

WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Business Association Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday February 11, 2009 11:30am-1:00pm

Blaisdell Manor; 2322 Blaisdell Ave S.

Attendees Rev. Maurice Battle (Mpls 1st 7th Day Adventists), Erica Christ (Black Forest Inn), Pastor John Darlington (Simpson United Methodist Church), Elizabeth Grzechowiak (AZIA), Lt. David Hayhoe (5th Precinct), Jim Hubal (Edina Realty), Carolyn Humphry (AAUW), Paul Jablonsky (Nicollet Ave Car Wash), Aaron McCallum (Three Sons Signature Cuisine), Jeff Orluck (Source MN/Fallout), Angela Piper (Gale Mansion), Dr. Brad Sim (Dr. Barry Gerst Denstists), Scott Wende (Lunning Wende Architects)

Staff Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 11:38pm by Erica Christ, BA Chair, followed by introductions. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were recognized. Marian added a mention of vacant storefronts along Nicollet to the agenda. A **Motion** to approve the agenda as revised was **carried**. Attendees were given time to review the minutes, and make additions or corrections (there were none offered). A **Motion** to approve the January 14, 2009 BA minutes was **carried**.

5th Precinct Update: Lt. Hayhoe noted that reported crime is down almost 16% in the precinct compared to last year at this time. Assaults and robberies have both been down. There is continual concern about theft from motor vehicles and burglaries of residences and businesses. For instance, a group of suspects broke into 2110 Nicollet and targeted 3 businesses in the building. There has also been a rash of burglaries where large flat-screen tv's were taken (from health clubs, etc); the precinct believes it may be linked to the digital conversion. As a reminder, maintain an updated inventory of the electronic equipment at your business, detailing the model and serial numbers. Please also use your alarms, and check to make sure your surveillance equipment is in working order. Precinct-wide, theft from motor vehicles has been down this year. There was a recent instance of a suspect using stolen credit cards at the BP on Third and Franklin, charging other customers' gas in exchange for cash. The cards had been stolen from vehicles parked in Uptown.

Attendee questions and comments: There have been 10-15 **vehicle break-ins** at AZIA, and the police response was frustrating: they did not seem interested in the restaurant's video footage. AZIA has invested in better lighting and some signage for the parking lot to try to deter theft. Other businesses have also had slow/no police response on vehicle break-ins, and sometimes hear from their customers about the lack of police interest. Lt. Hayhoe responded that the precinct is interested in all video footage of break-ins and theft, and that they do track vehicle break-ins. They have had 2 undercover teams, and the night team has prioritized surveillance of properties that are repeatedly broken into. **Graffiti** in the neighborhood and the tagging of "2012": Sgt. Giovanni Veliz is the citywide Graffiti Coordinator and can answer graffiti-related questions with more detail. An attendee questioned the "no guns permitted" signs many businesses post; Lt. Hayhoe noted it is up to individual businesses if they choose to post the signs. There has been no increase in the neighborhood in copper being removed from foreclosed properties; it has been an issue in the north metro. An attendee questioned the crime statistics used by one of the mayoral candidates (citing increased homicide rates in the Metro); Hayhoe replied he hadn't seen the numbers but doubted their veracity, based on departmental stats.

SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS: BLAISDELL MANOR & THREE SONS SIGNATURE CUISINE (AARON MCCALLUM) Three Sons Signature Cuisine has been in business in the Blaisdell Manor since 2003. Three Sons also runs the St. Anthony Main Event Center. The Manor includes the ballroom, a bar, pool table and reception room (and full kitchen) on the second floor, and a party and dressing room in the basement. At the two spaces, Three Sons did over 460 events and weddings last year. The Manor was also the site for last year's May Day Soiree, the Whittier Alliance fundraiser. Three Sons did receive some increased business from the Republican National Convention last fall, but their revenues were down in November and December. Their wedding bookings remain steady. One challenge is finding sufficient parking for their guests. Three Sons had a parking agreement with Waldorf School in the past, but the lease has ended. The currently have parking at the Park Nicollet Clinic, and a valet service through Metro Valet. Graffiti on their brick wall is also another constant concern; they are reluctant to plant vines because of the damage the greenery could cause to the brick.

PRESENTATION OF THE WHITTIER COMMERCIAL DESIGN STANDARDS/GUIDELINES (BY SCOTT WENDE OF LUNNING WENDE ARCHITECTS) The Design Guidelines are a follow-up to the goals and project of the Pedestrian Overlay District, which created city-adopted standards to ensure pedestrian friendly zones along Nicollet, some parts of 26th, and Franklin to Third. The guidelines will help to communicate neighborhood preferences (about signage, use of outdoor space, building materials, etc) to new developers and to existing property owners who are looking to renovate. Lunning Wende has been working on the guidelines since last summer in conjunction with and in response to a committee of Whittier stakeholders. The committee has met 3-4 times to discuss what the guidelines should incorporate.

