

WHITTIER ALLIANCE - Community Issues Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Monday May 12, 2008: 6:00 P.M. - 8:30 P.M.

Whittier International Elementary School

Present

Jim Baker, Alex Bauman, Tom Bissen, Mary Cable, Erica Christ, Mary Gazca, Chris Gottshall, Verne Greenlee, Eric Grumdahl, Vicky Jaskierski, Melo Lawson, Councilman Robert Lilligren, Máximo Mena, Jo Ann Musumeci, Noel Nix, Destin Nygard (CI Chair), Felino de la Peña, Dave Sasse, Scott Smith, Belinda Tossou, Lisa Vecoli

Presenters

Scott Mann (The Murals of LynLake), Tracy Nordstrom (Minneapolis Parks & Rec Board)

Staff

Marian Biehn, Josie Shardlow, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 6:12 by CI chair Destin Nygard. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted, followed by introductions of all present. **Motion** to approve agenda **carried**. Destin called for additions or corrections to the April CI Minutes. In the section about Simpson Housing's request for a CUP, the minutes were corrected to read, "a CUP for 30 additional shelter beds" instead of 20. **Motion** to approve the April 14, 2008 minutes as corrected **carried**.

Community Comments & Discussion

Marian noted a list of upcoming events and activities happening within the neighborhood [on handout]. **Announcements 5th Precinct Open House** will be on Thursday from 5-7. It is a way to associate with the precinct, get to know the officers, and let them know you appreciate what they do. There is an upcoming **Business Association meeting** on Wednesday. Those meetings are open to the public, but are often mostly attended by people who own businesses in the neighborhood. Please RSVP for the event. On Wednesday night there will be an **NRP Work Group meeting** to review and discuss the FCS contract, our youth providers in the neighborhood. Their contract completes in June, and it is open-ended for another renewal. They will also talk about the Nicollet Ave commercial corridor, and the preservation component of our NRP funds. Those funds help fuel neighborhood improvements and some of the spending is predetermined by an action plan adopted about 5 years ago. The funds cover 5 areas: housing, safety, youth, community building, business and local economy, and implementation. The implementation section is what funds the work of the Office. Community involvement helps to ensure that the money is spent wisely within the neighborhood. The **Pedestrian Overlay Task Force** will continue to meet; the next meeting will be Monday May 19. They will be considering the design guidelines for Nicollet Avenue and the commercial corridor. They will address issues that the pedestrian overlay could not accommodate, including: green space, public art, building materials, set and step backs, signage and lighting guidelines, etc. The meetings will go on for a couple of months, so it is a somewhat long-term (but fixed-end) commitment. The **Hennepin Lake Liquors 26th Annual Community Wine Tasting Event** is another fundraiser coming up in June. It is a multi-neighborhood wine tasting. There will be light snacks and 400 wines to taste. Tickets are \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door. The proceeds from any advance sales tickets sold through the office will go to the WA. The proceeds from the sales at the event are divided between 5 neighborhoods, but unfortunately we are not one of them. Please contact the office for tickets or more information. Josie mentioned that the **Whittier Walkers** will be out on May 13 and 27. It is a chance to be a positive presence on the Whittier streets. There is no need to sign up in advance (just show up at Black Forest at 6:30 on those nights) or if you want to be a regular, there is an email list you can join to receive advance notifications. Contact Josie or the WA office for more information.

Comments & Discussion:

A resident asked about what was going on with the **Rex Hardware** building; she had read in the Southwest Journal that something was going to be done, and she mentioned her concern over all the graffiti on the building. Marian explained that the current owners (George Barr, and his brother in law) are trying to sell the building to the owners of French Meadow (Steve Shapiro and Lynn Schultz), but French Meadow is having trouble getting their financing going. She would recommend that all concerned continually call 311 and report the graffiti, because continued calls bring the problem to the attention of the City. She talked with Todd Knudsen, the Rex Project architect, who went by the building and acknowledged the concerns about the graffiti. It was also asked about the boulevard gardens that were in that area, and if landscaping could be done to give that corner more appeal. Marian said that the WA could mention that to the owner and point out that NRP funds are available for remediation of graffiti. Someone wondered if condos were still planned for the area, and a resident noted that they were, but that the financing had not gone through so there wasn't a firm timeline. Destin noted that the house next to Rex is rapidly deteriorating also, and questioned if the neighborhood should push to have it demolished before it becomes a safety issue. Residents were encouraged to call 311 and mention that house as well.

