

**WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Business Association Committee – DRAFT MINUTES**

Wednesday October 8, 2008 4-5:30pm

Black Forest Inn, 26<sup>th</sup> and Nicollet

**Present** Erica Christ, Elizabeth Grzechowiak, Jim Hubal, Paul Jablonsky, Hank Jensen, Jeff Orluck, Brock Rasmussen, Marcy Tollefson, Lisa Vecoli, Doug Wilson

**Presenters** Mary Bujold (Maxfield Research), Jeff Mandyck (MS&R), David Motzenbecker (Oslund & Assoc), Michael O’Keefe (MCAD), Dan Vercruysse (MS&R)

**Staff** Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

**Call to Order** at 4:12pm by Erica Christ, followed by introductions. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted. There is an open for-profit business seat to the Whittier Alliance Board; interested parties can talk to Marian for more info. The term would be one-year. Marian added a mention of the Southwest Transitway scoping meetings, and solid waste containers, to the old/new business. A **Motion** to approve the agenda as revised was **carried**. Those present were given time to review the September BA minutes, and Erica asked for additions or corrections (there were none offered). A **Motion** to approve the September 10, 2008 minutes was **carried**.

**Spotlight on Business: Black Forest Inn (Erica Christ)** Black Forest Inn is a family-owned and operated business, started in 1965. The space has been gradually expanded over time to include a larger seating and service area and a beer garden. Erica’s mother Joanne was instrumental in getting the “Eat Street” concept branded and marketed in the mid-80’s/90’s. BFI recently celebrated Oktoberfest, one of their busiest times of year. Upcoming events include readings of Poe by a local theatre company the week of Halloween, and a play in November. They also offer their next-door garage space to a local pair of sculptors for their studio use.

**MCAD: Michael O’Keefe of MCAD, Jeff Mandyck and Dan Vercruyssee of MS&R, Dave Motzenbecker of Oslund & Assoc.** MCAD and MS&R updated attendees on the Master Plan for the campus, and presented on the plans for a parking structure and a surface parking lot. Jeff noted the details of early phase I, which involves site development with an eye to the future use of the space, such as creating a main entry to campus from 26<sup>th</sup>. It includes a multi-level parking structure (200 slots), with one level on-grade and two below-grade. The surface lot, which accommodates 47 slots, offers parking for visitors and staff. The lot will pave over a current greenspace on the corner of 26<sup>th</sup> and Stevens. Eventually, the parking lot will become part of the planned expansion for the academic building, although that expansion is 10-15 years from now. The overall plans call for about 250 slots in addition to the 50 they currently have in accessory parking (which will comply with the City parking requirements and be in line with the suggestions of the Walker parking study).

Dave noted that part of the surface lot considerations include using strategies to make the area more environmentally-friendly than a normal paved lot, with greater aesthetic appeal. Some of the proposed strategies include creating green spaces along the edges of the parking lot for rainwater gardens and salt-tolerant plants. There will also be shade and canopy trees, and water and salt-tolerant shrubs. One of the biggest potential problems is dealing with the detritus off parked cars (like oil seepage) and caring for it on-site. The plan is for pervious concrete over an extra layer of sand (that will act as a filter) before the water joins the groundwater. An option for the parking stalls is a type of gravel that creates more interest than plain concrete and also allows storm water to soak in rather than run-off.

**Attendees commented on:** the size of the trees that will be planted (will they be a sufficient size to provide a canopy cover within 5, 10, 15 years?); the length of time for the surface lot before redevelopment (10-15 years); and, the potential for parking elsewhere on campus. Jeff noted the idea is to have the surface lot be temporary and have the parking structure as a more permanent parking solution. The surface lot will also be used during/in the construction of the ramp. The ramp will be designed to support a future green roof if desired, that would bring it to the level of the nearby hill. Marian will check if the campus falls under any of the pedestrian overlay district. **Attendees noted:** the opportunity for the corner of 26<sup>th</sup> and Stevens to be a campus focal point/welcome greenspace, and the traffic along 26<sup>th</sup> and safety concerns. Jeff noted the long-term plan is to have a more sustainable street presence along 26<sup>th</sup>, which includes the academic building expansion and creation of a grand entrance. There will be opportunities for signage and traffic light re-timing requests to increase traffic safety. Michael noted MCAD’s forecast is that the school could serve 1,000 students with the expansions (they currently have 800); part of their plans include adding more bike parking, and encouraging students to use alternative transit by charging them for an on-campus vehicle. They are working on a capital campaign to raise funds for future campus expansion. MCAD and MS&R will present to the neighborhood next month will a more complete proposal and will be looking for support for the phase-I projects.

