

Whittier Alliance – Community Issues Meeting
Monday, March 12, 2007 – 6:30 PM
Whittier International Elementary School – 26th & Grand
Minutes

Members Present – Stephen Juarez, Destin Nygard, Anna Canning, Linda Martin, Jeff Nelson, Jim Baker, Tamar Herman-Bagley, Slade Winchester, Sarah Mahmud, Chris Carrow, Wendy Darst, Denny Kemp, Mark Trehus, Todd Skallerup, Shana Vachhani, Janelle Oberhard, Erin Sjoquist and Kurt Nelson, Michaela Ahern, Eric Grumdahl, David La Violette, Tom Bissen, Paula Horan, Colin King, Jeanine Marchessault, Peter Barr, Scott Reitovsky, Amelia Huffman, Hosmer Brown, Darlene Luken, Doug Melroe, Felino de la Pena, Tony Webster, Jodie Boline, Rhonda Meyers, Mary Cable, Neil Vachhani, Mary Simpson, Scott Smith, Alex Bauman, Mohamed Mahamed, Erica Christ

Speakers Present -- Scott Mann, Chip Johnson, Stephen Buck, Liz Moser, Sarah Sexton-Mahmud, Joe Kiesling

Staff Present -- Marian Biehn, Eric Fu-Wah James

The meeting was **called to order** at 6:40 PM CI Chair Ted Redmond; introductions were made and the Standard of Conduct and Conflict of Interest policies were reviewed. The **agenda** was reviewed and **approved**. The **minutes** from the February 12th, 2007 CI meeting were reviewed and **approved** 11:0:1

Announcements, Community Concerns and Discussion

Annual Meeting –Thursday, March 29, 6-9:00pm

Annual Meeting is 6-9 PM at Whittier International Elementary School. There will be board seats available, information on upcoming events, community resource tables, entertainment and awards. Present nominations for good business, good neighbor and board candidates by March 16th

Nicollet-Franklin Pedestrian Overlay – Vision for Nicollet Ave: Erica Christ reported they've been working for six months on the pedestrian overlay (PO). PO goes over existing zoning code. As a reminder, the Business Association put a moratorium on Nicollet Ave for the overlay to be done. They found out they also need 3-4 months of city process so they will be coming back soon to the community for guidelines and approval.

A PO is generally building up to the sidewalk, windows on the street, and no auto-orientated businesses allowed. Another rule is when a building is torn down, it must be built back to same height. A minimum amount of landscaping is required on new development. Existing businesses are grandfathered and will not be affected.

Currently Minneapolis has half a dozen overlay districts. It takes time to visualize the effect of POs. The committee has also set a maximum of linear storefront on Nicollet Avenue. What does not go into the PO will go into the design guidelines. These will include incorporating art and public works infrastructure (lamp posts, etc). The document will be approved by first the city, then the community, and finally city council. Once passed, the moratorium is lifted.

A resident inquired about where the PO exists. It starts at Franklin Ave at Steven's Square and goes to 29th Street. East-west from Blaisdell to 35W. It only applies to street front properties and new development or renovation. A few businesses will become non-conforming. They will be given a period to redesign.

Comments/Topics from Whittier residents: Whittier is again this year doing the Neighborhood Youth Champions. If you know of a youth who deserves recognition please nominate them. They will be recognized at a banquet and at the World of Whittier Family Fair. Building list of block contacts list, looking for people who will help put up a flyer and connect community. If you know someone interested as the weather gets nicer. Whittier Walker's continue to walk t as a presence against street crime. Walking dates vary but they always meet at 6:30 PM at the Black Forest.

MPD 5th Precinct Report: Lt. Amelia Huffman and CPS Sarah Sexton-Mahmud: Sara gave an update on map-making software. New maps will be available soon. A rental property owner workshop is coming up and will be soon hosting block leader training on April 11th 7-9PM. Contact Sara for more information.

Lt. Huffman will be leaving the precinct. Tonight is the last night she presents. The transfer is effective next Sunday and she will be located downtown as MPD community relations person. Lt. Eddie Frazell will replace Amelia. He will be at the next meeting. Lt. Huffman said she has had a wonderful time at this sector. Her phone number will remain the same feel free to call her.

A resident asked about the crime at 27th and Harriet on February 4th. Sara replied she may be reached by email or phone for specific questions. The city's website has specific crime statistics and maps available for precincts. Regarding recent arson cases, Sara knows one case was a vacant home. Lt. Huffman said we have seen a couple of arson cases as well as vandalism to cars. None were involved with occupied homes or retaliation against people. A resident asked about gun assault and robbery. Lt. Huffman saw the report but nobody was apprehended. A resident asked about attempted robbery but it was not reported. Lt. Huffman said everyone should things immediately so the police can track crimes.

A resident inquired about graffiti. MPD has a new investigator working out of the 5th Precinct, going neighborhood by neighborhood. They will be looking at graffiti abatement such as locking up graffiti cans, more surveillance cameras, better lighting and landscaping, and making murals available. A business owner reported several graffiti vandalism cases. The committee reminded that \$500 worth of damage is a felony and it can aggregate in court. Lt. Huffman admitted there are few graffiti prosecutions because few people are caught. The committee discussed how graffiti offenders are not given penalties with teeth to dissuade them.