A resident asked about 26th and Lyndale, and if a **corridor plan** for that area was in the works. Marian noted that there is a small area plan for **Lyn-Lake** that was initiated by the City and is currently being worked on and that Alex Bauman is on that committee. Alex explained that the committee just started work last week, so the boundaries for the corridor haven't been set yet (but it is likely that the corridor would extend north to the 94 freeway), and the plans thus far are more generalized and less specific. In response to a question of the committee's timeline, Alex noted that the committee wants to be done with their recommendations by the end of the year. It was asked if it was correct that **Lee's Cleaners** [107 E 26th] was not going to rebuild. Marian responded that was her information as well. Josie mentioned that there is a posted sign in Mexican Village that says a drycleaner is coming to Nicollet Ave near 27.th

Marian mentioned that if any residents know someone who is having trouble making house payments, the WA office received some information about **mortgage assistance** from Habitat for Humanity-Minneapolis. Refer those in need of assistance to 311, the City assistance directory; 211 First Call for Help, or have them call the WA office. She noted that around the neighborhood,

there are a large number of houses for sale, as well as number of foreclosures. A resident mentioned that he had heard that the City of Minneapolis is looking to shift some policies related to subsidized housing development for lower income people, which would put them into smaller houses and push for smaller developments. He explained that it is a shift that is strongly opposed by developers specializing in (larger) multi-family residences, as well as by some church programs that have strongly supported family size developments. An attendee asked if we knew how many foreclosures there are in Whittier; Marian said she didn't have the current numbers on that. The resident noted that in St. Paul, there have been (foreclosure) open house tours, and it was suggested that holding such tours in Whittier would be a good idea. Chris Carrow [WA Board member; not present at the meeting] was mentioned as a potential source of knowledge for this type of undertaking.

LRT Task Force Nicollet Ave: Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution [dated May 5, 2008]

Destin introduced the consolidated BA-CI Resolution regarding the neighborhood position on the proposed Nicollet Alignment (3C). He explained that last month's resolution [approved by the CI, April], was forwarded to the Board to consider. The Board also had a BA light rail resolution to consider [from their April meeting], which had some differences but in spirit was largely the same. The Board mandated that for this resolution, the task force meet again and create a consolidated proposal amenable to both sides. The Board requests that rather than amend the document, the CI do a simple yes/no vote of support on the consolidated document. Alex gave the **background** on the two different alignments under consideration: The 3A route will follow the Kenilworth trail, and go up near the corridor of the new Twins stadium and interline with the existing Hiawatha line. The proposed 3C route would go east through the Midtown Greenway Corridor, turn north where it intersects with Nicollet, and tunnel underground until Franklin, where it would surface and proceed up to/near the Hiawatha line. Obviously, the neighborhood has a lot at stake if the 3C alignment would be chosen. The resolution does mention support for light rail, and mass transit in general, but is clearly against the 3C alignment. Alex noted that four neighborhoods have taken official positions: Cedar-Isles/Dean and Kenwood are against the 3A alignment, and Harrison and Bryn-Mawr are in favor of the 3A, as they would be served by the alignment. Stevens Square has not yet taken a position. If the CI passes this resolution, and it is then passed by the Board, it would be forwarded on to Hennepin County to be considered in the Environmental Impacts study.

