

WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Community Issues Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Monday November 11, 2008 6–8:30pm

Whittier International Elementary School

Present Hawo Abdi, Ahmed Ahmed, Tesla Aldrich, Andy Baird, Steve Baldwin, Jim Baker, Shirley Bernu Joseph Bester, Mary Cable, Mahamed Cali, Anthony Carchedi, John Champe, Erica Christ, Lori Chu, Karl Cooper, Marcy Doffing, Andy Exley, Jessica Frehse, Chris Gottshall, Verne Greenlee, Marcee Hansen, Doreen Hartzell, Lt. David Hayhoe, Paula Horan, Jim Hruba, Abdikadir Ibrahim, Laura Jean, Chad Johnson, Jamir Jonah, Melo Lawson, Councilmember Robert Lilligren, Ervin Locke, Bruce Lundeen, Jeannette McDonald, Melissa McPartland, Julie Moline (HCMC), Destin Nygard, Becky Olson, Jesse Oyervides, Sarah Paul, Adam Pierce, Jose Procopio, Cassie Reaville, Jim Roscoe, Jerry Rudkin, Larry Rudkin, Jim Ruby, Imam Sheikh Sa-ad, Molly Schned, Mary Simpson, Joel Storby Chad Whittlef, John Wilson, Lisa Vecoli

Presenters Abdisalam Adam (Al-Hikmah pre-school); Gary Nyberg of HGA Architects & Mike Harristhal of HCMC (HCMC project); Linda Mealey-Lohmann & Walter Graff (MN China Friendship Garden Society)

Staff Marian Biehn, Josie Shardlow, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 6:08pm by Destin Nygard, CI Chair. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted. A **motion to approve the agenda** was **carried**, followed by introductions. Those present were given time to review the October minutes, and make additions or corrections (there were none offered). **Motion to approve** the October 13, 2008 **CI minutes**, was made by John Wilson, seconded and **carried**.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/COMMUNITY COMMENTS & DISCUSSION The **southwest light rail transit line (LRT)**: The Whittier Alliance has an official position against the 3C (Nicollet) alignment and in favor of the 3A (Kenilworth). The scoping period closed Nov 5; the WA also submitted a list of potential impacts to the neighborhood. The LRT committee is on track to make their alignment recommendation as early as February 2009. CM Lilligren feels the current and future City transit plans show more consistency with the Kenilworth alignment. There is concern the Nicollet alignment will be cost-prohibitive, as well as more disruptive to residents and requiring a greater number of property acquisitions. The City will meet December 10 to discuss the issue.

Plans are moving forward with **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** along 35W. The county is leading the project as part of the Access Minneapolis project to provide a ten-year plan for mass transit options. It is still unclear how the BRT will work from 46th Street to downtown Minneapolis, as the bus modal stations have not been placed. There should be a station at 35W and Lake Street; any action and updates on that station will go through neighborhood review.

Traffic work group for congestion mitigation for Pillsbury/Pleasant to Lake Street: Lilligren encourages neighborhood participation in the newly formed Congestion Mitigation Work Group. Changes in land use and commercial traffic (including that from Karmel Mall) have had a great impact on the traffic patterns in that area. The impetus for the work group came from Inspector Arneson (5th Precinct) who cited safety concerns. The flow and noise of traffic in the area has been a chronic livability issue as well. Public Works is ready to design and implement traffic flow improvements, but would like community involvement—both from residents and business owners in the area—before proceeding.

Lilligren noted one response to parking issues in the area has been to put in “critical parking” (parking by permit only) but that often just pushes the parking problem to a new block rather than solve it for the area as a whole. He is hoping Sabri (the owner of Karmel) will be part of the discussions, because having a traffic plan implemented for Karmel Mall will help with the larger picture. A resident raised concern with the litter around the mall; Lilligren will pass on the concerns to city inspections as businesses are responsible for keeping their immediate vicinities litter-free. Please sign-up for the Traffic Mitigation Task Force [on the circulated sheet] and the WA will organize a meeting in the next week or so to help identify the chronic issues. The Task Force will be short term and will address the traffic issues in that area specifically.

Lt. David Hayhoe: 5th Precinct report: Overall, crime in Whittier is down 11% compared to last year. October’s crime statistics are down 27% to last October. The biggest decreases for the month include robberies, down to 7 from 19 last year, and aggravated assaults down to 3 from 7. The new police department schedule starts December 23, adding 2 new beat officers to the patrol around the intersection of Franklin/Nicollet. The Mpls police department had documented 181 incidents citywide involving replica handguns. Kmart on Lake recently pulled all the replicas from their store. There is continuing concern with vehicle break-ins [to steal laptops and GPS systems from locked vehicles] and theft of catalytic converters. **Attendees commented on:** a safety concern with burnt out lights in the Kmart parking lot, and graffiti at 2820 Pillsbury and Pleasant/29th. Lt. Hayhoe will check on these issues. Lt. Hayhoe and crime prevention specialist Chelsea Adams are tracking livability issues in the areas of St. Stephens and Loaves and Fishes relating to chronic loitering problems. A resident thanked Lt. Hayhoe and the 5th Precinct for their efforts to curb vandalism and attention to the vandalism of personal property near 29th/Pleasant.

