

Whittier Alliance-Community Issues Committee- DRAFT MINUTES

Monday November 9, 2009 Whittier Elementary School

Attendees: Felino de Pena, Jess D Clark, David W. Schroth, Laura Jean, Mary Cable, Chris Gottshall, Garen Gotfradson, Jim Hruby, Tod Skallerup, David Bagley, Anthony Carchedi, Bill Cross, Jeff Neba, Chad Whittlef

Presenters: Councilmember Robert Lilligren, Greg & Lorraine Scott, Linda Mealey-Lohmann (MN China Garden Friendship Society), Anita Tabb (4th District Park Rep)

Staff: Marian Biehn, Becky Neamy, Jessica Rosenberg

Call to order at 6:15 by Chris Gottshall, board vice chair, who noted the Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies. A motion to **approve the agenda** was made and carried. Attendees were given time to review the previous months minutes; **a motion to approve** the Oct 12, 2009 CI minutes was **carried**.

Announcements and Community Comments

Comments/Topics from Whittier Residents – What’s happening with leaf pickup? This is the last week to have them picked up, put them at the street or compost them. **Green Fair-** This Saturday, 1-4pm, 1st Christian Church. A volunteer sign up sheet and event fliers were passed around. There will be bike and coffee give-aways and workshops. The event is free. **Whittier Walkers-** The Walkers are back! Meet at the WA office this Thursday, 6:30pm. Becky and volunteers will go to high auto theft area to leave preventing auto theft cards on windshields. Becky is also looking to get a nighttime walk set up, contact her if interested. **5th precinct Report-** Lt. Marie Przynski. Some increase in theft, mostly burglaries, primarily laptops, cameras, wallets and purses in cars or through visible windows in homes. Talk to neighbors about putting things away. Lt. Przynski works afternoons and evenings, so that she’s here when we’re here, is willing to come to any neighborhood or block meetings, or talk to anyone; call or email her with any questions. Questions: Is there any increase in assaults in the neighborhood? 40% down from last year, though that doesn’t comfort those who are assaulted. Precinct is working with neighborhood associations to increase lighting, working with Greenway Coalition on patrols. There have been crimes on the Greenway, reports of groups of people mobbing bikers, taking their bikes. What’s the crime statistics for the Greenway? More Greenway crime in the 3rd Precinct, 5th Precinct more complaints of glass on the Greenway, people camping out. **Fall Fundraiser** Whittier Alliance is a nonprofit, on an efficient budget; check out the Annual Report for details. Most of our funding is from the NRP, which serves us well but doesn’t cover everything. NRP is being phased out, a new program will come in, but it is unclear at what level. The fall fundraiser is to increase our unrestricted operating and activity budget. We offer business, homeowner, RPO loans, plan activities like the Green Fair. Marian is downtown, advocating for and representing Whittier. Funding helps to support events and activities that are not covered by NRP funds. **6th Ward Councilmember** – Robert Lilligren. Thanks for the past 3 ½ years, looking forward to the next 4 years of working together. Thank you to the other candidates; 3 of 5 candidates are on the WA Board, a demonstration of how involved Whittier is. In the next four years, in lean economic times, we’ll need to work together to protect our progress, and keep improving. Key areas include safety, supporting local business, job creation. The midtown section is one of the best job corridors in the state, and we need to make sure that gets to small businesses and entrepreneurs. CM Lilligren will be working on the housing situation: preventing foreclosures, keeping foreclosed homes from blight, and getting them into the hands of property owners. City hall has good energy to reexamine affordable housing strategies. There are good questions coming from neighborhoods, (ex., Why should nonprofit developers get privileges that for profits don’t?) WA is asking tough questions, CM is bringing them back to city hall. Having a range of housing choices available in a range of areas will best serve low-income people. The LRT discussion shows the increased interest in rail and street car plans. CM Lilligren is also working on reopening Nicollet and reconfiguring Lake St in his next term. We’ve made progress, have a city plan, have capital dollars to build road and bridge, now need site control. CM will continue to work with the WA, together we both have greater reach. As NRP sunsets, a new program will start: Neighborhood Community Relations Department. N’hoods will have a physical space at city hall, be at the center of city government .N’hoods will be part of how city runs. WA is strong, poised to do a lot. **Comments & Questions** What

