

WHITTIER ALLIANCE - Community Issues Committee - MEETING MINUTESMonday October 8th, 2007 – 6:00 P.M. - 8:30 P.M.

Whittier International Elementary School

Present Sirem Arak, Alex Bauman, Stacy Behm (Longfellow Community Council), Shirley Bernu, Mary Cable, Giancarlo Casale, Erica Christ, Brian Foster, Mary Gazca, Verne Greenlee, Eric Grumdahl, Tod J. Lane, Bruce Lundeen, Jeff Nelson, Nell Rueckl, Anne Saxton (Joe's Chicken Shack), Nat Shea, Mary Simpson, Scott Smith, Michelle Winchester, Slade Winchester, Resident 2729 Garfield

Speakers Kim Bartmann (Joe's Chicken Shack), Matt Perry (Community Engagement Task Force), Debbie Evans (NRP Policy)

Staff Marian Biehn, Josie Shardlow, Eric James

Call to Order at 6:10 by Chair Destin Nygard. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted.

Motion to approve the agenda **carried**. A **motion** to approve the September 10, 2007 minutes **carried**.

Community Comments & Discussion

Green Fair – October 13th 10am-1pm – First Christian Church: Renters, homeowners and businesses are all invited.

Learn how to conserve energy and prepare your home or multi-unit housing to be more efficient and consume less energy. Guests include the Hour Car, GardenWorks, and Minneapolis Solid Waste. A volunteer sign-up sheet was circulated

Fall Fundraiser \$10 Lousy Bucks! – Erica Christ: For residents, we are asking for a simple gift, \$10 lousy bucks which can go a long way to covering many of the daily operations and outreach of the Alliance.

Comments: - A resident notified the community that the Minneapolis Police Canine Unit will be doing training exercises at Salem Lutheran Church (28th and Lyndale). Residents should not be alarmed if they see police cars in the coming weeks.

- Marian updated on the Salem Lutheran Church project. The proposed plan preserves the existing sanctuary and a new addition along Lyndale and 28th will have retail on the first floor and for-sale condominiums on the second (40-45 family-sized units). The congregation is currently meeting at 21st and Aldrich.

- A resident reported lights on at the Pleasant Avenue pool hall, an old railroad building formerly Weller Carpeting and Disposal. Marian said she recently met with the Karmel Business Association and they are working on licensing the pool hall. Problems standing in the way of licensing include ownership of the building, pool hall, and the license holder. She stated Mohamud Isse is trying to acquire the license. The pool hall has been tagged and shut down by City Inspections. The Chair said zoning may allow the pool hall but the licensing to operate and parking requirements may not be met.

- Marian responded to a resident, the Yukon Club at Lake and Grand is under new ownership and will remain a bar.

- Marian briefed on Butler Drug (Greg Whitmore). The building has been for sale for a long time and finally was sold recently to the owner of Pawn America. Fix-up is occurring and the building may be resold or leased. The property is not zoned for a pawn shop and the owner has expressed no interest in opening one.

- A resident commented MPD are very slow to respond. She stated last weekend 40-50 people were rioting at 29th and Pleasant next to Karmel Plaza and the first responder to show up in 45 minutes was a fire truck and then one police squad. She felt there has recently been no response by MPD in the area with no regular patrol squads. Parking officers do not show up and no cars are ever ticketed. The Chair said Frizell can speak on that topic and such concerns be relayed to Josie.

Fifth Precinct Report: MPD was not available to be present

109 East 26th Street – New restaurant proposal of Joe's Chicken Shack – Kim Bartmann (restaurateur)

1) Site plan review for 56 seat Mediterranean restaurant and future potential event space on second floor, 2) Variance for parking reduction from 16 spaces to 0 spaces, 3) Class C Liquor License (wine, beer, hard liquor, five or less entertainers, amplification): Kim stated she is proposing a Mediterranean/Italian restaurant in the building of Joe's Chicken Shack, a former neighborhood bar. Her main request is for a parking variance (reduction). In a previous proposal for the space (Frida's restaurant) which had not followed-through, the bar space was gutted and as a result lost all its grandfathered rights including variances and code issues on entrances, egresses, handicap access, etc. Kim will ensure the building is brought up to code but there is no room for parking as the building occupies nearly the entire lot. She has been trying to inquire on leasing parking elsewhere including Corson's Corner redevelopment. She stated the bar has not had required parking in the lifetime of its operation. In order to turn the space back into a restaurant, she needs the n'hood to okay reducing parking as before. If the n'hood objects, she will amicably walk away from the project.

The committee reviewed the supporting documents. The site plan shows the first floor restaurant with 56 seats, and the storefront façade reopened to original large window spaces. The second floor, previously a ballroom, is mostly gutted and will remain empty. Kim said one tenant still lives in the building. The second and third floor will be left alone for a while as the interest is in a restaurant on the first floor. Future plans of the top floors may be office or studio space.

