

**Whittier Housing Issues Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**May 21st, 2019, 6:30-8:00pm**  
**Black Forest Inn, 1 E 26th St.**

**Attendees:** Dayna Liffey, Kate MacLam, Diane Uzela, Kevin Beaudin, Stewart Herman, Joanna Krause-Johnson, Christine Popowski, April Lott, Josh Christianson, Ben Cowper, Cyndi Hovey, Nate Broadbridge, Matt Barthelemy, Mary Gazca, Sean Knickerbocker, Greg Schmidt, Nate Rastetter, Anna Grelson, Stormy Peterson, Erich Reich

**Staff:** Kaley Brown

**Speakers:** Bryan Walters, Robb Lubenow (Yellow Tree), Sheldon Berg, Aron Johnson (DJR Architecture), David Haaland (Urban Works Architecture), Ibrahim Demmaj (G&L Furniture)

Meeting called to order at **6:38pm** by Stephanie Brown, Housing Issues Committee Chair. A brief overview of when the Housing Issues committee meets and upcoming projects to get involved with is provided.

Agenda & Code of Conduct are reviewed. **Motion** to approve agenda. **Seconded. Approved.**

April 2019 meeting minutes reviewed. **Motion** to approve. **Seconded. Motion carries.**

**Developer Presentation: 318 W Lake Street - Ibrahim Demmaj & Urban Works Architecture**

They have previously presented an earlier version of this project at a WA's Community Issues meeting in 2018, but since then have reduced the scope from mixed use with residential to just commercial use, as well as reduced the number of stories in the building. At this time they have submitted their formal application with the City, so they are looking for a more formal position from the committee and organization. They will need a variance to increase the building's FAR from 1.7 to 2.3.

Abe purchased the building in 1991 and has been an active member of the Whittier neighborhood. The existing building is no longer structurally-sound, and he wants to reinvest in it and double down on his place in this community. G&L makes custom furniture and serves many Somali and other immigrant families in Whittier and the surrounding area. No one is currently occupying the building; Abe has temporarily moved his store further east on Lake Street in anticipation of construction beginning in September. They hope to complete the work by March or April 2020.

New building will be 3 stories, all flexible commercial use with G&L Furniture being the anchor business on the ground floor. The project will have 4 stalls of parking behind the building though no parking is required by the City. They will be including new bike racks, trees, and planters on both the Lake Street and Grand Avenue sides. Ground floor will feature lots of glazing, a deterrent to the constant graffiti/tagging he deals with currently. Building materials include variant gray panels, galvanized steel, and window glazing. They are also retrofitting the building roof to eventually install rooftop solar to assist in offsetting energy costs and environmental impact.

**Motion** is made to provide a letter of support for this project from the Whittier Alliance. **Seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Developer Presentation: 28th & Garfield - Yellow Tree & DRJ Architecture**

This team has presented multiple times to this committee and have adopted feedback both from this body and the Planning Commission at the City. Some of the changes that have been made are increased setbacks on all sides, which resulted in the building going up from 5 to 6 stories; more green space and public realm activity on the ground floor. They have added more glazing (windows), as well.

Existing building was only 60% occupied and was in very rough shape; invested short-term repairs to improve livability for current tenants during this interim period. They have also secured similar units with comparable rents at nearby properties (2 blocks away) for existing occupants who wish to do so.

New building has 67 units with 40 parking stalls achieved with a car stacking system and has an “L” shaped orientation toward the alley. They aim to fill an opening in the rental market as an entry level market rate developer - \$1,100 for a studio; building has a mix of studios, 1 bedrooms, and 2 bedrooms. \$130/mo. For standard parking stall and less per month for a space in the car stacker. Building includes a “maker space” or flexible community room. Materials include a brick base, fiber cement panel siding, and shiplap. Walk-up units on Garfield have patios and balconies; public realm includes planters, hedges, and the ability for tenants to customize plantings a bit. Tenants pay for electric bill -- includes all heating, cooling, water costs. Landscaping and snow removal will be hired & best practices regarding sidewalk salting will be communicated.