will happen when NRP phases out? NRP is set to phase out 2010. We've been planning for it, doing focus groups, asking the community: Should we continue? Overwhelming answer has been yes, with n'hood discretionary funding a key component. That will be a big debate in city council, please stay engaged, talk to Robert. One as of yet unfulfilled goal of NRP was to improve cooperation between n'hoods and city hall. The N'hood Community Relations Dept & N'hood Community Engagement Commission are possible solutions to that. Rather than just concerned with n'hood operations, it will be involved in how city gets involved in n'hood (safety, road, transportation), so that there are standards being met, city departments are being responsive. Mark Hinds from Lyndale is our geographic rep. Commission meets on Thursday, can be viewed on city channel. Reps are 1/2 elected, 1/2 appointed. How can we have more city residents working city jobs? Yes, we want city staff, police, to be representative in and of the city. There used to be a residency requirement, but state struck it down as unconstitutional. For police, there is an incentive program, and the police have been working to recruit and train young people from the city. What is happening with 35W access at Lake St? Bus Rapid Transit is getting ramped up. There was a proposal to expand 35W at Lake St, has been opposed by the city, by Robert as a resident. People have been pressuring, especially bus rapid transit, MNDOT. What does that mean for Lake & 35W? There was a new plan out last year, asking what if any pieces could be done independently? And if yes, what would the cost-benefit ratio be? Need to have 1:1, cost to benefit ratio. The starting place would need to be a 3 level transit signature station: Greenway, Lake St, 35W. There have been many changes over the past ten years: we're out of money, and there has been an increase interest in transit. Is Allina still driving the exit ramp decisions? They still are, but there isn't money. Would 35W/Lake Station happen at the same time as the Nicollet reopen, or would it inspire it? Sears/Kmart is more involved in discussion now than they have ever been. Blaisdell-5th area has been lifted out of Nicollet redesign and put into 35W project area, for strategic reasons. Dollars are there, have been earmarked, but we're getting close to use it or lose it time, so county is very interested in using it. Is anything being done about people's speed on one ways? Park/Portland, 26th/28th were designed when people were looking to get through these n'hoods. Much like the downtown redesign, these streets are being considered.

2021 Pleasant Ave S – Greg & Lori Scott The Scotts have been involved in neighborhood, helping to rehab Victorian houses, three in the n'hood. 2021 Pleasant Ave they've owned for 25 years. Got it under condemnation order, purchased it at nominal price, totally rehabbed the building. It is a triplex, 2,000/2,000/1600 sq feet. It has four meters (one house meter). The City made a mistake, listed it as duplex, and the Scotts didn't notice until 2 years ago. Now they're remortgaging, went to city to clean up paperwork. City inspector came out, condemned it, they got that repealed. Another city inspector came out and said it was in great shape, should be triplex. Now they need a non-conforming use permit, which is what it should have been operating under already. Not asking for zoning change. Many non-conforming use permits in particular zones. Taxes have been paid as tri-plex non-homestead. Have electricity bill from 1984 showing 3rd meter in use. **Attendees Comments and Questions:** Do you have to go in front of city again? With city inspector's recommendation and WA support, hopefully not. Might have to pay \$550, hopefully not. Fire code? The sqftage of one attic unit bedroom is has less than a 7 ft clearance. They will do some buidout in the unit to get the sqft/height proportions into code. CM Lilligren has seen this a lot lately. It sounds like city is solving administratively. There are options, like rezoning. Non-conforming use permit is the least disruptive option, but are binding. It is not uncommon for use to be different from zoning. This is its own unit? 3rd Floor has its own entrance, 1600 sq foot 3 bedroom. 3 bedrooms are the scarcest in the city. Why is this an issue? There weren't permits originally, then city issued rental permits. When that changed, they probably looked at Pleasant as R2 Zone, and issued everything on the street duplex permits. What do you want from this body? A motion to support a non-conforming use. MB: Is there some way for the City to be less aggressive particularly when the owner is seeking compliance? A sign was posted on the property door to Vacate Today, as the Scotts were at City Hall resolving this. Caused undue concern and panic from the tenants. CM: It is kind of particular to this neighborhood, to have all these 3 & 4-plexes in an R2 Zone. Another CI attendee got a note from the fire

