

Whittier Housing Issues Committee Meeting Minutes
December 15, 2020, 6:30-8:00pm
Zoom Digital Meeting

Attendees: *Stephanie Brown, *Nico/le Weiler, Colette Baumgardner, *Natalie Strait, *Nate Rastetter, *George Rishmawi, *Nicholas Hutchinson, *Kate Nettleman, Steve Jenson, Addison Mills, *Jo Ann Musumeci, *Brigid Higgins, D'Ana Pennington, *Wendy Darst, Will Hanson, Mandy

**Asterisk indicates they are a registered voter*

Presenters: Qannani Omar; Graduate Student Group from University of Minnesota's Master in Urban and Regional Planning Program, Neighborhood Revitalization class (Colette, Natalie, Steve)

Staff: Kaley Brown, Julie Strand

Welcome/Introductions

- The committee went through a round of introductions.
- The chair presented the agenda. **Motion to approve the agenda. Seconded. The motion passed.**
- The committee chair recognized standard of conduct & Non-discrimination and Anti-racism Policies / Conflicts of Interest.
- The committee reviewed the October and November minutes. **Motion to approve the October and November minutes. Seconded. The Motion passed.**

Presentation on Commercial Displacement Risk Mitigation-Graduate Student Group from University of Minnesota's Master in Urban and Regional Planning Program, Neighborhood Revitalization class (Colette, Natalie, Steve)

-The student group presented their project on the Kmart lot redevelopment including preliminary research main findings. They concluded that the work and concerns for commercial gentrification is legitimate, it will be harder over time for smaller businesses to stay in the area with this redevelopment.

Interview Process Notes: It was hard to contact businesses. They talked to as many as possible over the phone using a survey about demographics, history of businesses, and feelings about planning and development. The findings were that the businesses do see development as an opportunity, but are concerned about being able to stay within a changing landscape. Businesses of note that the group talked with are Rainbow Chinese, Christos, and Whittier Childcare Center.

Visual Survey: Compared 2040 plan to both current buildings and development in the area to create a Whittier Property Vulnerability Map. This GIS (Geographic Information Systems) provides an analysis to gain a better understanding to indicate which businesses may be most vulnerable to displacement.

Recommendations to WA:

- Covid-19 is a more pressing threat in near term than development
- A Cultural Awareness Strategy is needed for continued outreach
- WA should focus on building relationships with the high risk identified businesses
- The price of rent and length of leases would be useful data to add to this report.

- WA should continue using the survey script used by the group to interview businesses.
- WA should develop another interview tool for property owners.

Next Steps: The Kmart visioning & engagement sub-group will use the data especially to continue to reach out to businesses.

Q-Can you speak more to displacement risk factors?

A-They looked at a building's age/condition, distance from Kmart, floor to area ratios (if property is small in terms of size or lot it is more likely to be redeveloped). They also looked at ratios of building value to land value, land use, year of last sale, and duplicate ownership. These factors lead to higher likelihood of replacement.

-The use of this map is to support and preserve the businesses in our neighborhood now. She asked for volunteers to help with relationship-building with these businesses.

Policy Discussion on Tenant Opportunity to Purchase (TOPA) programs with Qannani Omar, Housing Organizer with Harrison Neighborhood Association

-We are trying to plug into organizing efforts already in motion across neighborhoods. Qannani Omar presented a powerpoint on the proposed Tenant Opportunity to Purchase (TOPA) legislation options. Minneapolis City Council gave staff in 2019 directions for a study on TOPA. The study was completed in 2020. The TOPA model originated in Washington DC, also in Berkeley, CA and Alabama.

-TOPA is an anti displacement tool; Harrison supports an amended option 2 which allows individuals to participate in the housing market that has been difficult to enter.

-Housing Stock: A question arose on whether single family homes should be included since renters in our neighborhood sometimes rent rooms in single family homes. It was clarified that this wouldn't affect room rental in single family homes.

-Why TOPA now? Housing stability, preserving affordable housing, combating the housing crisis. Putting TOPA in place now will prevent out of state investors from buying up Minneapolis properties and help keep ownership local.

-The 2021 budget sessions just ended. Currently there is not adequate funding or technical support for tenants to go through this process when their building is listed for sale. Washington took ten years to fund their TOPA program.

-The City Council presentation on TOPA happened in November. Right now the committee is in a stand-off. Councilmembers are having conversations about technical aspects. It could pass in February, but we are not sure if that is possible/likely. This is the opportunity to advocate for a certain TOPA option. A lot of the meat of this policy will take place in the next two months.

Q-Is there any conversations about this happening for commercial spaces?

A-No, not yet.

Q-Are there any negatives for supporting this program/policy? Any data from Washington DC?

A-Option 2 was what protects the tenants the most and avoids unintended consequences

The TOPA options are listed here: <https://lims.minneapolismn.gov/File/2020-01178>

A-Pushback on this has often been about timelines. Many programs at CPED are very restrictive so the coalition wanted to advocate for a less restrictive approach, Option 2. We hope that during this pause we can restart the conversation by engaging other neighborhood organizations.

Q-Who should we reach out to to learn more and get involved?

A-Kim Keller at CPED and Andrea Brennan, main point of contacts. The chair gauged committee interest in getting involved in a coalition to support TOPA efforts. The members expressed interest in learning more and then voicing opinion and support. Some members mentioned concern for the gatekeeping around qualified buyers. All expressed a desire to learn more.

Chair asked the presenter to keep WA informed about what happens next so we can share out info with the wider community. We have a volunteer subgroup that the Chair will connect with after the meeting.

Committee Vote - [112 E Lake St.](#)

-Recap on the project: the first proposal was uninspiring, the developer worked with WA on a redesign. The redesign was shown to the group. The committee is now voting on a letter of support of this new design.

-Changes: A strong visual feature, a sign to define the area and a name for it, a front facade update, the color, the addition of brick, the addition of plants, more windows on the east side ground floor, paneling added for interest/design, balconies on the back, seating space outside, a mural, and raised planters outside. Additionally the developer agreed that WA will help select muralist. Still all one-bedrooms.

Q-Is there a parking minimum on this building?

A-No because of the transit access in the area.

Q-Idea of the rent levels?

A-Rent levels are coming out to just over \$1,100. Higher than average income in Whittier, but on the lower end of unsubsidized housing.

-The chair shared the letter of support. **Motion: to approve the draft letter of support and advance to a discussion and vote at the WA board level. Seconded. Motion passes.**

Other development project updates

200 W Lake St / 2910 Pillsbury Ave - Sabri Properties : This project was approved by the Planning Commission outside the WA's established process.

General announcements and upcoming opportunities are shared.

Motion to adjourn at 8:01pm. Seconded. Motion passes.

HI Meetings Every third Tuesday of the month (no January meeting)

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, February 16th, 6:30-8:00 pm @ Zoom

Meeting Minutes submitted by Julie Strand.