**Maxfield Research Inc.: President Mary Bujold** Maxfield Research conducted a study for Stevens Square, from south of I-94 to Franklin Avenue, to look at the commercial vitality of that area. Part of the study was to determine the mix of

businesses that would serve that stretch of Nicollet and draw up a plan for attracting those businesses there. The study included defining the business area, conducting interviews with business and property owners, developers and brokers, and analyzing market conditions and population demographics. Maxfield used the information they collected to create a (re)development strategy for that part of Stevens Square. A study of the Whittier retail area could help to identify the customer base of area establishments and understand who they are and why they shop/dine in this area. Research could help determine what mix of businesses would strengthen sales and serve both the neighborhood residents and out-of-area patrons. One challenge in Whittier is managing so many independent businesses and engaging them in efforts to increase the customer base for the area as a whole. A question is if the identity of “Eat Street” dissuades other businesses from moving onto Nicollet.

**Attendees noted:** the challenges of advocating for a culturally-diverse group of businesses; the potential disengagement of family-run and independent business owners (due to time constraints); and, the challenge of diversifying the mix of business and identifying complementary commercial/retail uses. Mary noted the high number of destination businesses in Whittier; there is opportunity to ‘capture’ those consumers for a longer/more-diversified visit to the neighborhood. Understanding and identifying why people come to Whittier—and what their needs are—will show what kinds of businesses those consumers would also patronize. There is a commercial/retail difference between serving the residents of the neighborhood and meeting their needs, and serving the needs of out-of-district consumers who reach Whittier/Eat Street as a destination stop. Mary explained that part of the Stevens Square study was creating a document that tells the story of who shops and uses services in the area, and how and why people spend time and money there. A similar document for Whittier could be used to approach potential retailers and market the site more efficiently than just to share the demographics of the neighborhood or customers. Mary also pointed out that having a modest number of chain stores in the neighborhood can help to standardize and familiarize the area for the consumer, making people who wouldn’t normally shop in an area more comfortable. If the neighborhood businesses would be interested in a Maxfield Research project, Mary can put together a working proposal based on the key issues identified by the neighborhood. Please contact Marian with suggestions of those key issues and she will relay them.

**Old/New Business Eat Street Designed Bike racks:** four businesses have signed on to have the racks installed. The racks are cheaper if they are purchased in bulk. Marian is working with Lilligren’s office for funding for the racks next year. The racks can be taller so that the logo will still be visible while the racks are in use; however, the logo will be stretched out rather than having longer-legged racks. Each rack costs \$515 plus \$45 for the installation. Plain bike racks cost about \$185. One suggestion is to install the bike racks in groups with 2 plain plus 2 logo’d. Please contact Marian if your business is interested.

Josie has planned a **Whittier Green Fair for Saturday, October 18**, from 1-4pm at First Christian Church. There will be tablers from a variety of green contacts, as well as workshops, a community art project, and giveaways. Hank, the manager of CVS, donated 50 reusable shopping bags for attendees, and will include some freebies in the bags as extra bonuses. Please take a flyer to promote the fair in your business or building.

There are still funds available in the **Façade Improvement Grant**. Please contact the WA office for more info.

The **scoping meetings** for the **proposed Southwest light rail line options** have begun. Part of the process is creating a potential impact statement for each of the possible rail lines. The Whittier neighborhood has already compiled a list of the impacts to the neighborhood of the Nicollet alignment, as well taken a formal position against that alignment. There will be two more public comment periods; comments can also be submitted via mail and email.

Susan Young of the City of Mpls Solid Waste Department has informed Marian of an **adopt-a-cigarette-disposal-can program**. An organization or business can get disposal containers for free from the City but are responsible for emptying them. If you are interested, contact Susan or Marian. Having the containers should help reduce litter.

There will be an **open house on October 30** from 4:30-6:30pm at the public service center downtown, to discuss the proposed revisions to chapter 543 of the city zoning ordinance. The ordinance affects **on-premise sign standards**.

**Meeting adjourned** at 5:40pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.

**Next meeting: November 12, 2008** at Tanek, 26<sup>th</sup> and Stevens **Attachments:** none.