department to Vacate Today. CM: The past few years the City has intensified enforcement for small apts, with the goal of keeping them safe, clean, secure. Not all landlords are attentive.

CI Motion 1: The Community Issues Committee supports the nonconforming use permit for a 3rd unit at 2021 Pleasant Ave S. in an R2B zoning. **Motion passes. 11-0-0.**

MN China Garden Friendship Society – Linda Mealey – Lohmann Chris: We heard from this group this time last year, supported the continuation of their exploration of the funding and design, and they are back to give an update. Linda: We've made some baby steps since last time. This is being proposed a sister city friendship garden, with Har Bin, a city in NE China, with similar climate to Mpls. They have an ice and snow festival every year, with an ice castle and snow city. One dream is to bring over some artists to do that in WFO. Since last year we've had a couple of meetings with the park board and park commissioners. They had questions and suggestions. Linda brought WA feedback from the Dec '07 meeting, asked landscape designer to make 3 new blueprints. Group is looking at what the n'hood usage of the park is. The low lying area: Reconstruct water feature, skating in winter? Until we get commitment from park board, we just have designs. Mayor Rybak traveled to China, visited with Mayor of Har Bin. Presented materials, was well received. Mayor of Har Bin will donate 2 architects. MN Foundation will be fiscal agent. The Society is hoping to present to park board as soon as possible. Linda has sketches of 3 different designs with pavilion, bridge, moongate. All designs are not to lose any existing healthy trees. **Attendees Comments and Questions:** Do you have a budget? No, estimated: 2-3 million dollars. But as sister city park, much would be donated. What does the park board say about water? Linda's getting a mixed message: would be wonderful to restore, but there is liability issues, and potential weed problems. Would it have to be artificially put in? Yes. New technology: can use gravity to get water in. Important to keep it low maintenance. Originally, Park Board said they had money for lights and benches in other parts of park. MNCFG would be responsible with maintenance endowment for their section of park. Now, Parks has no money for other half, are saying that if MNCFG has funds to park redo, MPR would take over maintenance. MB recommends listening closely; if they don't have money to fix up lights and benches now, then what will they have for maintenance? Linda hopes the state referendum for arts and culture money could be used for this. Comment: Could water come from the pavilion, put in a theater, performance space. Theaters already use Southwest corner, would be great to encourage that use. Linda: If anyone has photos of how that corner or sledding hill is used, please email them to Linda. We don't have a timeline, b/c are waiting for approval from Park Board. Felino: Do MNCFG people live in the n'hood? No. It seems to Felino that this doesn't fit the n'hood. Kids play soccer, people come to sit, walk. Others worry it will not be maintained. Mary: While this is pretty, is it for n'hood residents to come use it, or for visitors, (MIA, Children's Theater, etc)? Chad lives near park, has been advocating for the park for many years. Thinks this would attract people to live near park. Status quo park is a huge heap of un-used plans, deserves more. We have a huge population concentration, need to increase park utilizations. This will make the park safer, more people can use it, show it as cared for. How can we impress upon the park board that this is important? Linda: Park board is talking about having a community advisory committee for this. A few people have seen a new historical marker at Stevens and 22nd. Says that WFO is one of the few pastoral throwback parks. It doesn't feel like the China Garden fits, where did it come from? MIA? Why did you choose this park? The MNCFG had been looking at n'hood parks, for multicultural n'hood, compatible topography, and heard at WA meetings WFO has been under utilized. They are looking to partner with community, don't want to be somewhere not wanted. Can you tell us in advance when you'll be at the park board? Linda: hoping to get on agenda in Dec, will communicate with MB.