BP Amoco – Joe Keisling - L & D Maintenance Co. on behalf of Hassan Warsame, Owner

The BP Amoco station will be expanding their building on the corner of Franklin and 3rd to increase cashiers, store capacity and increase safety. There is no need for a setback variance and the project will meet all the zoning requirements. They were required to inform the neighborhood group as to BP's actions. The Steven's Square community requested signs to request fueling drivers to turn their music off and add more landscaping to property.

A resident asked about the public phones. There will be no phones available on the corner to prevent less desirable people from using them. Felino suggested public phones are necessary for low-income people and to report crimes. He said serious justification is needed. Ted recited the Steven Square's community meeting's request to remove public pay phones. Marian reported that the owner, Hassan Warsame has been working with the MPD on crime. Warsame wishes to remove the phone because of drugs and prostitution. The phone has actually been inactivate for a long time. Felino asked if a public phone can be placed inside the BP. Erica said that public phones inside a business also since create more problems than help. Public phones are a magnet of public abuse for an amenity.

The moratorium will not affect the BP because they are not tearing down. Site plan review is not needed because HPC is giving them a certificate of appropriateness. BP will be expanding building 5 feet towards Franklin and 15 feet towards the alleyway. A resident cited that restrooms were not available and the rear was used as a bathroom. The presenter said one restroom is available only to customers. They will be adding a freezer inside the store for more groceries. Marian encouraged BP to enhance landscaping on the corner of Franklin and 3rd. The presenter replied, they will be landscaped appropriately but to avoid creating a hiding area. Gas has been served there since 1902.

CI 1 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to approve the site plan review for the BP Petroleum expansion at Franklin Ave and 3rd Ave S. **Motion carried 28:0:0**

Apartment building purchases at 2119 Pillsbury, 2200 Blaisdell, 2215 Blaisdell, 2221 Blaisdell, 2312 Blaisdell (151 total units) – Scott Mann, Chip Johnson

Presenters introduced themselves as Scott Mann of Integrity Management who has 568 of 650 managed units as affordable housing and Chip Johnson of Turnstone Group who is involved in development near Lyndale and the Greenway. For the proposed rehabilitation, they hope to implement new management practices, renovate the buildings and stabilize them for a long-term period. They will spend more than twice of 2.6 million because the units are so dilapidated. Current favorable interest rate financing helped initiate the purchase.

The committee was shown a completely renovated building by the partners. Integrity places all tenants under one lease with credit checks. They have zero tolerance for drugs and have tenants sign a statement. For the proposed rehabilitation, it will be easy to convert the tenants over. The current owner has allowed leases to lapse and does not know who lives in the building.

Construction on all five buildings will be rebuilding the structure with new appliances, kitchens, parking, commons area, signage, landscaping, high quality windows, and amenities such as exercise and community rooms. They are spending a lot of money and have a contingency of \$125,000. This amounts to \$17,000 per unit. Each building will take 9 months to finish. This project is affordable not low-income.

A resident inquired about 2119 Lyndale rehab. Improvements include more canopies, landscaping, new windows. They also have rules controlling tenant actions (ie: window blinds). They will do what it takes to do the project right. Regarding current tenants, the good tenants will stay. The renovation occurs while tenants are living there. The average square footage for a unit at 2119 is 700-600 square feet. Each unit will receive a hardwood or heavy-duty floor that will last. Tenants and staff will ensure utilities, garbage, and maintain buildings.

The committee discussed average area rents and affirmed the proposal is affordable at 50% of MMI (1 person \$27,500, 2 people \$31400). Most of the units are studio and 1 bedrooms. They say people who live in their buildings like the neighborhood. They discussed the buildings' current dilapidation. Most windows are fogged up. The developer needs a letter of support from neighborhood for the Multi Housing Entitlement Bonds. They are spending a lot of money to make the buildings look better. Tenants will need proof of income to live at the rehabilitated properties.

The committee requested where Scott Mann's 568 affordable units are located. Several buildings were listed as East Bank Village near the University, Blueberry Lane in Coon Rapids, and in Chaska: Carver Ridge, Crosstown Commons and Aspen Oaks Apartments. A resident asked if they turn buildings for resale. Mr. Johnson said it would not work to sell the building, they will keep it. In his career he has only sold one building. A resident currently living in 2119 asks what will happen. His rent will go up but his unit will be renovated. A resident says the city has an affordable housing goal and asked about subsidy for this project. They get a low interest mortgage and a 4% tax break.

The project itself requires a tax-subsidy because it would not work for any developer. Tax-credits would be sold to finance the development. A resident asked about exterior improvements. Windows will be redone, landscaping will be done. Canopies, awnings, windows and signage will make buildings look more contemporary. Tuck-pointing of masonry will be done. Concerns were voiced of the 30-year covenant for affordable housing.

The buildings have not been bought yet and are contingent on financing. A nearby homeowner expressed frustration over the current building's renters screaming, people jumping out of windows, and threats. The apartments are hell, they're nasty and not habitable. Security has been horrible. Police have mentioned they are unable to access the building.