The Chair asked how Kim has addressed parking in her other restaurants. Barbette's on Irving and West Lake Street had less parking than what is required. She noted there is a city precedent that all buildings with existing storefronts are grandfathered in a certain amount of spaces. Barbette's takes over three storefronts. Additional rear parking makes up the rest. Bryant Lake Bowl use to have parking across the street but turned into a Dunn Bros and since then it has not caused problems. Kim said the building is a n'hood-focused restaurant and shouldn't generate huge traffic jams. She has

worked in Uptown for 15 years and understands the parking issues the n'hood faces. As for the new Red Stag in Northeast, it has overwhelming amounts of parking due to many empty lots. Kim said she is planning to have the building LEED-certified as well as the restaurant (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). She is doing the same at the Red Stag. The building sits in a very urban area and is not necessary for large amounts of parking, citing again it has operated for many decades without parking. The Chair asked if available off-site parking would be pursued. Kim stated she would and may move her offices upstairs if more parking was available. Right now she is focused on developing the restaurant and not planning on opening the upstairs spots yet. Hours of operation are lunch and dinner and brunch -- open late 1-2am.

- A resident living two parcels away asked about amplified music. Kim said a Class C has room for a few musicians doing acoustic music. The most highly efficient windows will be installed and sound would be insulated. Music will not be piped onto the street and she will be conscious of noise effects. The interior is small so it would not make sense to remove tables to fit a large band, the business is a restaurant to begin with.

- A resident asked about the ownership situation. Kim said a friend is buying the building and she is leasing the space with an option to buy it in several years. She was pursuing the building for quite a while but the other party changed their mind.

- The resident noted that CI has been too parking-focused and a new paradigm must be made that less parking will mean more demand for public transportation and encourage a new thought process to planning businesses. He also stated Kim would not need to even be in front of the CI should the grandfathered rights not be terminated by the previous owner. Kim said she and her assistant Anne Saxton examined other restaurants in very urban situations and yet development still occurs in the area though parking is the same. The Red Dragon on Lyndale was an example where Le Parisien condos went up a block away. She agreed the paradigm needs to shift and pointed out the City will be changing parking requirements. Erica of nearby Black Forest Inn said the restaurant space is very small and cannot fit hundreds of people. The demand for parking will not be like AZIA or her own restaurant. She also pointed out that east of 26th and Nicollet at this time is not very busy in regards to parking. Erica asked if outdoor tables will be added. Kim said four tables could fit and she would like to do window doors that open out as there is nowhere to build a patio. The rear may be a smoking area.

- A resident said he is familiar with Bryant Lake Bowl and Café Barbette's, they are very successful operations.

- A resident reported seeing drunks in the rear alley and the last time he entered Joe's Chicken Shack, the rear dumpster was on fire. Kim said she found half a dozen needles on her first visit and the business will be composting trash.

Site plan review: The Chair reviewed the site plan. Kim pointed out the 6 by 4 feet dumpster and recycling bins located and serviced in the alley. Cellar dollies will be reconstructed to take deliveries off the alley into the basement. An emergency exit will be added on the side of the building off the main floor. She would like to work with the redevelopment of the Laundromat or Corson's Corner to make a centralized entrance to allow elevator access into the building as an elevator would take up too much space in the current building. Kim said she is taking a risk with two large developments on either side but with the housing market falling off she feels it's a good time to establish.

Marian reported Corson's Corner is off the MPCA pollution list but now they're trying to make it work financially. The project is waiting on the market at this time. Lisa Poppenhagen who owns Lee's Laundry is interested in rebuilding but the project hasn't been put together nor financials and other hurdles addressed. Lisa will retain dry cleaning uses. Kim said she reached out to Lisa to partner but also feels it will take a while before that develops.

A resident **moved** to support the site plan review and was **seconded**. Erica said the development is within the Nicollet Franklin Pedestrian Overlay District and fits the requirements and spirit of the overlay. She understands Kim will be restoring some of the glass façade. The Chair said the commercial building is something the PO would emulate. The PO would require more window space but Joe's will be grandfathered to those requirements. Marian asked if the motion should be stated to clarify approval of the 1st and 2nd floors only. Kim agreed. Erica accepted the amendment. Kim noted she may petition to be included in the Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District.

CI 1 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to support the site plan review at 109 East 26th Street, new restaurant proposal of Joe's Chicken Shack.

CI 1 Motion carried. 15 / 0 / 0

Alex **moved** to support the parking variance reduction. A resident asked how many cars would be expected in any one night. The City requirement is to accommodate 16 cars, grandfathered in for two. A resident asked if there was any parking in the rear. Kim said there is no room for a car as the building occupies most of the lot and needs a dumpster.