Discussion

An attendee questioned **who was involved in creating** the consolidated document. Alex noted that Brooks Mahoney, Eric Grumdahl, Tammy Wong and himself, were involved in rewriting the document [and that Josie was also present]. The same document will also be presented at the Business Meeting later this week. Destin mentioned that this should be the last time the CI will be looking at this document unless necessitated by changes in the light rail master plans. Another resident asked if this resolution will likely be **approved by the BA**. Erica Christ [chair of that committee] said that the main concern for the BA was clearly stating opposition to the 3C alignment, which this document does more strongly than the one that came before. It was questioned how Bryn-Mawr is served by mass transit. Alex noted that the #9 bus serves that neighborhood; Destin remarked that Harrison and Bryn-Mawr are looking at the development of the 3A as a catalyst for development in their neighborhoods. A resident questioned how the **other neighborhoods** not in support of the 3C alignment would be served by 3A. Alex and Destin noted that there is some debate within those neighborhoods about the exact plans of the 3A, re: a 21st street station within a residential neighborhood. A resident referred a handout referencing the times/route numbers/access sheet for the proposed lines; saying that it seems that Whittier residents' access to downtown would be improved in some ways by the 3C. The attendee also questioned the **layout of the LRT Resolution**, and noted that the bullet points seemed to be confusing in that they don't mention reasons to support 3A, just delineate reasons to oppose 3C. He also mentioned the document itself seemed a little awkwardly written/at time in conflict with itself. Destin responded that the goal of the document was to speak to the specifics of how the 3C would impact Whittier, and not to speak to mass transit plans as a whole. Erica added that, from the **perspective of the businesses along Nicollet**, long-term construction along Nicollet—if that alignment were chosen—would be too much for many small businesses to weather. Massive construction along Nicollet would effectively mean months of no access for those businesses, along a rather car-oriented street; most businesses feel months without access by car would be detrimental to them. In the same spirit, a resident remarked that the bus service along Nicollet is extremely effective; from her perspective as a pedestrian, having the buses rerouted, and limited access to the businesses along Nicollet, would present difficulties.

A **Motion** to support the resolution was made and **seconded**.

A resident asked if this is Whittier's final word on the process. Destin explained that Whittier (as a neighborhood) doesn't anticipate another time to weigh in on this issue. The document could be rewritten in the future if something changes. Erica noted that there will also be City and public process on the development. Councilman Lilligren added that there will also be mandated public meetings that people can attend, which will serve as public forums for comments. Alex noted that residents can also go to www.southwesttransitway.org to make comments.

CI Motion 1: The Community Issues Committee moves to support the "Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution" [dated May 5, 2008]. **Motion Carried** 12-0-2 (*Full text of motion at end of minutes*)

Murals of Lyn-Lake, Informational presentation by Scott Mann of Integrity Management

Scott spoke to the development of the Murals of Lyn-Lake, a new **luxury apartment complex** located on Lyndale along the Greenway. He passed out handouts of floor plans, as well as a general informative sheet on the features/amenities of the building. Scott noted this is the fourth building that Integrity Management has done, and they feel it is their highest quality development to date. He explained that the **construction schedule** is on time: the first phase on Lyndale will be open August 1; the rest will open

September 1. The sixth story is about 60% completed. The metal paneling on the outside is going up this week, and includes metal trim going all the way around the outside. The model unit will be open June 15, and the leasing trailer will be on-site next Monday.

He referred attendees to handouts of the **floor plans** of the units: explaining that every unit has a balcony, its own washer/dryer, and its own separate heating/ac unit. The kitchens have a wood-look floor, and Clean Steel appliances, and the bath has ceramic tile. The larger units have walk-in closets. The bedrooms are all in the back of the units, with barn doors that open up to give the look of a more open floor plan. All utilities are paid except electric and cable. The studios are around 560 sq feet, and will rent from \$1100 to \$1160/month, including a fee for a garage space. The one-bedrooms run from 800 to 1000 sq feet, with a walk-in closet, full bath, etc. The 5th and 6th floors have decks that surround the whole building, and are mostly 2 bedroom/2 baths. The rents there would range from \$1800 to \$2300 (the highest rents would face the greenway, etc.). There is a shared fitness area that is 2000 sq feet or so with equipment; there will be fire pits outside, and there will be an upstairs deck on the 5th floor overlooking downtown Minneapolis. As to the commercial spaces, a restaurant will go in, as well as another commercial space with ties to Whittier. The side of the building on **Garfield** consists of 2 stories, and those units are designated like flats with walkouts. The upper units have steps going down to the walkouts. They are big open units, with 9 ft ceilings within the unit, and 12-14 ft ceilings in the shared public spaces. The design calls for lots of volume in the building, with plenty of common areas, and a patio facing the greenway. Scott noted this development is competing with other nearby buildings [such as “Blue” with 242 units]. From the standpoint of Integrity Management, this property has such a great location, on a good site, that they feel it will be competitive.