Anita Tabb- 4th District Park Rep Just elected, will be representing us in January. Community participation is key. Wants community input on things before Park Board does them. On controversial things (like China Garden), Tabb wants to form a city advisory committee, get people on all sides of issue, to provide context. These are our parks. **Attendees Comments and Questions:** Felino: Community is important. People come here from other n'hoods and want to do things. Tabb says that

based on work people put in, they don't want to do anything bad. One question to answer is, who are the stakeholders in the park? Some feel strongly it should be pastoral, others have seen it used for arts. Those discussions need to be held. Tabb is planning on coming to WA meetings at least quarterly, more if people would like, to give an update of what's going on in our n'hood parks and throughout city parks, so that people know what's happening. This is Tabb's first time in elected office, so she's looking for input on how best to get input from community. In the next month Tabb will do a walk through with the parks manager to see maintenance and park needs. Everybody knows money will be really tight, everywhere. There won't be a lot of money to spend, but we need an understanding of where we are, so we know what the priorities are and can spend money wisely. Hope to spend time with CM Lilligren, to hear concerns he's hearing. Chad hopes that as we see parks, we think about inner-city, concentrated population, where we've historically spent the least amount of money. Hopes Tabb won't continue the Park Board's inequitable past. Tabb is hoping not to cut, to at least maintain. Please contact her with where to target dollars. David Bagley: How do certain parks get budgeted? WFO was budgeted for open space. Other parks with many plantings have strong Friends organizations that do the fundraising and maintenance (i.e. Friends of Loring Park). And policing of parks? The Park police is under the Park Board. They have regular routes, probably based on statistics, events. David: [WFO] is regularly filled with people drinking. Is it St. Stephen's? Chad: St Stephen's guests are good people who need our help, and it is by a count of 10 the biggest food shelf in MN. A few bad eggs, we should be invested in making it safe for everyone.. CM Lilligren: There are equity issues. We need equity in capital and programming, equity of services and investment of park, and it needs to be demonstrated with numbers. As you're doing walking tour, might want to walk with WA people. MB: Whittier has park programming, Clinton Field has playmobile in summer, WFO is passive. Park programming addresses needs of kids in n'hood, but seems stagnant, not creative. Park staff is familiar with people who come, which is an asset, but hasn't encouraged creativity. Would there be a way to rotate staff, get fresh ideas, for more creativity in n'hood? Tabb says that is something we could look into. CM: The new historical marker is an example of something just showing up, without consultation. MB: Meanwhile, we fought for a year to get a sign that says Clinton Field Park. Tabb: That's why I ran. Chad says it's important to balance Clinton Field and WFO Parks. Soccer, basketball, volleyball, can all happen in Clinton.

Additional Comments: Hole in the WA online presence: Board Minutes are not online, just actions. We have no idea what's happening at board meetings. WA will work to get Board minutes up as soon as possible. Someone noticed gravely sidewalk near Supervalu. Call 311 with such issues. City will tell SV, more likely to get taken care of. Sidewalk cafes, are they obligated to clean sidewalks? Some do, but some don't. Who is responsible for washing down sidewalks? CM: Assume that it is part of permitting process for sidewalk cafes, that they cleanup. Call 311 to register complaint

Old / New Business (there was none offered).

Meeting adjourned: 8:09pm

Minutes submitted by: Jessica Rosenberg, Administrative Assistant, Whittier Alliance

Next meeting: Monday, December 14th, 6 pm, the Whittier Elementary School