

WHITTIER ALLIANCE – Community Issues Committee – DRAFT MINUTES

Monday February 9, 2009 6–8:30pm
Whittier International Elementary School

Attendees David Bagley, Mary Cable, Anthony Carchedi, Mary Doffing, Lt. David Hayhoe, Laura Jean, Melo Lawson, Councilmember Robert Lilligren, Bruce Lundeen, Jeff Nelson, Destin Nygard, Nancy Railsback, David Schroth, Erin Sjoquist, Carrie Thompson, Scott Wende (Lunning Wende Architects), John Wilson

Staff Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order at 6:10pm by Destin Nygard, CI chair, who noted the Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies. Agenda: Destin added an update on Southwest Transit. A motion to approve the agenda was carried, followed by introductions. Attendees were given time to review the minutes, and Destin asked for additions or corrections (there were none offered). A **motion** to approve the January 12, 2009 CI minutes was **carried**.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & COMMUNITY COMMENTS Business updates: There is a new Italian restaurant in the mall near Marissa's supermarket (Nicollet and 28th). Tiger Sushi 2 is now open in The Murals of Lyn-Lake (Lyndale and the Greenway). There are a number of commercial spaces along the corridors that have open storefronts. If anyone knows someone looking for a commercial space to rent, please have them contact Marian or the owner of the space directly. Marian noted the continued construction on Karmel Village; the plans still call for 77 units and there have been no applications to change the plan.

Meeting announcements: The Traffic Congestion Task Force (looking at the area around Karmel Square, Pillsbury/ Pleasant, Lake) will meet February 17th at Park Square at 4:30pm. Representatives from the 5th Precinct and Public Works will also attend. The Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan meeting will be held February 19th at Bryant Park (31st and Bryant) at 7pm. The **Annual Meeting** will be held April 2, 6pm at Whittier School. Five representatives to the WA Board will be elected to 3 year terms. If you are interested, please contact a board member or talk to Marian about what the position entails. There is an election/candidate registration form (available at the office or on the WA website) due March 18. Those community members who go above and beyond to serve the neighborhood will also be recognized at the annual meeting with the Good Business & Good Neighbor awards. The nomination form is due March 18.

5th Precinct report: Lt. Hayhoe gave a brief update on the monthly crime numbers compared to last year: there were 5 reported robberies this January, down from 17 in 2008; assaults were the same (4) for each year; burglary was up slightly (10 in 2009 compared to 8 in 2008). The total number of crimes being tracked for January was 44, compared to 67 in 2008. Theft of motor vehicles continues to be an issue; please do not leave your vehicle running with the keys inside. There has been an uptake in commercial burglaries involving thefts of flat-screen televisions (often from workout facilities). Officers suspect it may be related to the conversion to digital television. Theft from motor vehicles is a constant problem; a recent case involved theft of wallets from 3 vehicles parked in Uptown. The perpetrator used the stolen credit cards at the BP on Franklin and Third to buy gas in exchange for cash from other customers. Please don't leave valuables in your vehicle, as you will become a target. The extremely cold weather in January may have stemmed some crime activity, as there does seem to be some connection between the weather and certain crime patterns. In response to questions, it was noted that neighborhood shelters do look at the CLEAN list, which tracks the chronic offenders of livability crimes. For more information about the list, please talk to the WA office.

Follow up to MCAD's Parking Plan (presentation from January): MCAD will present to the Heritage Preservation Committee February 10 at 4:30pm at City Hall regarding their plans for a parking lot, vacating 2nd Avenue, and removal of the blue house. Residents are encouraged to attend the hearing or submit comments to the City planner working on the project through the City's website. Destin noted the WA Board was not in favor of the parking lot construction, even though the lot was approved at the CI meeting. The Board was concerned over the amount of surface parking already existing in the neighborhood, and encouraged MCAD to work toward another solution to their parking needs, such as a shared parking agreement. A resident noted concern that if the neighborhood won't accommodate their parking needs, MCAD might have to leave and that would be a great loss. **Miscellaneous:** The warmer weather of the last week has helped to expose litter on the sidewalks. Please use this as an opportunity to pick up around your sidewalk and property if necessary. The Whittier Alliance is in the process of filling the community organizer position.