Discussion

A resident asked about the **integration of the property into the Greenway**, and into pedestrian use along Lyndale. Scott noted that there is a bike storage area in the development right off the Greenway, and that the front of the property is built for a walkway along Lyndale from Garfield. They are also buying a hybrid car for use by the tenants on a per hour rental basis. A resident raised the issue of the **number of units/and the number of parking spots**. Scott noted there were 109 units and 122 parking spots. There are also 2 off-street loading docks. He anticipates that some of the tenants (maybe 30-40%) will not have cars. The retail/commercial tenants plan to lease their parking from Intermedia Arts across the street. A resident questioned the damage to the existing gardens in the area; Scott noted they donated some money to restore them, but that the development did not damage them more than they had anticipated and planned for. He also explained that they are providing a shed for Vera’s Garden supplies. A resident asked about **storm water and runoff**; Scott explained that the design has a storm water system which calls for a lower-level filtering system, in which water collects and is filtered out, then it sent away from the property. He noted that everything from the property drains into the filtering system, but that there will be no above-ground holding spots. In response to a question about landscaping, Scott explained that a lot of it will be maintenance free, but that it also includes some Japanese-style gardens and container pots. He mentioned that those plans are available online [at www.muralsoflynlake.com]. Pictures of the plans for the finished exterior of the building are available on that site as well. An attendee asked about the **details of the commercial development**; Scott replied that Tiger Sushi is the restaurant [currently have space in Mall of America] and they are interested in renting about half the available space. He couldn’t speak to the 2 other commercial spaces, as the talks are still early with potential businesses. Residents asked for more information about the paneling on the outside, and the development of the Plaza. Scott explained that the panels are made of cement board that will be painted, and the Plaza will be fenced off about 1/3 way in, with a low fence designed for the privacy of the tenants. It was questioned whether the building, with an exterior of glass [Scott estimated the exterior is 80% glass] and the paneling, will **fit into the existing neighborhood buildings** made primarily of brick and stone. Scott noted that they were seeking tenants who would be drawn to a more condo-type of design. The property cost over \$22 million to build so it is not cheap design, and the plans were approved by the neighborhood at past meetings. It was also pointed out that even with all the glass, the building will be energy efficient, partly because of high-efficiency building codes, and partly because they have installed low energy lighting (cf. motion sensors so lights don’t stay on). The 6th floor has an overhang as well, that will help to shade the south-facing windows on that side. All units also have blinds, and tinted glass for privacy. Artwork inside the building will have a mural-like feel, in the spirit of the great murals in that area. In response to a question, Scott noted that the wall that faces Vera’s Garden will have standing metal grids to encourage vines to grow up and over the wall. Scott also reiterated that there have been no changes to the plans, as the development followed what was approved.

