

WHITTIER ALLIANCE - Community Issues Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Monday June 9, 2008: 6:00 P.M. - 8:30 P.M.

Whittier International Elementary School

Present

Jim Baker, Tom Bissen, Nick Boettcher, Hosmer Brown, Mary Cable, Erica Christ, Andrew Cox, Bonnie Ford, Chris Gottshall, Lynda Gradert, Verne Greenlee, Paula Horan, Vicky Jaskierski, Molly Johnson, Sarah Kunze, Melo Lawson, Christina Le, Councilman Robert Lilligren, Julie Manworren, Kris Martinson, Jo Ann Musumeci, Jesse Oyervides, Christine Papai, Sam Papai, Felino de la Peña, Brian Poscu, Chuck Sasse, Tod Skallerup, Scott Smith, Daphna Stromberg, Chris Swaggert, Dona Varus, John Wilson, Cynthia Wong

Presenters

Chelsea Adams (CCP-Safe), Linda Donaldson (Brighton Development), Sarah Kunze, Pastor Jen Nagel, and Paul Wharton (Salem English Lutheran Church), Patrick Todd (City of Minneapolis), Marcy Tollefson (Washburn Center for Children)

Staff

Marian Biehn, Josie Shardlow, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 6:07pm by Ted Redman, former chair of the CI Committee [filling in for CI chair Destin Nygard], followed by introductions of all present. **Motion** to approve the agenda **carried**. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted. Those present were given time to review the May CI minutes, and Ted asked for additions or corrections to the May CI Minutes: there were none offered. **Motion** to approve the May 12, 2008 minutes **carried**.

Comments from community members

A resident raised concerns about **traffic safety on Garfield**: he noted that he often sees traffic going the wrong way towards 28th from Lake Street, likely due to the construction on Lake. There seems to be inadequate signage on Garfield stating that it is a one-way. A participant suggested that any talk with the City about traffic should include concerns about residential parking/permitted curbside parking for a fee. Councilman Lilligren said that he could help get the correct city staff to a future CI meeting when traffic concerns were on the agenda. Molly Johnson, who will be supervising activities in **Clinton Field Park** this summer, asked if there was a need for **adult recreation programming** in that park. If the neighborhood would like some adult programming, or if there needs to be any specific activities, please contact her or the WA office.

A resident questioned **building restrictions** in Whittier, asking if there was a way to put a moratorium on the height of building development. Ted noted that the neighborhood did have a moratorium on development on Nicollet for about a year, and that building height restrictions tend to be controlled through ordinances. Lilligren suggested that when there is a big project that will be a zoning issue in terms of height, that is the time to put a year-long moratorium. Since there is nothing like that currently in the works, he recommended that the neighborhood create some design guidelines (much like Stevens Square has done) in terms of what the neighborhood is willing to accept and what the neighborhood would prefer in terms of design. A resident commented that it was important to allow for differences in building within the neighborhood, and that the Greenway was one place to allow for higher building size and more density, so that mass transit would be more effective. Marian noted that Whittier is in the process of hiring someone to help create the neighborhood **Design Guidelines**. The guidelines help to extend the work of the Pedestrian Overlay Committee into the more aesthetic considerations for the neighborhood. Any neighborhood input would be welcome in the process as it occurs over the next few months. The **Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan** is currently underway, and includes steering committee members from Whittier. Lilligren explained that there has been a push to extend the plan as far north as possible, because on the Whittier side there are areas for potential redevelopment. The plan should be completed by the end of this year, but the full adoption will not take place until 2009.

A resident asked about the sale of **First Christian Church**, and it was mentioned that someone had purchased it. An attendee asked about the **wireless internet service** provided by the City. Lilligren explained that he wasn't fully aware of all the technicalities as to why Whittier didn't have service, but that it could be arranged to have the technicians at a future community meeting to discuss it. A resident argued that he would like to see the City of Minneapolis address the long-term vision of how **rental properties in Whittier** will be maintained. He noted the push to keep them updated and well-maintained is threatened by an oversupply of new rental units being built and converted.