The Whittier Alliance is in the midst of the **Fall Fundraiser**. Donations support the activities and administration of the WA. Donations of any amount are appreciated. There will be a drawing at the December CI meeting for donation prizes, as those who give certain monetary increments will be placed in drawings for gift cards.

MN CHINA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN SOCIETY: PROPOSAL FOR WASHBURN FAIR OAKS PARK FOR POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS; PRESENTED BY LINDA MEALY-LOHMANN AND WALTER GRAFF

The non-profit Minnesota China Friendship Garden Society formed in 2005 to promote Minnesota's connection to and friendship with China. The Society would like to create a northern-style Chinese garden pavilion and grounds in the southeast corner of Washburn Fair Oaks Park [24th Street/3rd Avenue]. They envision the garden as a place to relax, meditate, enjoy nature, and learn about Chinese culture. The society worked with a landscape architect to sketch out preliminary plans for the project [in a meeting handout]. The **preliminary plans include:** a "moon gate" that frames the view into the park grounds; adding a weeping willow to the existing trees (and moving one small tree); and the creation of wheelchair accessible paths around the quadrant. The west side path would have a bridge over a simulated water feature, with different types of stones and crushed gravel to simulate water and the water's edge. They are considering a water feature, but are aware of some liability issues. An open-air pavilion would be created on the top of the hill for use as a picnic or gathering space. A similar garden has been created in Edmonton, Canada with the support of a Chinese delegation and Edmonton's residents.

Linda noted the Garden Society has been working with the Mpls Foundation to plan fundraising efforts, and coordinate volunteer efforts and research into existing gardens and funding sources. Once they have a commitment of support from Mpls Parks and Rec, and from the City, the Society will attempt to get financial commitments from private donors. There is currently not an estimated budget, but in comparison to the Edmonton park, they are anticipating a million will be necessary. One small source of funding could be that the benches framing the garden could be sponsored/donated for a fee. The Society has met informally with the MIA Asian Art Curator, and will set up a meeting with MIA and other stakeholders in the area. Some of the factors that make Washburn-Fair Oaks a good site for the Garden are: its placement in an ethnically-diverse community; the proximity to the well-respected Asian Art Collection at MIA; and the current topography and trees within the park, because they are the basis for the design and would need little alteration to create the garden.

Attendees questioned: the aesthetics/details of the simulated water feature (using what types of rock and at what cost? will there be an issue with maintaining and replacing the gravel); the paths (will people actually use them?); tree size and maturity [Linda noted the plans account for mature tree size]; the cost of the long-term maintenance [the Society is proposing the creation of a garden maintenance endowment fund]; and, if other sites are being considered [this is currently the only site under consideration]. A resident noted that the Mpls Parks and Rec Board probably wouldn't allow for a water feature, given their past position against it. Attendees commented favorably on: the gardens' reinforcement of Third as "Arts Avenue"; the integration of the plan into the existing uses of the park, and the proposal (not too much concrete, not tearing down existing trees or fundamentally re-structuring the grounds, the style of the pavilion). One resident suggested they should include the community in the events and activities of the park's creation, rather than have an outside group implement the project with no neighborhood involvement. Attendees expressed concern with: the upkeep and liability of a real-water feature; and the possibility that the rock water feature and the pavilion would hinder winter sledding in the park on the hill/basin. One neighbor cited the historic nature of Washburn-Fair Oaks and its place within the historic preservation district. He feels any changes to its use or design would fundamentally alter the vision of the space and destroy its nature as a historical landmark.

Please forward additional comments or questions to Marian. Please email the garden society at mn.china.garden@comcast.net if you would like to be involved in the proposed project in any way.

HENNEPIN COUNTY MEDICAL CENTER: CONCEPTUAL PRESENTATION OF A PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT, (INCLUDING A FAMILY MEDICAL CLINIC AND A FUTURE CITY DEVELOPMENT) & REQUEST FOR VARIANCES; PRESENTED BY MIKE HARRISTHAL AND GARY NYBERG

Mike noted HCMC presented to the neighborhood last summer/August for a clinic at 28th/29th & Blaisdell/Nicollet. The revised plan attempts to address some concerns the neighborhood had with the original plan. The orientation of the building and site is basically the same [see minutes from August 2008]. HCMC is now using a Planned Unit Development approach, in which site development is broken in phases and completed over a length of time. HCMC is working to contract and transfer the ownership and development responsibility of the southern portion of the site to the City of Mpls. Under Phase 1, HCMC will build a medical center and its necessary parking and support buildings. There will be parking underneath the building (for 64 slots) with ramp access from the western side, and an additional 104 surface slots.