Minneapolis Parks Update by Tracy Nordstrom

Tracy noted that some of the Whittier residents participated in Town Hall Meetings for the Parks and Recreation Development in Dec 06. The input helped to develop the Minneapolis Parks **Comprehensive Plan** [available online at minneapolisparcs.org, click on “comprehensive plan”]. The goal of the plan was to give a 20-50 year vision of the parks and open spaces in Minneapolis. It had been over 40 years since the last comprehensive plan had been done. They are now working on the five year implementation plan, based on community input and using that input to guide future development. When she first joined the Park Board, Tracy was assigned to work on the comprehensive plan project, and she is still working on it, and anticipates working on it through the implementation planning and beyond. She noted that the model for developing the plan will be presented in Baltimore [at the annual meeting of Park Development Boards across the country] as a forerunner of parks in the nation. In **2010**, Minneapolis will be hosting the **National Meeting**. It is a chance to showcase their volunteers, the neighborhoods around Minneapolis, and the integration of the Parks into the communities of Minneapolis. Their **Annual Report** came out in April [available online] and includes budgeting numbers and information on what is going on in the Parks. The Minneapolis Parks and Rec’s celebrated Arbor Day—and their **125th anniversary**—last Friday, by planting 125 new trees around the Lake of the Isles with the help of neighborhood kids. Tracy also noted that at **Eloise-Butler Gardens**, they are harvesting mustardweed [an invasive non-native plant species brought here from Europe] and serving it at local restaurants. There will be a citizen harvesting next Monday. Eloise-Butler Garden is the oldest native wildflower garden in the United States, and turned 100 last year. Tracy thanked Whittier for funding programming at **Clinton Park**. She noted that there will be 8 weeks of activities at Clinton Park this summer, including athletics and crafts. Tracy explained that the **Lakes District Council**

[started by Tracy and a colleague who represent districts 4 and 6 and 28 neighborhoods total] is a forum for the represented neighborhoods that encourages citizen communication and involvement in Parks planning. The Council meets quarterly, and doesn't currently have a representative from Whittier. She encouraged the WA to appoint someone/to ask for volunteers. Tracy noted that she brought copies of the Annual Report for those interested, as well as bike maps.

Discussion

In response to a question about **limiting buses on the parkway**, Tracy noted that the Park Board is not officially doing that, although the permit prices for buses are rising to help pay for the damage the buses incur. She noted that there would not be drop in bus use though, partly because it is an effective way to showcase the Parks to out-of-town visitors. An attendee asked about **parks land use and development**, and Tracy responded that the Park Board has a **no net-loss policy**, which advocates for maintaining a sum total of 6400 acres for park use. She noted that there is always pressure to develop park land, and that, under certain circumstances, the Park Board must give up land for the public good [ex. the 35W bridge reconstruction required the use of some park land, in exchange for other land in the City]. Tracy explained that part of the reason for the Park Board is to have advocates for maintaining park land for the use of the citizens of Minneapolis. A resident encouraged the Park Board to include the Midtown Greenway on the tour of the City's parks during the 2010 National Parks meeting.

Question and Answer with Councilman Lilligren

As Lt. Frizell was not present at the meeting (and had been planned to speak at this time), Destin asked Councilman Lilligren to answer questions from the public.

Discussion

In response to a question about the **development of 35W Bridge**, Lilligren explained that the City itself put funds toward putting in a culvert for a bike/walk path through the piers of the bridge to complete the bike path that currently runs through the area. He noted that there was attention paid to the pedestrian/bike paths and amenities in the bridge development. Regarding the pedestrian/bike plans for the City of Minneapolis, Lilligren said that he was part of the **Pedestrian Advisory Committee**. One of their goals is to create a more walk-able city; they have started their focus on downtown Minneapolis, and then will be extending their plans within the City. Lilligren noted that the Committee falls under a **\$25 million grant** [worked on by Congressman Oberstar, motivated in part by childhood obesity] with \$21.5 million actual spendable funds. Four areas were chosen nationwide; the existing infrastructure and the bike-friendly attitude of Minneapolis helped secure the grant in this area. Lilligren noted that he also serves on the **Bike/Walk Advisory** committee, which is responsible for the application of funds. He explained they are currently using funds to augment the existing bike plans, but that the pedestrian plan will help them. Lilligren also mentioned the **non-motorized transportation grant**, eligible for Minneapolis and cities that border it, to help with development. A resident noted safety concerns about the northbound sidewalk on Lyndale near **Rudolph's**, mentioning the end of the bike lane and the potential hazard of forcing bikers on the sidewalk near busy outdoor seating. Lilligren conceded that it was a problem spot. An attendee asked about City debt incurred by the Target Center, and how the City is financing that. Lilligren explained that the City carries **debt on the Target Center** [partly because it was never planned to be a publicly owned building] and that paying that debt is a constant issue for the City. There is a clause that requires that the Center be maintained as a first-rate sports arena; this partly dictates the spending on the arena. Lilligren noted that there is a tax bill (in the current legislature) that includes a provision in the proposal that converts 379 TIF districts into "opportunities," meaning that those monies would be specifically re-designated for neighborhood revitalization efforts and sports venues, etc. [The money would also cover the St. Paul Energy Center.] Lilligren believes the bill will almost certainly be vetoed by the governor, but hopes that the provision will survive. In response to a question about **resurfacing the roads**, Lilligren discussed the City's new approach to resurfacing the roads. The method involves scoring down into the existing surface, and then resurfacing [rather than reconstructing the streets]. He mentioned that this should extend the life of the road. Whittier was scheduled for one of the first resurfacings done this way, but it was decided this spring that other city roads needed to be prioritized. He noted there is also some concern for the financial responsibility of the new resurfacing methods, given that the new resurfacing methods are more expensive than just filling in potholes. However, the method extends the life of the streets. A resident **thanked Lilligren** for participation in the May Day Soiree.