Announcements

Marian announced that the Whittier Alliance does have an **open Board Seat** [term through 2011]. At the annual meetings, [in March] there are always five Board seats to be elected. There is still one seat available, and the Board has the prerogative of appointing someone to that seat if they meet the criteria for residency in the neighborhood. She would encourage anyone who is interested in serving to talk to the current Board members about their experience, or go to the WA website to read more about the activities of the WA, and then to contact the WA office. Erica Christ [the current WA Board Chair] noted the Board meets the 4th Thursday of the month, and that members are also expected to attend either the Business Alliance or Community Issues meeting. One way to familiarize yourself with the activities of the Board is to

attend any of the task force meetings [HCMC, Design Guidelines, NRP workgroup], or to come to the Board meetings (which are open to the public to sit in on).

The **Hennepin Lake Liquors 26th Annual Community Wine Tasting Event** fundraiser is this Wednesday June 11. It is a multi-neighborhood (about 7 neighborhoods) 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. Please contact the office for tickets or more information. It was suggested that perhaps Whittier could do its own wine-tasting on Nicollet Avenue in the future. Marian announced that there will be **free theater in Fair Oaks Park** this summer: Cromulet Shakespeare Company on Sunday June 29 at 2 pm, Open Eye Figure Theatre on Thursday July 17 at 7 pm, and Heart of the Beast Thursday July 31 at 7 pm. All the performances are free and family-friendly. MIA will be open during the performances (for any necessary amenities) and the WA will send out notices about the event, as well as have a poster made to advertise the event.

Chelsea Adams, the **crime prevention specialist for the 5th Precinct**, gave an update on safety and crime-prevention in Whittier. She handed out the Whittier crime maps for May, and reported on the year-to-date crime figures. She noted that crime is down 10% overall in Whittier, and the only category with an increase was theft (which is up 4 more reports this year to the figures to date from last year). She noted that burglary was a concern across the precinct, and that she would encourage people to record the serial numbers on all their portable electronics (laptops, IPODs, GPS units) and larger mobile items (bikes). Theft of GPS units has risen nationwide, so she would suggest that if you have a unit, unmount it and bring it with you whenever you park. New versions also should have serial numbers for you to record. She explained that all serial numbers go in the police report for stolen goods, and that the numbers go into a national database and can be used to track down the items as they are trafficked, or traded in at pawn shops. Chelsea also has created an inventory form, which is available online [or on free jumpdrives available at the meeting] and suggests that people record all of their information in case of an emergency. She also handed out flyers on preventing burglary and preventing bicycle theft. A resident asked about the standoff on 25th and the knife incidence on 4th during May, because they didn't seem to be represented in May's numbers. Chelsea noted that the standoff may not be on the crime sheets, depending on what the incident was coded, and that she had no more **information** on the knife incident. An attendee suggested that Chelsea prepare an update on incidences of high-profile crime within the neighborhood for future meetings.

Franklin-Nicollet Security Camera Feasibility Study

Josie reported on the **Franklin-Nicollet Security Camera Feasibility Study**. She noted that the businesses, residents, property owners, and stakeholders in Stevens Square and Whittier have created a task force to address alcohol-related crime along Nicollet Ave and Franklin. They have met with Deputy Chief Rob Allen to discuss the use of safety cameras, which have been used successfully in downtown Minneapolis and along Bloomington and Franklin in the 3rd Precinct. The task force is asking the neighborhoods that would be part of the camera-cover area if they are in favor of undergoing a feasibility study. The study would determine the need, number and cost of cameras, as well as their location. The cameras view street activity in a certain area, and will be monitored by the 5th Precinct. The conviction rate is currently 100% when information from the cameras has been used at trial. The data will be applicable for more than just alcohol-related incidents (cf. traffic violations). In response to a question about potential ACLU concerns with camera monitoring, Josie said she didn't have information about those issues yet. The question before the attendees is if the neighborhood would like the City to do a feasibility study, paid for by the City. The actual cost of the camera system will likely be paid for by the City/police department and private funding, though funding from neighborhood organizations would help to prioritize the project.