Scott explained the goal is to create a set of design standards for commercial buildings that can be a tool for the neighborhood to use in discussions with developers and existing property owners, communicating what design elements and features are important to the neighborhood. They didn't want the document to be prescriptive, or to focus on what *not*

to do, but to give a sense of what the neighborhood would like to see and what types of design are valued. The guidelines address development along both sides of Nicollet, the north side of Lake, the east side of Lyndale, and much of Franklin.

The document approaches design from 3 scales: how the pedestrian interacts with the storefront or building, how the pedestrian interacts with the street, and the lot/building level of development. At the building and pedestrian level, the issues include signage, entries, color, detailing, lighting, and so on. "Pedestrian and street" concerns plantings and landscaping, street furniture, open spaces, public art, etc. The issues and impacts of new development, safety and security concerns, solar access and water resources, height and massing, and parking are some of the issues discussed at the building and lot level. Each area of concern is discussed by breaking it down into: "Description and Intent" (a quick definition of the topic), "Elements" (the pieces of or the areas the topic encompasses) "The Feel" (conveying the emotionally-based response a preferred design will generate) and "We Encourage" (neighborhood preferences and suggestions). Most of the imagery is of the neighborhood, but there are some images from outside Whittier, partially to show what kind of opportunities exist.

One goal has been to involve the business community throughout the project. The intent is that the document can provide inspiration for improvement projects of all sizes and scopes, and provide a vision of what changes can be made. Lunning Wende's goal is to incorporate the last round of edits and present the document's final draft again sometime this spring. Scott suggested having the final version as a pdf available on the WA website, a few hard copies in the office, and having the document printed to CDs (at 50 cents each, they are much cheaper to distribute than hard copies). The Design Guidelines committee should meet again once or twice; please email Marian with any suggestions or comments. The eventual goal is to have the document adopted/accepted by the neighborhood.

Attendee comments and questions: an appreciation of the feeling some pictures convey (warm, inviting, welcoming)—even if they aren't from the neighborhood; concern that a few of pictures (some of the European street photos) seem to be a stretch and that their inclusion takes away from the authenticity of the document; an appreciation of the generic drawings which head each chapter and for "the Feel" section as it leaves room for flexibility; noting that the document leaves out historic buildings which are already regulated by historic preservation regulations; if the design vision for Nicollet should be different from the vision for Lyndale; if the language is accessible to business owners or is more helpful to developers; and, liking the positive tone of the document, rather than a list of "don't do this". An attendee suggested the BA create a letter which can be sent to businesses with storefronts that need some maintenance and updates, referencing the design guidelines and the opportunities for façade improvement funds. The guidelines could provide a place to start the conversation with those businesses. Some attendees want the BA to more direct in approaching businesses in need of improvement.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS Virtual Public Art Installation: The BA has set aside CPED funds to do a few virtual art installations, in which an artist creates a rendering of what an art piece might look like on a particular commercial property. The "virtual install" may help business owners visualize what public art could look like in the neighborhood. Marian has identified 2 artists, as well as 2-3 property owners who are interested in seeing what the artist conceptualizes. The artists will receive a small stipend for their time and the cost of their presentation materials. They will present at the May BA meeting. **Whittier Alliance Annual Meeting:** The meeting will be held April 2 at Whittier Elementary School at 6pm. Five at-large members to the Board will be elected to 3-year terms at the meeting. At the following BA meeting, the BA non-profit and for-profit Board representatives will be elected, each to a one-year term. The BA chair will also be elected. Please consider serving in these volunteer positions. The Good Business & Good Neighbor awards will be presented at the annual meeting recognizing community members who serve Whittier. Consider nominating someone you know who has made a difference to the neighborhood. Forms are available online, and are due on March 18. **Vacant Storefronts:** Marian would like to start a database detailing the vacant storefronts along Nicollet, noting their square footage, location, and ownership/leasing details. The office often gets calls from people interested in renting out a commercial space; also, the catalogue of information may be useful in marketing. If there is enough interest, Marian could talk to Maxfield Research and see if they could use the database to come up with potential renters, based on the type of commercial activity that is needed in the neighborhood. A future BA grant could be used to market the neighborhood to commercial contacts. There are a number of vacancies along Nicollet, including buildings for sale at 22nd and Nicollet. **Miscellaneous:** Materials are available from the office for **graffiti removal**; a business owner noted the materials work really well. There are also grants available for larger graffiti removal or prevention projects. Paul Jablonsky has some burgundy canvas awnings that are available if anyone is interested. An attendee expressed dissatisfaction with his snow removal service; other businesses were recommended. The demolition of the meat packing plant (on 28th and Nicollet) is still moving ahead to make way for a medical clinic, although HCMC—the purchaser of the lot—has said they do not have a confirmed timeline. They do have \$30 million dedicated to the project.

Meeting adjourned at 1:07pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen. **Next meeting:** March 11 at Old Arizona.