

WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Business Association Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday January 14, 2009 4-5:30pm

Blind Inc, 100 East 22nd Street

Present Erica Christ (Black Forest Inn), Elizabeth Grzechowiak (AZIA), Reed Herreid (Java Properties), Jim Hubal (Edina Realty), Paul Jablonsky (Nicollet Ave Car Wash), Kate Speckmann (Java Properties), Marcy Tollefson (Washburn Center for Children), Lisa Vecoli (MIA), John Wilson

Presenters Jeffrey Mandyck (MS&R), David Motzenbecker (Oslund & Assoc.), Mike O’Keefe (MCAD)

WA Staff Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 4:11 pm by Erica Christ, BA chair, followed by introductions. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were recognized. A **Motion** to approve the agenda was **carried**. Those present were given time to review the December BA minutes, and make additions or corrections (there were none offered). A **Motion** to approve the December 10, 2008 minutes was **carried**.

SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS: BLIND INC. (AL SPOONER, ASST DIRECTOR) Blind Inc. is an adjustment to blindness training center focused on teaching adults alternative techniques to accomplish everyday tasks. The goal is provide training to the blind to help them lead normal, independent lives, including transitioning and training blind people to the workforce. Blind Inc, a non-profit funded as a vocational rehabilitation service by the state, draws students from all across the globe, with facilities to teach 20 full-time students at any given time. Students take classes in courses such as: cultural perceptions of blindness, computer interface and equipment, home management classes, Braille, and daily living skills. They also offer summer programs for teens, an orientation to blindness for seniors, and adventure learning (activities outside the center, like rock climbing or camping). Blind Inc. is located in the Charles Pillsbury mansion, and has been in this location for 16 years. The building is also shared by the National Federation of the Blind-Minnesota.

MPLS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN: PRESENTATION OF REVISED PARKING PLAN (MIKE O’KEEFE OF MCAD & JEFFREY MANDYCK OF MS&R) MCAD has a finalized proposal they would like to take to the city next month, concerning the creation of a surface/flat parking lot, the removal of the blue house from the property, and the vacation of 2nd Avenue. The plans still align with the goals of the 100-year Master Plan, which include the development of a face and front of the college along 26th, defining the entryway on 26th and 2nd, and laying the groundwork for future expansion of the academic buildings.

MCAD’s parking lease with MIA (and the use of the 3rd Ave parking ramp) has been in yearly renewals, and was recently renewed in December of 2008 for one-year, although another renewal is not a feasible option. The target is to have the surface lot constructed by the fall of 2009. The college is working to promote staff and student use of alternative forms of transit, such as car pooling, bikes, shared transportation. (For instance, the plan calls for 110 additional bike racks to accommodate increased ridership). Starting in the fall of 2009, students who live on-campus will not have guaranteed parking in an effort to discourage car use. MCAD plans for the surface lot to be in place for 5-7 years until a capital campaign can raise funds to build a more-costly parking ramp (although the capital campaign is currently on hiatus). MCAD looked at the Dispatch laundry site as a potential surface lot, but is will only provide 66 stalls; they feel other surface lots in the neighborhood are too far away from campus.

The proposed surface lot on the corner of Stevens and 26th will provide roughly 136 spaces of parking for visitors and staff, maintaining the hill to the east of 2nd as a greenspace and quad for the students. There will be rain-gardens at the perimeter to control runoff; as the plan calls for the use of impervious materials. Lighting is yet to be finalized, although they are trying to follow the “dark skies” criteria. Access will be controlled through the use of a gate. (Lisa noted that MIA will probably have to alter how they use the 3rd Ave parking ramp to ensure it is visitor parking).

Attendees commented and questioned: traffic onto/from 26th will be increased (and potentially unsafe) as the campus entry is shifted onto the 2nd avenue drive (could MCAD/MS&R work with the city on signage or traffic light timing?); current uses of 2nd Avenue [it dead-ends into the middle of campus]; the Heritage Preservation Commission’s position on the removal or demolition of the blue house [MS&R/MCAD met with the HPC informally, and asked them for help in moving the blue house; About a year ago Marian contacted owners of vacant lots in the neighborhood. Marian noted that she was concerned with the development & planning of the neighborhood: looking at the best evolution of Whittier, was installing another flat lot really the best option? She is concerned a 5-7 year lot could become permanent. Jeff responded that one difficulty is that despite the push for the use of mass transit, the current transit system doesn’t adequately meet the needs of all riders or offer complete coverage of the city, necessitating some on-campus car parking. Until there is a shift in patterns and in transit use, some parking needs to be offered. Erica suggested that MCAD work on their outreach, as MCAD students/faculty parking in the neighborhood (until driving habits change) will put pressure on nearby residents and may create animosity toward the institution.