A Motion to request a Security Camera Feasibility Study along Franklin and Nicollet was made and seconded.

Discussion

A resident questioned whether security cameras were the best option, and suggested that it would be more effective to implement long-term policies that reduce the crime to begin with. It was noted that cameras tend to reduce the crime in the area of the cameras, but often move the crime elsewhere. Josie noted that there is crime pressure along those routes, and that while the crime may be pushed elsewhere in the neighborhood, it is likely that some of it would dissipate and move out of the neighborhood completely. If the motion passes, Josie will take the neighborhood study recommendation to the Stevens Square Community Organization.

CI Motion 1: The Community Issues Committee moves to request a Security Camera Feasibility Study from the City of Minneapolis to look at crime activity along Franklin and Nicollet. **Motion Carried:** 19-yays, 1-nay, 5-abstentions.

Further Announcements

Josie announced that there will be a **Greenway Cleanup** on Monday June 16 at 5 pm. All interested should meet at the Soo Line Garden between Garfield and Harriet. She also noted that she has created a handout listing the **summer**

activities for Whittier youth [also available on the WA website]. It was announced that the CI meeting for July will likely be at First Christian Church, 2201 First Avenue South, on Monday July 14, 6-8:30pm.

Request for a letter of support for a mixed-use development as the corner of Lyndale and 28th (the site of the Salem English Lutheran Church site): Linda Donaldson of Brighton Development; Pastor Jen Nagel, Paul Wharton (president of the congregation), and Sarah Kunze (vice-president of the congregation) of Salem Church

Linda noted that Brighton Development has been in business for 27 years, and that it is organization of three primary individuals: Linda, Peggy Lucas, and Rick Brustad. Brighton has been primarily working on housing projects in urban areas, and has a long interest in doing work within neighborhoods that meets neighborhood expectations about development with a unique perspective. They also have an interest in historical development. Brighton and Salem English are presenting at the meeting to ask for community support behind the proposed development of Lyndale and 28th. The plan keeps and improves the existing Church, and allows for the development of the rest of the site. Keeping the Church was one of the most important things to the neighborhood, and the plan keeps it and updates its facilities for the use of two congregations (Salem English Lutheran and Lyndale United Church of Christ). Pastor Jen Nagel has been with the Church for a number of years. In the last few, Salem has been in a period of transformation and transition within its congregation, as well as transition within its physical surroundings. The congregation wants to stay in Whittier. They have partnered with Lyndale United to allow for a church development. Paul noted that their congregation has around 150 members, while Lyndale United counts about 60 to 70 members.

Linda explained that the plan calls for saving and “rehabbing” the Church, and then working along Lyndale to create one floor of retail/commercial space, and four floors of affordable rental housing. The housing will be geared toward working renters: those who have a job but need to have affordable housing that is income-scaled. The rents would vary depending on the salary of the renters, but a one person unit could run from \$707 to 849/month. Due to the affordable housing component, the development will rely on—and is applying for—a large amount of City resources from a variety of sources. Linda estimates that this project could have 10 or more sources of funding. Sources of funding could potentially include: Low Income Housing Tax Credit Equity, Tax-Increment Financing, and loans through the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County (cf. Minneapolis Affordable Housing Trust Fund Loan, Hennepin County Affordable Housing Incentive Fund Loan, Hennepin County Transit Oriented Development Loan). The site is a mixed-use development, with 10,000 square feet of retail/commercial space, and 60-65 units of housing. The plans call for a surface parking lot for church and commercial use, and underground parking for the renters.

Discussion

In response to a question about the **level of affordable housing**, Linda said that the rentals would fall in the range of 50-60% of median income. She described the housing as work-force housing, rather than subsidized housing, noting that all of the apartments will be affordable. The current estimates about the rent levels rely on the most-recent earnings data; the actual rent levels will be calculated according to the 2010 numbers when the project will be complete and ready to rent. They have not discussed a regular market-rate component for the site. In response to a question about filling empty rental units, Linda remarked that Brighton manages other properties that are running at a 90% occupancy rate, so they believe a high occupancy rate is feasible. This development speaks to a different kind of housing that isn't necessarily available in Whittier, and markets to a different segment of renters.