CI 2 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to support the parking variance from 16 spaces to 0 spaces at 109 East 26th Street, new restaurant proposal of Joe's Chicken Shack.

CI 2 Motion carried. 13 / 0 / 1

Erica **moved** to support the Class C liquor license. The Chair noted an additional public hearing held when the license is submitted and postcards will be sent. Additional comments should be made in writing or at public hearing. Check the City or the Alliance will notify you.

CI 3 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Community Issues Committee moves to support the Class C liquor license at 109 East 26th Street, new restaurant proposal of Joe's Chicken Shack.

CI 3 Motion carried. 15 / 0 / 0

Community Engagement – Matt Perry, CE Task Force Member

Review of task force findings, community comments on CE document: The City is looking at better ways to engage citizens. Matt Perry would like n'hood input as part of the Community Engagement (CE) process. CE focuses on individual engagement, community engagement, and the future of NRP. The Task Force had 10 meetings with 21 members consisting of city officials, property owners, block clubs, developers, etc and later will have a new City Commission to extend the task force's work. Matt reviewed the CE Phase I and Phase II which recommends the City build on what is working with NRP and the City have effective feedback so residents know the resulting action of a public comment and receive a response. CE also wanted to ensure community organizations and affinity groups are able to have City resources such as people, time, and money. The task force was also concerned affinity groups, (cultural and religious groups), are not fully represented in community organizations. Similarly the CE does not want to continually rely on NRP to ensure the City engages effectively with all different types of people. Matt said the comments he receives tonight will be taken back to the task force which will synthesize the input and see if it requires new additions to the report. November 15th is the report's City Council presentation. Input is due by October 8.

Bruce commented he paid enough taxes and if a n'hood or affinity group receives City funding/resources, there should be a self-evaluation process required to qualify. Matt noted accountability was discussed in the CE process. Bruce said he would like the evaluation to include substantial requirements such as mission statements, strategic planning, etc. A resident suggested social causes be considered a criteria for City resources especially groups working for economic progress and bringing people up from poverty. The VISTA contingent in the city is an example. Erica added if an organization gets money, then it should be for something that looks toward the future goals of the n'hood. The n'hood should be able to have some control over how funds are awarded by the City based on their stated long-term goals and strategic plans. The responsibility is on the receiving organization to prove its significance to the n'hood. The City should also allow the n'hood to determine the long-term strategic plan. Marian said with City grants, a regular report must be sent back on money spent. In terms of accountability, the structure may already in place.

A resident noted the CI itself was a demonstration of community engagement as their input goes to the City from the Board of Directors. He feels the City is already at an engaged level and commented that other n'hoods do not have such an engaged organization. He emphasized the Whittier Alliance as a community organization needs a sufficient allocation of money to carry out the n'hoods goals. The previous resident noted the CE needs to address the long-term well-being of residents besides short-term improvement. Matt acknowledged other n'hoods are not doing well and also that cultural groups have no chance for representation. He queried the group regarding when CE worked and when it failed. The Chair said many times Whittier does a good job with some turn-outs of nearly 100 hundred people. People living in the n'hood have a common interest, though with different backgrounds. Affinity groups have the problem to be segregating and focus the attention on protecting their own interests and sub-sets instead of the greater n'hood. The Chair suggested allowing affinity groups resources may be moving citizens away from each other than uniting a random sampling. Affinity groups should not be institutionalized. The previous resident noted as an example, the developer of Karmel Village is concentrating and proposing all units for Somali residents. This moves in the opposite direction of working together to network people who need such housing in the City.

Marian agreed with The Chair's point. There are 81 n'hoods identified by the City, adding sub-groups operating within or across geographic areas would counter the n'hoods. Affinity group definition is also broad encompassing religious, cultural and arts organizations. Whittier alone would have 100 different groups feeding different messages to the City. Singularizing the message and voice to the City is important. Marian also noted the City needs to instruct employees or developers to inform the n'hood when activity or development is occurring – possibly as a requirement. Many times n'hoods receive word too late to take proper action or receive complete information. A resident expressed concern over affinity group definition citing a church, labor union and VFW. Matt said the CE put together a category list of groups potentially eligible. The Task Force could not identify all the groups and realized implementation difficulties would arise.

Erica commented most people do not understand City requirements such as variances and zoning issues. She said there are communication issues. City employees should be able to know how to engage the public who know nothing about code. The Chair said previously planning staff were regularly at neighborhood meetings. Presenters should not be expected to know how to communicate to the n'hood. He attributes the loss of City presence to cut budgets. Erica noted a previous councilmember did not agree with the n'hood preventing Wendy's from moving in on Franklin Avenue. She stated an independent voice must be given to the n'hood. If the n'hood agrees to take action against the CM's wishes then there must be a venue for that request to be heard.

