

**Design Guideline Task Force**  
**July 28, 2008 6-7:30pm**  
**Whittier Alliance**

**Attendees:** Erica Christ-Black Forest, Tammy Wong-Rainbow Chinese, Destin Nygard, Ethan Fawley, JoAnn Musumeci, Mary Cable-Sullivan's Supermarket, Nick Boettscher, Bob Lunning & Scott Wende-Lunning & Wende Assoc, Marian Biehn.

Introductions were made and Bob & Scott gave a short review of their experience. The Scope of Work and Agenda were reviewed and approved. A brief background on the Pedestrian Overlay and the outcropping of the Design Guideline development due to the inability of the PO to address the more esthetic preferences of n'hood development.

Bob & Scott reported that they had walked Nicollet Ave and took notes and photos. They noted it as one of the most urban and active n'hoods in City. It is an experience on foot that is not available by bus or car. They feel that we should encourage the eclectic quality of the n'hood and particularly the commercial streets which is contrary to the more common school of design guidelines of making things more the same. This approach is much more intriguing and has more potential for developing something that is more open. What is to be the outcome and how is it to be shaped.

L & W want to get input on what works, what we are afraid of happening, what we like/don't—send them emails and photos jpgs.

The moved into reviewing the advance questions:

**#1 Name one or two places/buildings along Nicollet that work well and why:**

- Rainbow Chinese restaurant -- container garden inviting, nice building—dragons on top-vines on building-good signage, outside dining
- Waldorf School- plantings, fencing
- Black Forest courtyard-holds lot line but is an open inviting space
- Greenleaf, Eat Street Lofts and Artist Quarter—residential density, good restaurant interaction with street, good windows
- Mixture of era's along Nicollet. Franklin Nicollet Liquor. Sight line to downtown from Nicollet and 22<sup>nd</sup>.
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**General comments:** To have the entire Nic Ave be all multi or mixed use would be too much. Having open spaces along the Ave is a good relief for pedestrians. Looking down the street looks kind of bare in areas but other areas have the planters or other inviting aspects that make the street friendlier. Awful buildings are mitigated with a plot of green which is unique and an asset. Layers and variety of "in and out" is an asset to the street. The intense use and not intense use have different feels—some of the open spaces feel okay while some just feel neglected. Corner of 25<sup>th</sup> and Nicollet is pretty good—nice architectural detail on apt buildings and spyhouse. Pkg lot on nw corner is not good. Butler building example of bad—no landscaping.

*(In the interest of time, the group skipped to #4 for discussion. Responses from #2 & 3 are from the responses received in advance of or post meeting.)*

**#2 Name one or two places/buildings along Nicollet that don't work and why.**

- Empty lots—ugly, don't feel safe
- Java Restaurant at Nic & 28<sup>th</sup> —nothing about it invites
- Relax-Exotic—former Yummy—big parking lot in front-hot and empty, the pole signage,
- Palm Brothers Bldg (near Quang's) – front yard parking-building could be salvaged with some minor design work but the parking is a big detractor
- Pho 79/Caravelle—ugly building, too many signs on front, bad materials, potential for flower boxes and green unused.
- Mexican Strip Mall on Nic near 28<sup>th</sup>—store fronts are shabby, uninviting

**#3 Nicollet Assets**

**Structures**

- The variety
- New mixed use buildings
- Mixed eras represented
- Varied setbacks—rhythm of structures along the street

**Architecture**

- Some peculiar building
- Interesting brick work/detailing on older buildings
- Franklin Nicolette Liquors—retro
- Mixed architectural style

**Pedestrian engagement**

- Activity in street/dining
- Flower boxes
- Windows

**Other**

- Eat Street fencing & banners
- Turn Lanes

**#4 What design/architectural, pedestrian, etc changes/improvements would you like to see implements along Nicollet in the next 5 years?**

- More 2 & 3 story buildings.
- More opportunities for window shopping.
- Adding day time users.
- Keep affordability for small businesses.
- More cultural (arts) opportunities and more creative green implementation.  
(Counter comment: *The rest of the neighborhood is lush so it makes Nicollet a counter point to the green.*)
- Maximize the opportunity to interact with people.
- Less street level parking
- Better streetscaping
- Public Art
- Open Nicollet at K-Mart
- Small plaza for public gatherings,
- Streetcar

- More tasteful signage
- Refreshed-remodeled store fronts (removal of fake brick)
- More retail/commercial variety
- No litter & graffiti
- Sidewalk design/texture/variation
- Clean sidewalks—no tar and gum

**General Comments:** More people come with more density. What is the reaction to the Artist Quarter—fairly positive. Nicollet side good. Scott felt the height of the 26<sup>th</sup> St side was oppressive. Erica commented on the dullness of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ave side. What is the height tolerance level-- 3-4 stories probably okay.