A community member requested that Brighton look at **home ownership** as a possibility for the development, suggesting that designating 20-30 of the units for low-income rentals, and the balance for sale. He noted that increasing the level of home ownership in Whittier has been an established goal of the neighborhood. Another community member cited appreciation for restoration (rather than demolition) of the Church, but reiterated the neighborhood preference for home ownership. Linda replied that they did look at the option of home ownership, but that the amount of resources available for home-ownership-minded development made such a project cost prohibitive. It appears that the market has no real demand for condos at this time, and that part of the development process is to work on the timeline that is best for the churches involved. Linda said that this development is right for the church's time frame. An attendee commented on the amount of rental already in the neighborhood and suggested that adding more would over-saturate the market. If rental properties go unrented, they deteriorate. A concern was raised that additional rental units would hold down rents in Whittier at a time when building expenses are increasing, with the potential that the rental units could deteriorate due to lack of funds to maintain them.

A question was asked about the **specifics of the Church development**: Jen noted the plans call for redevelopment of the oldest part of the Church (dating back to 1904), and the newer areas (built in the 1960s) are the sections that have been targeted for major reconstruction. Part of the problem is that the Church is so large that the congregation cannot care for or make good use of all the space. The plan calls for limiting the Church space down to a more sustainable size at 12-14,000 square feet. The goal for the involved churches is to be in the refurbished space by September of 2010. There are no plans for **supportive services** at this site, and the site cannot be used for senior housing (as this would require new

permits and coding). The **parking lot** will take into consideration the needs of the retail establishments and the needs of the church congregations.

The **Church would sell the land to Brighton** for development, and retain ownership of the church only. The sale would be around \$3 million, which the Church would put back into its own development, making it a zero-gain proposition. It was questioned by some community members where the numbers for the sale and development spending for the Church were coming from, saying that it seemed a little high. Linda replied that the money that Salem English receives for the church would be invested back into the Church, and that \$3 million might actually not be enough funding given the structural issues of the Church itself. She reiterated that Brighton and the partnered churches are committed to making it work and seeing the project through. Because of the public funding component, the **financial records would be open** to the public. She noted there would be plenty of public review due to all the public funding.

Brighton would manage the property and rental units of the development. This kind of affordable housing development requires that the property be owned and managed by one company and kept affordable for a minimum of 15 years. Linda stressed that the long-term, stable and professional management of the property could help to provide the stability that is often associated with home ownership.

The Church is currently zoned as a duplex. Because Brighton is just in the process of asking for resources, it is unclear what permits they will be applying for. It is also unclear just how much the rental use development would cost. By 2009, Brighton will know what sources of funding they have received and be able to more accurately predict the cost of that aspect of the development. It is clear that they will be back before this committee and other task forces a number of times to present on the as-yet-defined detailed plans and to receive neighborhood approval. Once the resources are together, they will move on to the step of actually designing the architecture. No estimates on development costs were available. At this time, the presenters are looking for a general letter of support from the community in order to apply for the affordable fund pool.

A **motion to deny a letter of support for a mixed-use development** on Lyndale and 28th was **made** and seconded.

Further discussion

A resident **spoke in favor of the motion**, noting that ultimately, because this will be a publicly-funded project, the taxpayers will end up paying for the development. He argued that **more financial detail was necessary** on the project before the neighborhood should write a letter of support, given the amount of financial numbers that were still unknown. Linda replied that Brighton's goal was to work with Church to come up with a solution that meets their current needs, and that the project is still in its earliest stages. A property owner also expressed concern about the lack of financial details for the project. If applications are being made for funds, what do the construction costs, etc look like.

An attendee **spoke against the motion**, saying that he sees a number of good points to the church's plan, and noting that there will plenty of opportunities to speak to and weigh on the specifics of the plan once it has been fully flushed out. Another community member spoke to how important Salem English has been to Whittier, and said that they have been a good neighbor to the community. A resident noted that it would be good to see something done in that space.