In order to move ahead with Phase 1, HCMC is requesting neighborhood approval of the following variances from the pedestrian oriented overlay document (the PO): a setback variance for building placement in excess of 8 feet (to allow for a plaza entrance at northeast corner), and a setback in excess of 8 feet on the western edge of the building; a variance for an excess of 60 feet of street frontage parking (because phase 1 will have more than 60 feet parking along one side); a variance for an excess of 20 feet for driveway width (the plan calls for (no more than) 24 feet for safety and use by emergency vehicles); a variance for the corner cut on 28th and Nicollet (in excess of the 8 feet called for in the PO); a variance for reduction of floor area ratio from the required 1 to .84; and a variance to allow in excess of 120 feet of linear

frontage for a single use (HCMC's intent is to break up the look of the building along Nicollet by varying it along the street level). The City of Mpls will take over the southern portion of the site and control its later development. Only the clinic development will move forward in phase 1. The land transfer to the City and the phase 2 development could take up to 6 years; the type of development on that portion will be decided at that time.

Attendees questioned: the number of patients served daily [225 to 250] and where they come from [all over the Metro, from all demographics]; if the development will be LEED certified [they are attempting to be at a minimum LEED certified]; if HCMC would push for the reopening of Nicollet at Lake, given that the clinic may create additional traffic in the area and congestion on 29th [Mike affirmed they are in support of reopening].

Destin recommend that in the interest of time, the slate of variances could be moved, with the Whittier Board considering each of the variances independently at their November meeting. Erica **moved that the CI committee move the variances as a slate**, contingent on the continuing land process transfer of the southern portion to the City; seconded.

CI Motion 1: The Community Issues Committee supports the slate of variances (from the Nicollet Franklin Pedestrian Overlay) for the proposed HCMC Family Medical Center [28th/29th, Nicollet to Blaisdell] contingent on the planned continuation of the development and land process transfer of the southern portion of the site to the City of Minneapolis.

Motion Carried: 30-0-2.

HCMC/HGA is submitting the proposal to the City on December 8. Please email Marian with any specific concerns by November 20th. Destin again noted that the Board will consider each of the variances independently.

PROPOSED KARMEL AL-HIKMAH PRE-SCHOOL AT 2901 PLEASANT AVE S: REQUEST FOR CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FOR PRE-SCHOOL IN R2B ZONE; PRESENTED BY SHEIK ABDISALAM ADAM

Abdisalam explained the proposed pre-school would address the need for early childhood education among the Somali population of the Twin Cities. The pre-school will offer bi-lingual education and will primarily teach children from the Somali community. The site is currently zoned as duplex-residential use. A pre-school use would require a conditional use permit, and they would need to meet the conditions for safety and access, and demonstrate that the use would not be injurious or impede the development, use, or enjoyment of other property in the vicinity. They are planning to have 5 classrooms on two levels, and parking in back of the building. The proposed hours of operation are Monday through Friday 7am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday 9am to 6pm. There is a Saturday school at Karmel Mall, but the parents would like to see the students moved out of the mall.

Attendees questioned: traffic congestion in the area (if critical parking goes in, where will the students' parents park? how will the drop-off and pick-up traffic be minimized?); the number of students [Abdisalam estimated the school could serve 50 students; he currently has 10 students signed up]; where the school would grow if successful (the lack of space; is there room for an outdoor playground?); and the legality of the initial construction of the building and its parking lot. A resident mentioned the property vandalism that occurs in that area and his concern that more traffic and congestion would increase the conflicts between residents and patrons of the nearby businesses. He has been vocal about the problems in the area and worries he is targeted for speaking out. Attendees noted general support for a Somali school in the Whittier neighborhood, and suggested use of an unoccupied school on Nicollet. Other comments included: this would be the first Somali project in Whittier; the need for Somali-run schools and shops; the difficulties of working with the owner of Karmel Mall; and the need for more details on the project. Verne made a **motion in support** of the CUP, with a condition that the school serve no more than 50 students, and it was seconded.

CI Motion 2: The Community Issues Committee moves in favor of granting a conditional use permit for Karmel Al-Hikmah pre-school (2901 Pleasant Ave S) for a school use in a R2B zone, with a maximum number of students limited to 50. **Motion Failed:** 6-16-10.

Jim Roscoe **moved** that the school work with the Whittier Alliance to identify another location in the neighborhood for the preschool, and it was **seconded**. It was suggested that a school for Somali children would be an asset to the neighborhood, and that other options were available.

CI Motion 3: The Community Issues Committee asks Karmel Al-Hikmah pre-school to work with the Whittier Alliance to find a location in the Whittier Neighborhood for the proposed pre-school. **Motion Carried:** 25-0-2.

Old/New Business (There was none offered). **Meeting adjourned** at 8:28pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.