

Whittier Alliance Board
May 28, 2015 6-8:30 PM
Whittier Park

Present: Grayson Carr, Erica Christ, Andy Cohen, Ted Irgens, Laura Jean, Christina Le, Charles Nguyen, Jesse Oyervides, Araceli Perez, Joan Vorderbruggen, Kenya Weathers

Absent: David Bagley, Tom Bissen, Diane Moe, Mike O'Dell, Natascha Shawver, Erin Sjoquist, Daphna Stromberg, Brett Vandenbussche **Staff:** Marian Biehn, Rita Stodolka

Call to Order at 6:09 by Erica Christ, Board Chair. Standard of conduct and conflict of interest were reviewed. A **Motion** to approve the May 28 agenda with the financial audit added to the Finance report, Preservation Alliance of MN proposal added to the Strategic Plan, the 2016 calendar and youth programs added to Old and New Business **Carried**.

Comments from the Chair: There are things coming up on the agenda that come up on and off and could be perceived as threats to the organization, but we are in a really strong position right now: money in the bank, strong group of volunteers and supporters, strategic plan, etc. There is a worry that NRP funds could go away, we're in the middle of a lawsuit; as long as the WA sticks to the Strategic Plan we are successful.

Secretary's Report, Erica Christ for Natascha Shawver

Minutes: The minutes from April 23, 2015 were reviewed and a **Motion** to approve as written **Carried**.

Attendance: May is the second meeting of the board year, some board members have missed meeting.

Board Roster: A new board roster was distributed. Contact the office with corrections. Please remember this is for internal board use only-not to be shared.

Executive Committee, Erica Christ

Affordable Housing Complaint: The Whittier Alliance and the other Minneapolis/Suburbs currently signed onto the complaint are going to be submitted separately from the St. Paul complaint. An email regarding this was shared with the group. There aren't any changes to the complaint – just more clarity to the complaint for the n'hoods to file only with the Mpls side of the complaint vs being part of the St Paul & Richfield portion.

US District Court Complaint – Sabri et al vs WA: The hearing was May 19 before US District Court. The final ruling has not been made and it may be up to 60 days before the judge will make her ruling. No other action is needed while the ruling is pending.

Blue Print for Equitable Engagement Draft for comment: Neighborhood Community Relations is asking neighborhoods to comment on and help shape a draft a plan that would increase participation by more people. The draft is the City's version of the Blue Print for Equity. The draft plan was distributed for review and discussed. Comments were not favorable in that the document doesn't take into account the differences neighborhoods start out with – Whittier is 50% poverty, for example. So, a one size fits all approach to the document could make it more difficult for some neighborhoods to meet the benchmarks.

Meet & Greet: There is a Meet & Greet on Sat. May 30 10-Noon at Glam Doll Donuts. Encourage all to attend.

Finance Committee-Erica Christ

April 2015 Financial Statements: The April financial report was presented. The WA has money in the bank. The negative entries reflect money we have spent and are either CPP or NRP reimbursements that are pending. WA bookkeeping is very specific, all income and expenses are categorized and aligned

to the CPP, NRP or unrestricted (funds WA raises) accounts & contracts. The goal is to have enough unrestricted funds to keep the organization going without city funds or allow the WA to take on larger projects like the Stevens Ave houses. The finance committee has researched CDs and other vehicles to earn more money on the funds in the savings account. Interest rates are so low that it wasn't worth tying up the money. The strategic plan has specific goals for which unrestricted funds could be used if the applicable task force comes up with a plan that requires funding. The WA was involved in more real estate development in the past, but it requires a lot of time and the right project if it is to be done again. The Profit/Loss report shows the budget categories and how much is spent in each. The goal is to stay at or below budget. On a monthly basis numbers can be higher or lower, but usually even out by year end.

FC Motion 1: The Whittier Alliance Board accepts the April 2015 financial report for the Whittier Alliance. **Motion Carried**

May Day Soirée: A few payments for auction items are pending, about \$150 or so. Total profit will end up around \$13,500. This is lower than last year, but on par with many prior years. There were fewer people in the room – 126 this year vs. 158 last year. Overall it's a great party and people have fun. Not just about the money earned, it's a good social event. As in prior years, several ideas were discussed about what could bring more people to attend: lower ticket price, different timing, different name, different entertainment, venue/outdoors, etc. Typically about ⅔ attendees are Whittier residents, the rest friends. A task force will likely be formed soon to debrief on the recent event and form recommendations for a similar event next year. It can change, but it's important to have an event that showcases the n'hood (restaurants, etc.). The venue will present a challenge since the Blaisdell Manor will likely not be available due to renovations. **Black Forest Inn:** The WA made \$725 from wrist band sales at the *Black Forest 50th anniversary party*. **Vi Runquist:** The WA has received some donations in memory of Vi Runquist (Brooks Mahoney's mother). Two trees will be planted in Washburn Fair Oaks Park for both Vi and Ralph who passed recently as well.

NRP Funding Draft for comment: The City Council directed NCR to explore why n'hoods have unspent NRP money. City Council perceives these unspent dollars as money that could be recouped into the city budget. However, at most n'hoods could have 5 million in unspent dollars, making it a drop compared to total city budget of 1.2 billion. NRP Phase I was passed by state legislature to use tax increment financing to fund n'hoods. Whittier was much rougher in 1985-90 – boarded houses, drug dealing, etc. The idea was that n'hoods could best help themselves, but needed money to improve. Each n'hood applied for money and determined how it would be spent. Whittier was ambitious and applied for a lot of money – the bulk going to building the school and gym that is shared with the park and the Eat Street branding. A lot also went to loan programs, which is one reason Whittier still has NRP funds available.