The plaza concept was discussed-- how do you keep away unsavory lingering in public plaza. What would the public plaza be about—response: optimism. It could be a public-semi public gathering spaces—a stop to rest, no spending of \$\$, just an inviting place to rest. Needs to be easily policed—want people to linger but not loiter. Concord street in St Paul – cultural tradition of communal outdoor usage—works well. The shop keepers watch over it. Loitering and crime usually happen in areas that no one feels responsible for. Peavey plaza is a good use of open space.

*(The group moved to #8 with the info from #5 being filled in from pre or post meeting responses.)*

**#5 What are the repetitive attractive and unattractive elements?**

**Attractive:**

- Eat Street streetscape
- Brick Buildings
- Out door dining
- Container Gardens
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**Unattractive:**

- Empty Lots
- Surface Parking
- Vacant Store fronts
- False facades
- Signage
- Newspaper display boxes
- Litter & Graffiti

**#8 How do you characterize “Eclectic?”**

Are we in agreement in wanting to keep eclectic nature—yes.

What make it eclectic—ethnic businesses, diversity of architecture, non homogenous design, varied set backs, mix of economic levels of business. Sometimes “character” is a euphemism for dirty and not safe-or unpredictable—don’t know what might happen in a shop or whether the business is busy-variety of patrons. Not necessarily a bad thing.

The eclecticism is a result of the diverse economic levels. How do you avoid being a victim of success (e.g. Grand Ave in St. Paul). Challenge of design guideline is to open up the visual imagination, keep accessibility/affordability available to broad business and patron base.

Guidelines highlight elements of the community that people appreciate. For new development these are the character elements that are important but stay away from being prescriptive. Use as a point of dialogue—for n’hood to a developer and developer to their designers.

**Design Guideline Development Approach:**

The list of Design Guideline components was reviewed. No priorities were set but all seemed eligible. Could be categorized. Possibilities:

2 sets of guidelines –one for new development and one for rehab with bridging elements that apply to both.

Or

Have a level of guideline that has to do with the block or with a style of building and have a level of guideline that only deals with details—signage, lighting, etc.

**Question:** Have other guidelines been effective?—Stillwater developed guidelines to retain historic quality of downtown. Wayzata 's are very prescriptive and limiting a have achieved a very “prescribed” look. Bob & Scott will bring in examples of approach.

**Comment:** The neighborhood has been sending back developer and pushing them to be more creative. Need to inspire developers vs. limit or prescribe.

**Bob-Scott:** The guidelines should inspire. For rehab encourage authentic, materials should be enduring, sustainability.

**Comment:** Signage is bad along Nicollet and awnings are bad—people don't know how to get help. Color and signage is important to the street. Many business owners will be here a long time. How can we help advise the business owners. The neighborhood currently has 2 impending opportunities that that the Design Guidelines could be useful in getting better outcomes: a \$50k façade improvement from the City for commercial streets and the visioning for the GFI-HCMC site between Nicollet-Blaisdell/28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>

Scott and Bob would like to use images from the street and the community of what really works well. Start to build on our knowledge to assemble the positive aspects –would rather not borrow images from other places. Look around n'hood and find things that can be positive recommendations to start the conversation. What worked and what didn't when talking with developers. Email them comments and photos.

How do we approach the CI & BA—best to come with 2 or 3 questions. Have specific outline to report on process, direction and get comments. Open ended conversation at CI not effective. BA could be used as another focus group. Scott and Bob will attend the Aug 13 BA meeting and the Sept Community Issues meeting. The n'hood will use the design guidelines both for marketing and development.

They will start pulling together topic areas and put some images in. Send them images on what works/doesn't work. They will come back with rough idea/draft of their proposal for the Design Guidelines.

**Next Meeting:** Aug 18 6-7:30 WA office  
Minutes Respectfully Submitted by Marian Biehn, ED