5th Precinct Crime Report: (there was none).

Old/New Business: (there was none offered).

Meeting adjourned at 7:54 pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen

Attached: Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution [dated May 5, 2000]

Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution -- May 5, 2008

The Whittier Alliance (representing the residents, businesses, and property owners of the Whittier neighborhood) has given significant consideration to the alternate routes of the proposed Southwest LRT. The Nicollet Alignment (3C) was extensively considered, as its selection would have major impacts on the neighborhood. Based upon robust public discussions of the alternatives with a wide range of stakeholders, The Whittier Alliance has reached the following findings:

The Whittier Alliance supports the Kenilworth Alignment (3A).

The Whittier Alliance recognizes that the Nicollet Alignment (3C) could provide meaningful benefits for the neighborhood.

- Improved transit speed, reliability, frequency and connectivity
- Access to increased customer and investment base
- The possibility of minimized traffic congestion through grade separation

The Whittier Alliance has significant concerns about the Nicollet Alignment (3C) for the following reasons:

- The reduced likelihood of a Midtown Greenway Streetcar serving all of the Midtown neighborhoods and connecting between Southwest and Hiawatha LRT, with the potential to extend to the river and beyond
- The preclusion of a future Nicollet Avenue Streetcar, whose more frequent stops might better serve our dense, near-downtown neighborhood
- The likelihood of reduced, rerouted or eliminated bus service currently serving the area
- The proposed line and station locations poorly serve the commercial nodes at 26th & Nicollet and Lake & Nicollet
- Vehicular traffic currently along Nicollet may be forced on to the residential streets
- The physical and technical requirements of the Nicollet Avenue tunnel, and specifically it's entry portals near the Midtown Greenway and Franklin Avenue, may have the following undesirable impacts:
 - Render Nicollet Ave useless as a through street
 - Render reopening of Nicollet at Kmart infeasible
 - Isolate and render nearly useless the area between Cecil Newman (29th St) and Kmart
 - Eliminate Nicollet Ave parking
 - In the short term and likely in the long term, be detrimental to the commercial and retail business along Nicollet Ave
 - Be disruptive of the urban fabric of Nicollet Ave, the Greenway and the neighborhood
- Even without factoring in the immediate (and possible long term) negative economic impacts to the Nicollet commercial corridor, the projected cost of construction for the trench and cut-and-cover tunnel doesn't appear to provide for the well executed system that The Whittier Alliance would expect in order to truly benefit the neighborhood. Given recent experience with the Central Corridor planning, The Whittier Alliance fears that should such amenities and mitigation efforts not be fully accounted for and explicitly included at an early stage, they may disappear from the plan during later budget cuts.

Based on the currently presented alternatives and for the above reasons, **The Whittier Alliance does not support the Nicollet Alignment (3C), and supports the Kenilworth Alignment (3A), supplemented by a Nicollet Ave Streetcar and a Midtown Greenway Streetcar, as the best option for the neighborhood.**