NRP II came in 2005 and the WA put together another really ambitious plan, Many n'hoods gave out grants instead of loans, so they don't have money left. Some n'hoods didn't ask for a lot of money or have ambitious plans. There's about 1.1 million left from phase II; the city thinks the money should have been spent by now. So, the city wants to require benchmarks to spend a certain amount by a certain time; then, take the money if benchmarks aren't met. Whittier has managed the money very well – loans are active, youth grants, etc. There are only a few categories that have unspent allocations – like reopening Nicollet – because there hasn't been anything to spend the money on. Ultimately, if it doesn't meet their definition of active, the funds are at risk of reverting back to the city. Whittier will respond to NCR with a letter. Steps will be taken to flesh out the info needed – a complete audit for 2014, obtain a report of how many times the loan funds have been cycled through, start spending in unused categories, increase marketing of loans to get more out there, etc. A letter has to go to NCR about the NRP proposal

Audit: A full audit is being scheduled for the WA. We have always had very clean audits, the last full audit in 2005; there are a lot of procedures in place to keep the books accurate and accountable. The audit will include charitable org & 990 filing, a report to the board, etc.

Acting Committee Reports & Motions

Community Issues: There was a small group at the CI – less than 10 people so there wasn't a quorum. A recommendation was forwarded to the board regarding a request from JCJ Construction on behalf of the owner of 2724 & 2728 1st Ave to move the lot line. Currently, 2724 is an undersized lot. By moving the lot line to the north, it would make the two lots into nearly equal widths, the width would fall a few feet short of standard lot sizes. Both lots are owned by the same person. There is a house on the north lot (2724) that is currently occupied by the owner of both 2724 & 2728 1st Ave. The lot line adjustment would not impact the house. The presenter stated the goal is to build a small house in which the owner of the property plans to live. The presenter also asked the committee to support his request for a variance that would be needed to build the house. The committee forwarded this recommendation as well, but the board determined not to act on the variance request until more was known about the house plan – an application is not on file yet with the city.

Bd Motion 1: The Whittier Alliance Board of Directors supports a lot line adjustment between 2724 & 2728 1st Ave to create two equally sized lots. **Carried 11-0-0**

Business Association: Taylor Martinson gave a presentation about a new marketing tool called DIVI. It's similar to a Groupon, but proceeds go to charitable orgs chosen by both the vendor and the consumer. It's free to use for businesses and charitable orgs. It is location based, so offers are relevant. Consumers pay an unlock fee – maybe 5% of the savings – to use the deal. For example, it might cost \$ to unlock a buy one get one free meal at a restaurant. The charity gets half the unlock fee – ¼ to the charity chosen by the consumer, ¼ to the charity chosen by the business. It's in beta testing now – with summer launch.

Strategic Plan Ted Irgens & Laura Jean

The Preservation Alliance of MN is submitting a grant proposal to the McKnight foundation that would fund pilot projects in 2 Mpls & 2 St Paul n'hoods evaluating the way historic assets are identified and designated. For example, in addition to looking at physical, bricks and mortar aspects, they want to include emotional aspects as well—what makes a n'hood feel like a n'hood, the character/ambiance that is created. In the past, social significance hasn't been given much weight in determining historical significance. The proposed changes will expand on that and aligns with the Historic Preservation Strategy. Marian was asked by PAM to submit a letter of support for the grant request and Whittier would be one of the pilot neighborhoods if the grant is received.

2118 Blaisdell Historic Designation Study Proposals: HPC nominated this address for Historic Designation in Feb, but the city doesn't have funds to pay for the required study. Whittier contacted several agencies and received two proposals for consideration to complete this study – one from Thomas Zahn and one from PVN. Both are reputable firms, timeline is tighter with Zahn, pricing was similar, PVN gave a more concise timeline. A grant application to fund the study is being completed. The board discussed any conflict of interest – any gains by any board members – if the property is designated. The group determined that this doesn't fall under the definition of conflict as there isn't a clear and specific line to material gain by anyone. There is no guarantee, for example, that neighboring property values would increase – or decrease – by virtue of designating this property.

Bd Motion 2: The Whittier Alliance Board of Directors approves the April 16, 2015 proposal from PVN Preservation Design Works, LLC and authorizes a Historic Designation Study to be completed and taken through the Minneapolis HPC process for the Pillsbury Snyder House at 2118 Blaisdell Ave S. **Motion Carried: 10-0-1**

Organizational Sustainability- Fund Development: Laura Jean handed out task force assignments for earned income, grants & donor development. The goal is to have each task force do research and develop recommendations to present at the August/September board meeting. **Midtown Greenway Energy Challenge Biz & Residential:** An energy challenge was issued – read the document and get info back to Marian ASAP. Whittier has been at the table for this, been in the works for about 3 years. Need

to make it more effective, get more people engaged. There is a loose group, but it struggles to get off the ground.

Staff Reports: The staff reports are on the copy machine and will be distributed later. Marian has made some progress with interviews. Goal of having a Spanish speaker may not be realized as few of the resumes indicate the proficiency. Rita submitted her notice and has submitted a proposal to do contract work but will not be doing the day to day.

Old and New Business: Events - Whittier Alliance will be tabling at events this summer: Open Streets Sun June 7 11am-5pm; Somali Independence Day June 13 1-8pm; Fallout Art Fest & Whittier Art Crawl June 20 Noon – 10pm; A signup sheet was passed around. Other volunteers will be lined up as well.

2016 Calendar - Ideas are being solicited for the 2016 calendar. Examples of previous calendars were given. **Summer Youth Programs and Events** - There are lots of youth programs throughout the neighborhood for the summer. The WA will compile a list and distribute it and post it on the web site.

Adjourn **8:35**

Meeting Minutes Approved on _____

Erica Christ, Board Chair

Natascha Shawver, Board Secretary