

WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Business Association Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday December 10, 2008 4-5:30pm

Pancho Villa, 2539 Nicollet Ave

Present Erica Christ, Elizabeth Grzechowiak, Mark Hockley, Paul Jablonsky, Todd Jones, Dan Kennedy, David Schuster, Karina Moreno, Lisa Vecoli
Presenters Dan Verduyck, Jeff Manduyck, Pam Newsome, Tom Deegan, Brian Small, Bryan Tyner,
Staff Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 4:16 pm by Marian Biehn, followed by introductions. Announcements: please contact the Whittier Alliance if you could hold the Business Association meeting for January; funds are still available for the façade improvement grants (City grants administered through the WA for exterior work, matched 1:1 on Nicollet, and 1:2 on Lyndale and Lake); there are also low-interest loans available as Commercial Improvement Loans); please take some Dining Guides to promote the dining in Whittier in your office or building. The WA is also in the midst of the Fall Fundraiser and looking for donations to help fund outreach, activities, and programs.

SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS: PANCHO VILLA The manager, Patricio, explained they have been open almost 10 years, and enjoy being part of the neighborhood. They recently expanded to have more dining room space.

A **Motion** to approve the agenda was **carried**. Attendees were given time to review the minutes from November (no additions/corrections were offered). A **Motion** to approve the November 12, 2008 minutes was **carried**.

MPLS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN: PRESENTATION OF REVISED PARKING PLAN (PAM NEWSOME OF MCAD & JEFF MANDUYCK & DAN VERCRUYSE OF MS&R) Erica noted MCAD also presented to the Community Issues meeting and will be back for approvals of their plans at a future meeting. MCAD's parking contract with the MIA is expiring, and that is partly driving the need to find a parking solution. Pam explained the first phase of the MCAD Master (100 year) plan had included underground parking/ramp with 200 stalls and expansion of the academic building. The cost for the parking ramp has been estimated at \$13 million. A decline in enrollment and the economic climate have led MCAD to look for a less ambitious solution to their parking need.

The revised parking plan calls for a temporary (5-7 year) paved surface lot off of 26th Street, with 151 parking stalls, and appropriate landscaping. The plan calls for an expansion of the bike parking and involves laying the groundwork for the actualization of the Master Plan. There are multiple choices for the landscaping plans for the edge of the lot, with an eye to integrating the landscaping into the academic expansion. The parking lot will include gate access, security cameras, and will be monitored by the on-campus security patrol. The proposed ramp, now slated to be built in 5-7 years, will integrate with the hill on campus, and could potentially include a green roof. There will still be a small surface lot (25 stalls) for visitor parking at that time. It is unlikely a surface lot could be moved north, partially to preserve on-campus green space for future use. The feasibility of the funding of the ramp build partially depends on the economy recovery and the fundraising goals and directives of the to-be-hired president of MCAD. MS&R/MCAD will have a hearing with the Heritage Preservation Commission, a city planning committee review, and then will apply for a vacation of 2nd Avenue. They do not anticipate needing any variances to move forward with the surface lot. They are looking for someone to help pay for the relocation of the house that has been used for student housing but will need to be moved before any on-campus expansion can take place. MCAD/MS&R will present plans at a future meeting for site approval.

COMMERCIAL BUILDING AND VACANT COMMERCIAL BUILDING REGISTRATION & PROPOSED ORDINANCES (FIRE MARSHALL BRYAN TYNER, BRAD SMALL OF MPLS FD & INSPECTOR TOM DEEGAN) Bryan overviewed the proposed **commercial building fire inspection program**: the fire department currently does complaint-based inspections of commercial properties, except for regular inspections of buildings with (level-2) hazardous materials. The proposal is for cyclical commercial inspections for all commercial properties, done by trained fire marshals. The program will also involve the registration of commercial buildings, to be registered showing their uses. The registration will carry a fee, partially determined by the scale and size of the building. The owner is responsible for fee payment. Each commercial property will undergo a full inspection at least every five years. The initial annual cost of the program will be just under \$1 million. The program will also recover fees and fines, though it will not be a profit-making venture for the fire department. The scope of work will be based off the fire-code inspections and the MN state fire code. Brad noted there is a significant difference between the insurance and fire code requirements; the fire code looks at the suppression and detection systems in the building, and also addresses new buildings. He argued that not all insurance programs mandate an inspection/documentation process that is as stringent as the proposed program. The inspections would be done through

your local fire department, and would include the building familiarizations the departments already do. The City estimates 5800 buildings will fall under the program.

Attendees commented/questioned: Is the City model based on an existing model? Could the Mpls' plan be closer to the plan for the City of Bloomington (where the annual license fee is much smaller and the program involves an annual inspection)? Has the City considered private sector involvement and competitive bidding for inspections? What is the exact scope of service/inspection plan, and could the complete scope of service be outlined in writing? Could the Fire Department collaborate with insurance companies (to reduce the cost, to ensure there aren't redundant inspections and increase efficiency)? Will the fee/fee structure continue to go up? How does the fee structure equate when doing inspections for a building like Nico vs. the IDS building? Where will the revenue/profits from the program go?

Public comments on the program will be accepted until December 17, in writing, email or fax, to the City. Citizens can also speak at the committee meetings to get their comments on the record.

Tom Deegan explained the proposed fee and registration of **vacant commercial properties**: The City has a registration and fee for vacant residential properties, which has been successful in helping to address vacant residential properties and help keep them from disrepair. The City is looking to apply a similar system to vacant commercial properties, as they can only address commercial spaces if they fall in residential zones. A space is considered "vacant" if 30% of the leasable store front is unoccupied. The fees for vacancies should encourage owners to work with the City to get vacant spaces re-occupied. Fees can be held in abeyance for 6 months while the property owner works with the City to get the property re-occupied. Tom noted the city tore down 140 houses in 2008—there are over 100 vacant lots in Northside alone—partially as a result of the cost of vacant home maintenance. As a first step, the Whittier neighborhood needs to engage with CPED and Councilmember Lilligren to work to address any vacancy issues in the neighborhood.

Attendees comments and questions included: The definition of "vacant"—what is it and what buildings will fall under the definition? How will well-maintained and up-to-code properties that are actively being marketed (but still are un-leased) be treated under this program? What if short-term vacancy is actually less of a problem than occupancy of problem properties? What is the complaint process? How does the City plan to work with commercial property owners to get vacant spaces re-occupied/leased? Will there be a push to demolish vacant buildings if fees increase on properties the building owners are unable to lease?

The public comment period ends December 17. Please email Tom through the City website with any questions.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS Eat Street logo'd bike racks: the city special services district can help to pay roughly ½ the cost of the purchase and install of the racks. The special services district that serves Nicollet could budget for the racks if it is desired by property owners along Nicollet. Please consider if your business would like to install the racks; or brainstorm another idea to help transform the sidewalks along Eat Street. Sidewalk planters have been suggested (but they can also be expensive, due to the cost of the planters themselves, the plantings, and the maintenance). **Graffiti Removal:** The WA has materials to aid in the removal of graffiti from commercial property, which are available free of charge from the office. There are also funds to cover the reimbursement costs for graffiti removal; apply through the WA office.

Meeting adjourned at 5:50 pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.

Next meeting: **January 14, 2009;** (time and place to be announced) **Attachments:** none.