CI Motion 2: The Community Issues Committee moves to deny a letter of support for a mixed-use development at the corner of Lyndale and 28th (site of the Salem English Lutheran Church). **Motion Failed:** 7-17-4.

A **motion in favor of a letter of support for a mixed-use development** on Lyndale and 28th was **made** and seconded.

Further discussion

A resident reiterated his desire that no more than 20% of the rentals be designated as affordable housing.

A motion to amend the motion on the floor to read "A **motion in favor of a letter of support for a mixed-use development** on Lyndale and 28th, encouraging that no more than 20% be designated as affordable housing" was made and seconded.

The amendment of the motion was called to question. **Motion in favor of a letter of support for a mixed-use development** on Lyndale and 28th, **encouraging that no more than 20% be designated as affordable housing. Motion Failed** 6-13.

CI Motion 3: The Community Issues Committee moves to write a letter of support for a mixed-use development at the corner of Lyndale and 28th (site of the Salem English Lutheran Church). **Motion Carried:** 19-5-4.

[note: the motion was in favor of writing a letter of support for the project, for Brighton to submit with their requests for funding]

Request for a conditional-use permit for a parking lot at 2437 Nicollet Avenue South: Marcy Tollefson of Washburn Center for Children

Marcy noted that at previous CI meetings, she gave informational presentations on Washburn Center for Children's need for additional parking and their desire to create a parking lot on Nicollet. WCC now has a site plan to present to the community for comment and review. Marcy explained that WCC has been in the neighborhood since 1972. Due to parking needs for employees and patrons, they are looking to purchase a vacant lot at 2437 Nicollet and develop the land into a surface parking lot with a sunset clause of 7 years [meaning that after 7 years the lot would be able to be repurposed and developed]. She noted that the concerns of the pedestrian overlay were brought up at past meetings, (including concerns about the need for variances due to single-use zoning restrictions) but that they have been told they do not need any variances.

Discussion

A resident questioned the plan's call for a **fence along the alley**. Marcy explained that the plans call for a fence that is 6 ft high and 90% opaque. The resident noted that one concern is that a fence like that would provide surface encouraging **graffiti**; another concern is that a high fence provides a camouflage for attackers in the back of the alley, raising **safety issues**. It was noted that the City is requiring a fence be of that height. A community member asked about **lighting** on the lot, and noted that in the winter the lot would be dark, again speaking to the safety issues of the lot and the alleyway. Marcy explained that lighting wasn't required by the City. Residents encouraged WCC that if lighting did happen on the lot, it would be nice to see lower-level human-scale lighting.

A community member asked about the **landscaping** along the edges of the lot, in terms of rainwater gardens and **storm water runoff**. Marcy noted that the front [the side facing Nicollet] will have place for storm water runoff, and is lined with plants. In response to the grading of the lot, Marcy noted that the lot will have to be graded due to the steep entrance to the lot; however, she didn't know the exact percent of the grade that would be needed. A resident asked if the current trees on the lot would be saved, and if new trees would be planted. Marcy noted that there will be five trees planted along Nicollet. Marcy noted that the only vehicle entrance to the lot would be from/to Nicollet.

A resident noted that she worked on the **Pedestrian Overlay Committee**, and that part of the committee's goals was to create pedestrian friendly sites along Nicollet. Ultimately, it would be a shame to see a parking lot be the first major development along Nicollet since the Ped-Overlay has been adopted. This project poses a challenge to the long-term vision for Nicollet Avenue. It was noted that making the area more pedestrian friendly—not necessarily more car-friendly—is the longer-term vision of the neighborhood.

It was asked if WCC had **explored other solutions** to their parking problems. WCC noted that they currently have no other options. Marcy explained that they have a need for about 30 parking spaces, but that the 24 spaces this plan calls for would be a step in the right direction. They have about 50 employees per day, plus interns, to work with their 40 spots located around their building. They also have psychiatrists on hand 2 days a week which puts additional stress on their parking needs. Their overflow parking tends to stretch to 25th and Blaisdell from Nicollet. WCC noted that they haven't found anyone to share existing parking, but have talked to some restaurants about sharing the proposed lot.