NRP Reduction of Whittier Phase 2 Allocation – Marian Biehn

Phase I investments, phase 2 goals and funding, implications of reduced funding

Whittier was one of the first n'hoods to receive funding in Phase I (1991) – then \$7 million, Phase I lasted ten years. It was leveraged to over \$70 million to build places such as Whittier School, Bethlehem Com Center, Eat Street and other bricks and mortar. It created loans for single-family homes, businesses, RPO. These were created physical, visible outcomes. Phase II received \$2.4 million and WA went through a large n'hood discussion process – 30+ focus groups. The final funding strategies included housing, safety, youth, business & local economy, community building and implementation. WA was funded in March 2005 with that amount and money was spent into many activities including community and

people related efforts such as youth, safety, and community building since physical structures were in place. A large percentage of the rest of the funds are required to be spent on housing.

A letter recently received from NRP stated the Whittier would only receive 38% (\$938k) of the \$2.4 million and \$525k is required to be spent on housing. The balance of our NRP funding is \$15,500 because of the \$938K, money has already been committed to other strategies and funding was expected to last until 2009. WA has reserve funds including fundraising, loan interest income and program income for next year's budget but not much beyond 2008. The Alliance has known NRP is on shaky ground and that the Mayor feels there are other ways to engage and fund n'hoods but he hasn't identified his plan. Whittier is an old organization and will most likely stay around, though not necessarily true for other n'hoods not as active. NRP as a nationally recognized program that rejuvenated n'hoods. It needs to be supported and funding continued. Marian expressed NRP has been healthy in Whittier and other n'hoods as a grassroots, effective program. Though it is not perfect, those who have been in the n'hood for at least 15 years will have felt and known the changes. Supporting NRP for the WA is important but Marian encouraged support NRP as a funding mechanism for all neighborhood organizations. The neighborhoods of the city are another form of its' infrastructure.

Erica asked what is the political will to fund versus how much money is actually there. Marian introduced Debbie Evans from the NRP Policy Board. Debbie said the current situation is 100% political will. The Council at its next meeting could move to vote in favor of restoring NRP funding and then most n'hoods would receive close to 100% for Phase II. Some longer-term funding past 2009 is also available. There are many myths and truths in the NRP. It's important now to get information to the City Council that the n'hood wants NRP to continue through calling councilmembers and filling out petitions and postcards.

A resident agreed the money is needed and asked why the Mayor disapproved of NRP. Debbie said The Mayor's first-campaign run had claimed he approved of NRP but afterwards changed his mind with many reasons. She stated NRP is a fairly cheap way to do the amazing leveraging that volunteers and staff can do. N'hoods spend \$250 mill to leverage over a billion dollars. The City Council is not aware of how n'hoods actually do the work – that money is required to do projects and fund staff. It would be bad to throw out an organization in which over a hundred countries have approached NRP and the Nation claims NRP is one of the best community engagement models.

The Chair asked Debbie how the money is available. NRP funding comes from a group of TIF districts called the Commons Project, established in the 70's and 80's during a period of heavy downtown development. Urban flight was occurring and the legislature mandated NRP to care for the City's infrastructure and housing stock. When funding came for the Commons Project, the City Council immediately voted a priority line-item above NRP to have sole discretion over funds. The first item is repaying TIF debts and third being the NRP program. The reasoning was, at the time the City received development funds from the Hilton Hotel project and the finance department put those funds into the stock market and the market tanked, losing almost 25 percent. The line-item in the Commons Project ensures that each year money is taken out to repay those lost funds. Investigations occurred but nothing happened. The line-item was never removed and since then the City has chosen to continue to spend funds that come from the Commons Project. If the City chooses to stop using the funds (and even not repay the money taken) then nearly 100% funding for NRP will be rededicated and restored through Phase II. Cities are not allowed by law to invest in the stock market. The discretionary dollars from the Commons Project are not set aside for any purpose but a special reserved fund the Council would like to have.

A resident asked if the City simply wants to have more central control versus neighborhoods. St. Paul for example is more centrally controlled. Debbie said St. Paul has Districts like Wards but are forced to work with their entire District. In Minneapolis, neighborhoods can choose to partner or combine if they wish. Many of the control and power issues have already been figured out for a long time. Another issue for the Council is that neighborhoods take away from CM election votes as well as the CM disagreeing with how the n'hood spends its strategy. If the n'hood feels it wants its money, then the residents need to voice that to the Council. Stacey Behm of Save NRP is coming together and a petition will be circulated amongst various neighborhoods.

Meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m. Minutes submitted by Eric Fu-Wah James, Whittier Alliance.