It was discussed if any motions to approve the proposal should have a 5-7 year condition put in place, stating a preference for the surface lot to be repurposed in 5-7 years (acting like a sunset clause). It was suggested that putting the conditions wouldn't be useful or helpful, because it might limit MCAD's later options. It was also noted that the Community Issues committee did put a 5-7 year condition on the surface lot. No variances or CUPs are needed.

Lisa **moved in support** of the site plan, the construction of the flat lot, the vacation of 2nd Avenue, and the removal of the blue house, as a slate of motions, and it was **seconded**.

BA Motion 1: The Whittier Alliance Business Association moves in support of the construction of a flat lot at 26th and Stevens; the site plan for MCAD's proposal as presented; the removal of the blue house on on the MCAD campus and, the vacation of 2nd Avenue for its use by MCAD. **Motion Carried** (with 2 abstentions).

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FOR BUSINESS OWNERS The WA BA has money from the city that can be distributed in a **Façade Improvement Grant** for commercial properties along Nicollet and Lyndale. The matching grant funds can be applied toward the cost of most exterior work (except landscaping). The WA also has \$300k in a revolving **2% loan**, offering low-interest loans to property owners. The funds can be used for restoration and rehab, as well as exterior work.

The BA received grant funding from the city for 2008-09, with \$1200 earmarked to promote public art. The BA is seeking artists to prepare a **Virtual Art Installation**: a series of renderings of potential installations of public art on visible Whittier business properties. Marian has contacted a couple property owners to gage their interest: Dr. Barry Gerst from his dentistry on Nicollet; Paul Jablonsky owner of a car wash on Lyndale; and Tom Nguyen of AMC Mortgage on Nicollet. Marian is looking for artists who can present a before/after vision of public art, such as mosaics, sculpture, or sidewalk or benches with art treatments, etc. The money must be spent by the end of May, and can be split up between various artists or given to one as a stipend for a more involved visioning. The project does not obligate the business owners to commission the artwork, or the artist to do the installation; the initial stage is more about seeing what can be done. The ultimate goal might be to put some funding (maybe from the commercial corridor NRP funds or the façade improvement grant) toward public art in the future. Marian has set an early May deadline, so the commissioned artists can present their virtual art at the May 13 BA meeting.

The WA has commissioned Hess Roise to do a **Historic Preservation Context Study** for the Whittier neighborhood. Through historic research and fieldwork in the neighborhood, Hess Roise will identify 5-10 historic building trends through existing developments. They will prepare Historic Preservation Guidelines to help property owners through historically-appropriate exterior renovation and repair. Hess Roise will also make recommendations to the neighborhood regarding the guidelines for the Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District, and how they can be rewritten to be more accurate and specific (and easier to follow for property owners). The work will be completed by the end of the summer.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS The **WA Annual Meeting** will be Thursday, April 2 at Whittier School, with elections to the Board of Directors at that time. The BA has 2 non-profit and 2 for-profit representatives to the Board; currently one non-profit seat is unfilled. The chair of the BA is also elected in April. The Good Neighbor and Good Business Awards will also be handed out at the meeting to honor those community members who go above and beyond to make the neighborhood a good place to visit or live in. Please fill out a nomination form by March 18 and return it to the office.

Neighborhood news and updates: The WA does have graffiti removal supplies available; please be neighborly and shovel your sidewalk; HCMC did close on the purchase of the former GFI site and should schedule the tear-down of the existing property for late March/April; John Wilson is running for mayor as part of the New Broom Coalition and would welcome community comments about their satisfaction with the current system/Councilmember Lilligren.

Meeting adjourned at 5:22 pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.

Next meeting: February 11, 11:30am-1pm at Blaisdell Manor. **Attachments:** none.