A motion in favor of a conditional-use permit for a parking lot at 2437 Nicollet Avenue South, granted to Washburn Center for Children, was **made** and seconded.

Further discussion

A resident suggested that WCC explore options for parking lot sharing rather than building a lot. WCC noted that their need for parking is so great that they must create parking, even if it is their financial burden. It was asked if the sunset clause was implicit in the CUP; WCC noted that a sunset clause is their intent, even if it isn't implicit in the language of the motion.

The motion was amended to read "A Motion in favor of a conditional-use permit for a parking lot at 2437 Nicollet Avenue South (with a 7 year sunset clause), granted to Washburn Center for Children".

CI Motion 4: The Community Issues Committee moves in favor of a conditional-use permit for a parking lot at 2437 Nicollet Avenue South (with a 7 year sunset clause), granted to Washburn Center for Children. **Motion Carried:** 17-8-3.

Site Plan Review for a parking lot at 2437 Nicollet Avenue

Discussion

A resident noted that some of the major neighborhood concerns about the parking lot seem to be issues with the lack of **lighting**, and the design of the **fence**. It was suggested that a shorter (4 foot) fence, or the use of landscaped rocks, fence poles, and larger bushes could work on the site rather than the proposed fence. It was also noted that of the native plants

proposed in the plan, none were flowering plants and that their use would increase the beauty and plant variation on the lot.

A motion of support for the site plan with additional requests for a 4 ft fence (or other landscaping option), pedestrian-scale lighting, and native landscaping (including flowering plants native to the area) was made and seconded.

CI Motion 5: The Community Issues Committee moves in support of the site plan design for a parking lot at 2437 Nicollet Avenue South, as proposed by Washburn Center for Children; with additional requests for a shorter fence (or other landscaped fence option), pedestrian-scale lighting for the lot, and the use of native flowering plants in addition to the native plants already proposed. **Motion Carried:** 18-4-3.

Minneapolis City Assessor: Patrick Todd

Due to lack of time, Patrick Todd gave a brief review of the City tax assessment calendar and overview of the department. He explained that there are 36 people in the City assessor's department, plus support staff. Each appraiser is responsible for 7-8,000 properties, which means that in any given year, they only see about 20% of the properties they must appraise. It also means that they rely on input from residents to keep their records accurate and updated. From January to March, they are preparing the assessments; the assessments are printed and mailed in March. Throughout March and April, the office takes calls from people about their assessments, and works to track and correct any mistakes. By June 1, the assessments are locked down, so accuracy in valuation is important by that date. After that time, the appraisers start walking their assigned neighborhoods and begin to look at properties on an unannounced schedule. [Patrick noted that the visits are never announced, or by appointment, and that all residents have the option of not allowing the appraisers onto their property.] They look at properties from June through September, and in September and October start pulling permits to examine. Patrick noted that developments with a number of improvement permits are often examined in more detail, and may require a visit to the property. In response to a question about involuntary permits, Patrick noted they generally do not take a look at those properties unless they have questions or curiosity about what will be done. In response to a question about the assessment of purchased property, Patrick noted that reevaluations in property assessments often use the sales of other houses and properties in the same area as benchmarks. The important issue for them is to ascertain why certain properties sell for more/less than other comparable properties. Patrick referred to a handout about property classification. He noted some important steps all homeowners should take: make sure the mailing address is correct, note the information about the prior and new value of the property, look through your evaluation options should you need to appeal the property classification or value, and attend property tax information meetings within your neighborhood. Paul explained the neighborhood meetings are one way to interface with staff to get your questions answered and set up further appointments if necessary. He recommended anyone with questions go to the website for the City of Minneapolis to look at more information about tax and property valuations. Patrick noted he was available to come back at another time and more property-tax-related questions.

A community member thanked Patrick for coming, and remarked that she would encourage any community members to work with the City Assessor's office, as she had a very positive experience doing so.

Old/New Business (there was none offered)

Meeting adjourned at 8:59pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.

Next CI Meeting: July 14 at First Christian Church, 2201 First Ave So, from 6 to 8:30 pm

Attachments: none