

WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Business Association Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Wednesday June 10, 2009 11:30am-1pm at Nook & Cranny, 118 E 26th Street

Present Ahmad Al-Hwari (Loon Express), Phil Broussard (Architron, on behalf of the Loon Express), Mary Bujold (Maxfield Research), Erica Christ (Black Forrest Inn), Elizabeth Grzechowiak (AZIA), Jim Hubal (Edina Realty), Carolyn Humphry (Gale Mansion, AAUW), Paul Jablonsky (Nicollet Car Wash), Norbert Kapingiri (gold imports), Rhoda Mehl (Nook & Cranny), Felino de la Pena (WA board), Michael Rainville (MeetMinneapolis), Marcy Tollefson (Washburn Center for Children), Lisa Vecoli (MIA)

Staff Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 11:46am by Erica Christ, BA Chair, followed by introductions. Erica recognized the Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies. A **Motion** to approve the agenda—with the additions of the Multi-Neighborhood Wine Tasting and the Whittier 2010 calendar—was **carried**. Those present were given time to review the minutes; a **motion** to approve the May 13, 2009 BA minutes was **carried**.

SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS: NOOK & CRANNY Co-owner Rhoda Mehl explained that Nook & Cranny is a home management/concierge service designed to help bring balance to a busy life. They specialize in cleaning and organization, but also offer errand-running, event coordination, a cabin-cleaning service, pet-service coordination, etc. She and co-owner Claire Riordan started the business 7 years ago and moved to the current location on 26th about 3 years ago. They employ 8-18 people depending on the season. Most of their clients live in south Minneapolis or downtown, though they serve the entire Twin Cities. Nook & Cranny have donated to the May Day Soirée and enjoy feeling connected to a neighborhood.

MAXFIELD RESEARCH, INC: MARY BUJOLD Using Business Association CPED grant funds, the Whittier Alliance contracted with Maxfield Research to do a marketing study of the Nicollet commercial corridor and give recommendations for retail enhancements to the business mix, based on existing businesses, demographics and population, and current weaknesses and perceptions.

Mary presented an overview of “South Nicollet Avenue: Now and Into the Future.” Some highlights of the presentation: Eat Street has created a destination-like “draw” to Nicollet Avenue—the challenge is how to work with and extend that draw to include other businesses in the area. Local cultural institutions bring a great number of people into the surrounding area. The population density and demographics show that a young urban group—often singles with disposable income—is the one of the fastest growing populations living here. The strength of the area includes the high traffic and visitor volume, the mix of ethnic restaurants, and the great number of people who live in relative proximity to the area. Some of the weaknesses of the Nicollet commercial corridor include the vacant storefronts which give the impression of economic decay as well as the inconsistent signage, streetscape and parking for the area (which leads to a confusing retail experience for potential customers).

The goal of enhancing the unique retail mix on Nicollet Avenue will mean adding businesses that complement the diversity of independent businesses. Investors should be attracted by the strong dense population base and the well-established businesses. Re-leasing vacant spaces as soon as possible will help maintain the active atmosphere. Aesthetic improvements to the streetscape, as well as increasing available parking (by installing meters for example) would help to draw investors and customers. The focus for small business has shifted to providing a shopping “experience”—a feel and environment—for the consumer. Suggested strategies for recruiting retail include forming a special committee and creating a website dedicated to vacancies for interested parties. It would also be helpful to pitch a story to local newspapers about the changing retail focus and try to establish a new strategy that isn’t solely reliant on the Eat Street branding.

Comments and suggestions: need to increase partnership between MIA and neighborhood— add link to the museum for places to eat nearby; add links to MIA’s event pages for local listings; more demographic information on MIA patrons would be useful; biggest issue is people want to feel comfortable about how to get somewhere, plus issues of parking/safety; is expensive for individual businesses to promote their events by themselves; add Eat Street brochure online (to download) on Whittier website. Mary will send her study to the WA electronically for webposting.

MARATHON LOON EXPRESS AT 2801 LYNDALE, REQUEST FOR CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FOR OFF-SALE LIQUOR STORE: OWNER AHMAD AL-HWARI AND PHIL BROUSSARD, ARCHITRON Phil explained they would like to take part of the existing sales floor for the convenience store and turn it into an off-sale liquor store of approximately 750 square feet. The small size would necessitate stocking with only a select number of items. There would be no change to the outside of the store, though new signage would reflect both aspects of the store sales. Access to the existing bathrooms would be from the convenience store only. The liquor store entrance would be from Lyndale and separate from the convenience store. The TCF ATM would remain, as it is one of the biggest draws for the store. They currently ask delivery drivers to

park along Lyndale on the street to ease congestion in and out of the store.

