some renderings of virtual face lifts on Nicollet. He was asked for realistic, modest projects; some were as simple as window replacements to historic buildings or remodeling an entryway to be cleaner and more welcoming. There is a fair amount of money out there so far, but many projects are very small such as awnings versus historic preservation projects, which carry particularly high impact. There are a couple of projects currently in the pipeline such as murals and façade restoration to original bricks and windows. There is money left for this year. If remaining money is contracted out soon, WA can reapply for funding for the next two year cycle. Smaller projects will still be considered, but the hope is that people are as ambitious as possible to have a larger impact on the street. The Nicollet corridor also includes 26<sup>th</sup> St. to 1<sup>st</sup> and Blaisedell. The application has two parts and will be reviewed by WA as well as the city. If a plan is approved, the grantee has six months to complete the project, which will account for construction difficulties during the winter.

#### **Old & New business**

**Whittier Fall Clean-Up—Sat., Oct. 29 1-4 pm:** There is a challenge out! The n'hood will be divided in 9 zones. Businesses have a zone along Nicollet where they can form teams and clean up an area. To inspire some volunteerism the Ice House gentlemen have volunteered a team. Let Marian or Jen know if you are interested. Spyhouse is donating pastries and hot beverages.

**Whittier Green Fair—Sat., Nov. 12:** This year, WA is trying to increase participation. There will be demonstrations, presentations, free samples and educational materials. The event will be held at First Christian Church. Many organizations will be participating from Hennepin County Recycling to vendors of solar products and other practical and easy tips for conserving energy and waste reduction. There is generally something for renters, businesses, children and homeowners. Bring as many people as you would like it's a resource for the whole area. WA is still getting vendors set up, but there is room for more, so contact WA with ideas and suggestions.

**Wine Tasting—Wed., Oct. 26 6-9 pm Tickets \$25:** The Wine Tasting is a fundraiser that supports n'hoods in South Minneapolis. Tickets are available in advance or at door. Proceeds from tickets bought advance go to WA for n'hood activities and outreach. There will be over 400 samples of wine and food from Chef Tim McKee. See WA website for tickets. The event will be at Calhoun Sq. on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors and is usually well-attended and enjoyed by all.

**Strategic Plan:** The strategic plan will go to the WA board for fine-tuning and approval at the end of the month. There are a number of initiatives for businesses—mainly along Nicollet that mesh with the goals of environmental sustainability, historic preservation, housing, etc. The next step will be to move forward, taking things from idea to action. A lot will happen on BA in presentation and brainstorming. Ideas have been and will continue to be traded for four season interest on Nicollet such as winter activities and a large summer festival.

**Adjourn 1:22 pm Next Meeting; Wed., Nov. 9, 2011 Minutes Respectfully Submitted: Lisa Hermanson**