PRESENTATION OF THE WHITTIER COMMERCIAL DESIGN STANDARDS/GUIDELINES (BY SCOTT WENDE OF LUNNING WENDE ARCHITECTS) The Design Guidelines are a follow-up to the goals and project of the Pedestrian Overlay District, which created city-adopted standards to ensure pedestrian friendly zones along Nicollet, some parts of 26th, and Franklin to Third. The guidelines will help to communicate neighborhood preferences (about signage, use of outdoor space, building materials, etc) to new developers and to existing property owners who are looking to renovate. Lunning Wende

has been working on the guidelines since last summer in conjunction with and in response to a committee of Whittier stakeholders. The committee, of neighbors and business owners, has met 3-4 times.

Scott explained the goal is to create a set of design standards for commercial buildings that can be a tool for the neighborhood to use in discussions with developers and existing property owners. They didn't want the document to be prescriptive, or to focus on what *not* to do, but to give a sense of what the neighborhood would like to see and what types of design are valued. The guidelines address development along both sides of Nicollet, the north side of Lake, the east side of Lyndale, and much of Franklin.

The document approaches design from 3 scales: how the pedestrian interacts with the storefront/building, how the pedestrian interacts with the street, and the lot/building level of development. At the building and pedestrian level, the issues include signage, entries, color, detailing, lighting, etc. "Pedestrian and street" concerns plantings and landscaping, street furniture, open spaces, public art, etc. The issues and impacts of new development, safety and security concerns, solar access and water resources, height and massing, and parking are some of the issues discussed at the building and lot level. Each area of concern is treated by breaking it down into: "Description and Intent" (a quick definition of the topic), "Elements" (the pieces of) "The Feel" (conveying the emotionally-based response a preferred design will generate) and "We encourage" (neighborhood preferences and suggestions). Most of the imagery is of the neighborhood, but there are some images from outside Whittier, partially to show what kind of opportunities exist.

The committee is still working to decide what images are appropriate, and to edit the document thoroughly. Lunning Wende's goal is to incorporate the last round of edits and present the document's final draft again sometime this spring. Scott suggested having the final version as a pdf available on the website, as well as a few hard copies in the office that can be checked out, and having the document printed to CDs (at 50 cents each, they are much cheaper to distribute than hard copies costing roughly \$15 each). Lunning Wende will present a final version at a future CI meeting.

Attendee comments and suggestions: that the document is meant to inspire not restrict—to attract developers interested in this type of development and design; questioning the use of the word "standards" and if it implies restrictions and rules (Scott replied that "guidelines" seemed to imply they didn't have to be taken seriously and could be excluded); how well the guidelines will apply to new vs. existing businesses (they may appeal more to those who are building brand new—will they appeal to those who are established but have little funds to devote to renovation?). Scott noted they have presented to the Business Association and have business owners involved in the committee. The intent is to have business community input so the standards wouldn't feel out of reach for normal business owners. The guidelines suggest design changes that will make the businesses more attractive, and may help them to be more successful. There is no expectation that a developer would come along and meet every suggestion on the list, but the guidelines provide a context for a discussion about new development.

CM LILLIGREN: ADDRESSING THE IMPACTS OF THE CITY BUDGET CUTS ON RESIDENTS AND CITY PROJECT UPDATES

In 2003, the state was facing a billion dollar shortfall and responded by eliminating or cutting local government aid (LGA) that went largely to the cities. In response, the city made structural (permanent) cuts to meet the budget changes. In December of 2008, 13 million was cut from the LGA payments. The state just announced an additional 17 million will be cut from 2009, and 18 from 2010. The city will again try to respond to the lower amount of LGA by making structural adjustments rather than one-time solutions.

Although public safety funds come largely from the discretionary funds, Lilligren anticipates that the debate will center on making other cuts. Issues that the city will discuss in their efforts to meet the budget adjustments are likely to be property taxes and pension reform. The city has an obligation to pay out over 38 million in pension funds over the next 10 years. There may be a push to bring these closed pensions into the public shared pensions that the city now uses for its employees. (Residents asked if the city was looking at private sector retirement funds as well). The city will likely also talk about revenue options (other than property tax). One goal for the city is to be prepared to fully take advantage of the federal funds and programs that the economic stimulus package will include. Lilligren noted over the last 8 years, it had been much more difficult to secure and spend public safety monies from the government.