Developers said they will work with the community and affirmed they own their buildings. Tom asked about the tax credit they will be receiving—it's a lot of money and it commits the neighborhood to long term affordable housing. They said they needed the tax credit to be able to finance the rehab.

A resident asked about renovation of architecture. The window budget is highest ever used on a property. Security system will be at each entry and coded with a key. A former property owner discussed the positive effects of their own rehabilitation of a rental property. However it was stressed, the key is a good property management company. A comment was made that this issue wasn't about management or renovation it about committing the buildings to a long term affordable covenant.

Paula reiterated Whittier wants market-rate housing. Recent trends suggest that more people will be going to rent. The committee asked if the project can be done through cash-flow but the developers say it cannot. The developer warned the building will continue to deteriorate at its current rate.

The buildings have been on the market for about a year. The asking price will be available when the transaction occurs. The developers will be paying 8.4 million. The committee asked why they are interested in these buildings. The developers said they are doing a \$20 million project on Lyndale Avenue and have become involved in this area. On-site parking will be monitored with permits with reserved spots. A resident expressed concern over rising rents. Mr. Mann suggested different rent increase plans may be available for some individuals.

Marian asked how long the tax-credit will be received. It will be received for 30 years. The tax-credit will be sold off to an investor and be used as equity. They pointed out the project's rental rates follow overall rent prices in the area. The committee expressed concern over achieving 60% of median income renters. The developer says reports show most renters meet requirement. Repairs and long-term investment are budgeted in.

CI 2 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to write a letter of support, contingent upon receiving letters from the city's they have similar projects in, for the proposed rehabilitation at 2119 Pillsbury Ave, 2200 Blaisdell Ave, 2215 Blaisdell Ave, 2221 Blaisdell Ave, and 2312 Blaisdell Ave, and send letters of recommendation to the required departments of the City of Minneapolis. **Motion carried 23:7:3**

Bob's Java Hut at 2651 Lyndale – Stephen Buck and Liz Moser

Steven Buck with business partner Liz Moser has lived at the property for some years and bought the building in 1996. They converted it to its form and now are proposing to improve the site further.

It is a two-story building with Bob's Java Hut, Uptown Tattoo on second floor, with Moxie Hair Salon to the north in a 1923 addition. The additions include a second-story addition to Moxie, a new atrium area, and new two-story structure facing 27th street. Covered parking in the rear with a green roof will help with drainage and run-off. The architect firm is a non-profit local business. The site will maximize and make best use without being overwhelming. They are doubling the size of existing totaling 3800 square feet. They do not have a tenant lined up and will stay away from food. There is leasable 2600 sq. ft. for small office or retail.

A front yard variance for the north addition is needed to build up to the property line. The property north is R6 residential zoning. The addition lines up to the existing structure. A parking variance is needed to reduce required spaces for the rear

two-story addition. The city grandfathered 17 parking spaces of which Bob takes 14. The new lot holds 4. The new addition requires 8 more spaces assuming no restaurant.

Accessibility is not required due to the size of the building. Exterior treatment will be synthetic stucco or traditional old stucco. The building's current setback and awning are grandfathered into the overlay. The green roof has a light-weight medium with plants that can grow in a dry environment. Other roofs will drain in and keep run-off from storm sewer. It may satisfy landscaping requirements. The entire site is impervious and may make an infiltration bed under parking. Overall, the building look will be improved.

Nearby resident is very upset with the parking situation. Customers are parking in homeowner driveways, parking illegally near fire hydrant and not back from the curb. Steven says they have not seen parking problems in their experience there.

Other residents noted: school buses being a concern, the street design is a hardship, could have more signage, problems in the alleyway, more traffic, delivery trucks a problem, the new pizza restaurant, partnering with the Soo Line Visual Center for parking. Owner agreed to work with the neighborhood and says the project brings more employment, tax base and makes the whole corner vibrant. They pointed out lots of parking on Lyndale. Motorcycles will stay. A resident suggested parking and traffic problems didn't happen until Bob's came into business. Pros and cons over density.

CI 3 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to approve the variance at 2651 Lyndale Ave for a front yard set back from 24 feet 6 inches to 0 feet. **Motion carried 26:1:1**

CI 4 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to approve the variance at 2651 Lyndale Ave for a side yard set back from 7 feet to 0 feet; provided that disclosure of plans are made to the owner to the north. **Motion carried 26:0:3**

CI 5 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to approve the parking variance at 2651 Lyndale Ave for a reduction of 9 parking spaces (30 spaces to 21 spaces). **Motion failed 8:9:11**

Owners should build goodwill with neighbors, encourage good habits from customers, and build solutions on parking. Parking reduction is based on the assumption that the new addition will not be a restaurant but a small business function. If a restaurant were to locate there, it would need to reapply.

CI 6 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to approve the site plan review at 2651 Lyndale Ave. **Motion carried 19:0:6**

The meeting was **adjourned** at 9:00 PM
Minutes respectfully submitted by Eric James.
Next meeting: Monday, April 9