Ahmad plans to hire 2 full time liquor store employees for each shift, as well as an overall manager. They plan to carry a full line of hard liquor, some beer and a minimum of wine; they will not carry 40 once malts or sell beer by the can. The small size of the store will mean a limited selection. They do not plan to sell liquor in the small ½ size convenience bottles, as their patronage is 60% women and they want to be conscientious of safety and security and the kind of clientèle that is interested in purchasing single servings of alcohol for immediate consumption.

Ahmad and Phil have researched with the City and the location meets the requirements for a liquor store. They do not need any variances for increased parking. They currently have 8 spaces plus bike parking. If sales for the store are good, and there is a need for increased parking, Ahmad told the city he would be willing to shut down 2 pumps and use those spaces for increased parking. They have not done a study looking at increased traffic due to the liquor sales. They plan to meet with the planning commission next month and would like to have a neighborhood statement on the cup before going to the city. Erica noted the committee could place conditions on the cup if there was a motion to approve it.

Attendee comments and suggestions: a complete traffic study may indicate what the real traffic demands will be and anticipate problems; liquor store deliveries—will they block the driveway or take up parking?; security—most liquor stores have some security personnel, please be willing to get some if necessary; don't sell the ½ pint liquor bottles— attracts a clientèle that is more likely to panhandle, consume in public, and litter; concern over increased traffic and congestion on that corner.

Felino **moved** in favor of granting the cup for off-sale liquor sales, and it was seconded. Lisa added the condition that there be no sales of single cans of beer, and it was accepted.

BA Motion 1: The Business Association moves in favor of the conditional use permit for off-sale liquor sales at the Marathon Loon Express at 2801 Lyndale, with the added condition that there not be any sales of single cans of beer.

Motion Carried: 7-0-1.

MARKETING FOR MEETMINNEAPOLIS: MICHAEL RAINVILLE MeetMinneapolis is the official convention and visitor's bureau for Minneapolis. They are a non-profit who is funded by the City as well as through the membership of private businesses and corporations. (Azia, Black Forrest and MIA are all members). Their goals are two-fold: to draw people to the area, and to encourage them to spend time and money in the area. Some of their marketing devices have been the creation of a city neighborhood website, as well as a Nicollet Avenue webpage where consumers can give feedback on their experiences at Eat Street restaurants for example. MeetMinneapolis is a good asset for the business community, as they are often able to promote events on a larger scale than an individual business could afford. Their website receives almost a million hits annually. Contact them if you have business opportunities or an event you would like to promote.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS Draft of the Design Guidelines for Commercial Corridors: The last draft of the guidelines is being crafted and is in review by the committee. Please consider volunteering your time to proofread the final draft before it is presented to the neighborhood for review and approval and eventual adoption by the Whittier Alliance Board.

BA-CPED initiatives for 2009-10: The WA will apply in July for City funds for BA initiatives. Over the last year, the funds have paid for the work on the Design Guidelines, the Marketing Study by Maxfield Research, meeting materials, etc. Lisa suggested some money be designated for the next printing of the Whittier Dining Guide. Please start thinking of what projects the BA should fund.

The 2010 Whittier calendar. Past years' calendars have featured housing and Whittier visual identity photos submitted by residents. NRP funds pay for the calendar, coming out of whatever strategy (housing, visual identity) is featured in the calendar. The overall cost is about \$9-11k (with printing and distribution fees). One idea is to feature Eat Street and neighborhood restaurants in 2010 and pay for the calendar using NRP funds designated to the business and local economy strategy. Suggestions: a picture of the restaurant owners with a popular dish; a recipe of the month; photos of the business with a short story of their history; etc. The WA has received positive feedback about the calendar from the community, as it is distributed to 7400 residents at no cost to them.

The 27th Annual **Multi-Neighborhood Wine Tasting** is tonight, with proceeds benefiting 7 neighborhood organizations. Tickets are \$25 in advance from the Whittier Alliance, with proceeds funding Whittier neighborhood initiatives. The office does have graffiti removal materials available for free for business use. There is an open **For-Profit BA Seat** to the WA Board of Directors.

Meeting adjourned at 1:17pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.

Next meeting: July 8, 2009; (time and place to be announced).