There will be a few public meetings addressing the issue; the next is Tuesday night, February 10. There is a place to make your comments electronically on the city's website under the 2009 budget. The mayor will present the revised city budget on February 18 at city council chambers. The city council will then have some weeks to amend, revise, and approve the budget.

Attendee comments and questions: a desire to see better management of the city's infrastructure [Lilligren noted the city has moved to a resurfacing program for the roads, partially in response to the need to extend the life of the road when the funds aren't there to completely replace it]; the usefulness of the 5-year budget planning and the push for more transparency [the plan is available on the city's website, and is part of the city's efforts to be more transparent and to provide a longer-term vision to the public]; and, what programs will likely be cut [Lilligren speculated that police and fire department would have the fewest cuts, but that department operations, finance, and infrastructure could be hit].

Attendees asked about the plan for the city wireless program; Lillgren noted certain features of the neighborhood (multi-unit buildings, density, materials used) made wi-fi more difficult to install here. He will ask for more information about the project. No further info was given by CM Lillgren when asked what other services the LGA covered. He said the city would not look to “create” revenue streams—such as making sidewalk repairs and charging the tax payer.

Southwest Transit Update: There is another proposed alignment that would have an impact on the Whittier neighborhood. The proposal (by Councilmen Remington) would use First or Blaisdell (instead of Nicollet) to reach downtown. In other respects, it is very similar to the 3A alignment which is undergoing review. The 3C (Kenilworth Alignment) is also under consideration. The Remington line has generated some interest; within the next month, the committee will have enough information to know if it is a viable option. The Southwest Transitway group is putting together a presentation for the neighborhoods involved, and will present once there is more information about what lines are in final consideration. Minneapolis has undergone a Street Car Study, to see if some neighborhoods or avenues would be better served by a street car. The biggest challenge would be to find a way to pay for that type of project. Lillgren anticipates that a push for nationwide energy independence may lead to an emphasis on local small rail projects. **Attendees noted** the difficulty of responding to a new light rail line alignment if the details are in flux (will the Remington line use First or Blaisdell or both?).

Lillgren has office hours in Whittier the first Monday of every month. Call his office for an appointment.

PRESENTATION ON REDUCING YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT AND YOUR ENERGY BILL (BY REBECCA LUNDBERG OF POWERFULLY GREEN) Rebecca is a solar installer whose focus is residential and small commercial installations. An overall goal of energy and consumption education is to teach people how to reduce their carbon footprint (a measure of the impact of human activities on the environment in terms of carbon dioxide emissions). The US Department of Energy estimates that the habits and activities of the average American produce 20 tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually. On average, the US gets only 7% of its energy sources from renewable energy sources like solar power. Seventy-five to one hundred percent of the energy in Minnesota comes from coal-fired electric plants. Cutting energy use can have a great impact on a given household’s carbon dioxide emissions.

Individual households can work on three areas to cut their energy consumption: conservation, efficiency, and reducing their phantom loads. A “phantom load” is energy use coming from devices that use electricity even when they seem to be turned “off”. Devices susceptible to phantom loads include electronics with clocks, timers or remotes that remain on even when the device itself is not in use (like a stove or microwave), and devices that have wall cubes/boxes on their power cords (like laptops), as well as electronic power cords (like cell phone chargers). The higher tech your home or business and the more phantom loads you will have. Standby power for such electronic devices consumes 7 to 25% of the average household’s total energy.

Suggestions to reduce your phantom load: turn off or unplug devices when not in use (cell phone chargers, chargers for cordless drills, etc), or plug electronic devices (such as your TV, DVD player, and sound system) into a power strip that can easily be turned off; use a Kill O Watt meter to determine the actual energy use of your devices and brainstorm ways to reduce that use; use a Smart Strip for office use (a power strip with different settings for devices based on your use needs); and, commit to changing 4 light bulbs to CFL. The average Minnesotan household uses 850 kilowatt hours per month (compared to 600 as the national average); reducing use by 200 hours would save each roughly \$20 a month in energy costs.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS (there was none offered)

Meeting adjourned at 8:27 pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen. **Next meeting:** Monday, March 9.