Variations needed would be a Conditional Use Permit for the size of the building, which would take care of any height variations, a variance for the setback, and a variance for the parking (which is only a formality because the way the City accounts for parking does not factor in car stacker technology; they actually have more parking than is required).

**Q:** Are you still exploring a shared car on-site model? **A:** Yes, we hope to provide this but are still researching the parameters for how it can be used; ideally it would be an electric car, powered by rooftop solar panels. That way, the people who don't want a car but aren't sure how to address the 1-2 times per month they really need one, can take that step to getting rid of it.

**Q:** Are you open to changing the color scheme to something more subdued? **A:** Yes

**Q:** Are you still exploring the installation of a mural on the building, and if so, do you intend it to be done by a local artist? **A:** Yes, we would likely issue an RFP, but are open to collaborating with community members on that process or the mural design itself.

**Comment:** Appreciation for the meaningful engagement Yellow Tree has been doing with Whittier on these projects

**Motion** to provide a letter of support on this project with the following stipulations:

- That they collaborate with the community on the mural and ideally involve neighborhood youth in the process (WA to help facilitate)
- That they include the green roof as stated in their plans
- That they include the car stacker as stated in their plans
- That they reconsider the exterior color scheme to be more subdued

**Seconded. Motion carries on a vote of 16 in favor and 2 opposed.**

#### **Developer Presentation: 26th & Blaisdell - Yellow Tree & DRJ Architecture**

Yellow Tree and Whittier Alliance have had a strong dialogue going on this project the past month. Many of the changes that have been made are on the ground floor and also to some of the massing on the

upper stories. Building has 146 units and over 100 parking spaces, some of those being tandem spaces. Building materials are brick, a stone “podium” entryway on Blaisdell, and metal panel. They have increased the northside setbacks; southside walk-up units include planters and patio space. They will likely be seeking a Conditional Use Permit on the height, an increase on FAR, and a variance on the setbacks (which the Planning Commission requested).

They now have active uses on the 26th Street side benefiting the community and will share more about this. Green roof (non-active) and green wall on the south side will assist with stormwater management, and programmable public realm along 26th St. setback could provide more possibility as well. Cars will access the garage off the alley on 26th, and they will close off the Blaisdell curb cut to allow for smoother, safer bike land and traffic use.

They plan to pursue a Volunteer Rental Rebate Program in partnership with Whittier Alliance to connect their tenants with volunteer opportunities in the neighborhood in exchange for a break on their monthly rent capped at a certain amount TBD. Yellow Tree acknowledges it needs to be a good enough deal that folks will actually take advantage of the program.

Flexible use space on 26th (“Bike Lounge”) would be programmed and managed by Whittier Alliance for a certain number of days / hours per week, and open to tenant use during the rest of the time. Ideas include youth bike repair programming, small business pop-up/event space, WA meetings and events, informal community group meeting space, others TBD.

**Comments:** The adjacent space would house the Whittier Alliance office with a subsidized rent in exchange for leading the programming of the flexible use space and engaging their tenants. It could become a model of a public/private partnership. Maintaining full transparency in the partnership would be key to avoid any optics of a conflict of interest. There are fewer and fewer commercial spaces that nonprofits can afford in the neighborhood, and this is a way that WA can continue to operate in the heart of the neighborhood, provide more community benefit than we currently can, and control overhead costs. Concerns voiced on the safety of Calvary Church as a historic structure. Whittier Alliance would need to draft a Letter of Intent to be signed by both parties as an assurance to the agreed upon terms of the partnership.

**Motion** to provide a letter of support for the project contingent upon the following items:

- The building materials we like will remain a part of the plan
- The green roof and green wall stay in the plans
- The Rental Rebate Program will be established with WA as a partner
- WA will co-design and co-program the community space / bike lounge
- The WA office remains a part of the building plan with a caveat that WA full board must vote in support as well

**Seconded. Motion carries by a vote of 10 in favor 4 opposed.**

**Motion** to adjourn at 8:38 pm. **Second. Motion carries.**

**Minutes respectfully submitted by Kaley Brown.**