

Whittier Alliance Board Meeting Minutes - For approval at 9.24.20 meeting

Sept 2, 2020 6-8:30 PM

Zoom Meeting

Present: Stephanie Brown, Shinjan Sengupta, Daniel Perez, Cyndi Hovey, Nate B., Nate R., Erin Sjoquist, Katie Heimer, Brigid, Abigail Speller

Absent: Aldona Martinka, Jen Kader

Guests: George Rishmawi, Nick Hutchinson, Crystal Myslajek, Amber Klein, Kameron Brodie

Staff: Kaley Brown, Julie Strand

Call to Order at 6:07 pm by Cyndi

Cyndi thanked the board for being flexible and shifting the meeting from the 27th.

Cyndi called for suggested edits to the agenda. Seeing none, **Motion** to approve agenda. **Seconded**. Motion **Carries**.

The group was centered by reviewing the [Anti-Racism and Discrimination policy](#), [The Standard of Conduct and Conflict of Interest policies](#), and the [Board Community Agreements](#). Cyndi asked for feedback on the agreements. The board discussed removing or rewording three of the bullet points. The board agreed to continue evaluating the agreements.

The board went through a round of introductions with the question “what have you done for self care lately,” checked in on commitments, and expressed current project interests.

Park Dedication Fees Program & Greenway ADA Ramp Opportunity, Discussion

Crystal Myslajek provided an overview of the midtown greenway. She explained that the Hennepin Regional Railroad Authority is the owner of the midtown corridor. The City of Minneapolis has a permit to operate the trail that runs through there and maintain the space in conjunction with Hennepin Regional Railroad. In addition the Parks Board owns the parks or green space along the trail.

Manage program started in 90s stakeholders develop greenway and develop economic viability of greenway

Midtown Community Works started a program in the 90s with area stakeholders to develop the economic viability of the greenway. This program and its budget is closing out. With Hennepin County Community Works' limited budget and limited time remaining to spend the funds they would like to improve access to trail. This is one of the unfulfilled goals stated in the 2015-2016 study on the greenway. The study revealed a need to improve signage, traffic safety, trail crossing improvements, public space, bikeway connections to connect the network, and ADA compliance. There is only one entrance to the greenway in Whittier (Nicolet Ave). It is not ADA compliant.

The nearest ADA compliant access is a mile away in each direction. No design has been done. Feasibility has only been looked into. Concept drawings were shared with the board. If needed stakeholders including WA okay the preliminary design final design would be approved by 2022 with project delivery being 2023. There needs to be 1 to 1 federal funding received for the ADA compliant access. Again, the Hennepin County Community Works program would close out their project with funding this access. There is a \$370,000 funding gap that needs to be filled. There is \$700,000 in the Whittier neighborhood park dedication fees “bank”. Hennepin County is asking WA to give their initial impressions on figuring out how to access those funds for this project.

The board thanked Crystal for presenting and expressed the boards interest in creating ADA compliant access. It was stated that the hill between Harriet and Grand does has a dirt path. Members were curious as to the history on the choice of location of Garfield and Harriet rather than another section of the greenway. One member asked if Soo Line Garden has been talked to yet?

Crystal informed the board that the rail authority does not allow construction on the south side of the trail because they are preserving it for future transit rail. This location is one of the only remaining points on the other side. She added that they did talk to the board of Siline two years ago. The concept would cut through the gardens, but the Siline board thought this project would essentially be a good thing if planned in consultation with them.

One board member asked if the new entrance (by Lake & 35W) would still be accessible? Also, when does Hennepin county need to have a decision from WA to move forward?

Crystal said that Lake will be compliant, but it won't be easy to reach with the street network. Also, that they would like to have a decision soon because there is pressure from county commissioners to close out the project somehow. Also to use the federal funds the project would have to start this year. Ideally, they could know by October. Later than that would make approval difficult.

The board was reminded that WA can influence the decision not ultimately decide. Adam Arvidson can help the board understand how to shape and influence the decision in further conversations and board members can email Crystal with questions. crystal.myslajek@hennepin.us.

Secretary's Report

Board meeting attendance: 13-0, 1-1, 1-2, 0-3, 0-4, 0-5, Reinstated-0, Resigned-0, Terminated-0, Vacancies-8, Total Seats-23

Michael, Christine, and Justin (community issues chair) have resigned from the board. Sam has not been able to engage so has been terminated based on absences. 8 seats are vacant.

Seeing no questions or changes for the July meeting minutes. **Motion** to approve the July meeting minutes. **Seconded**. All in favor. No abstentions. **Motion Carries**.

Treasurer's Report

Review & Accept June & July 2020 financials

The treasurer reviewed the July numbers adding that the ledger looked good. Emergency fund distribution is going as planned. There is still money left, but WA has helped a lot of folks with rent relief and needed funds. Kaley added that we are almost at \$30,000 distributed. \$33,000 has been allocated in total. The emergency food distribution site support could come from this fund. She added that donations have been collected as well. She asked the board if WA should continue to distribute the emergency fund checks? WA should strategize who we give to and other ways to reach those in need.

A board member asked what the staff thinks the answer is. Should WA continue on the path? Reduce? Etc? The staff responded that the results so far have been great. Fartun has seen a lot of need and the opportunity introduced 51 applicants to us, almost all brand new relationships. A lot of people have been coming to the office that haven't been before. The amount of need is still overwhelming. It is a fair amount of Kaley's time to get the checks cut. Right now the application is closed until the board decides what we should do and application/language access is further addressed.

A board member expressed concern about the amount of staff time required to implement the program. Also it is drawing down our reserves that might be needed at some point, risking WAs sustainability.

Another board member suggested that WA could focus our efforts on redirecting people in need to the Hennepin County Rental Assistance program which can be applied for more than once. He added that all you need is a lease, so undocumented neighbors can also apply. That might benefit everyone more as they have deeper pockets and we should support the systems at play.

Another member added that maybe we should take a step back to asses the systems and programs available like the rental assistance program, identify gaps in them, and focus the funding to fill those gaps.

It was countered that if WA can raise money for this, we should implement that money now, as it is still evidently needed. WA should reopen and give that money out freely. That member also stated that, if we identify any part of the community that is *missed* by other programs (e.g., undocumented neighbors) and therefore even more stranded than most, then it might be worth a targeted fund to address that.

Motion to spend what has been allocated plus any dedicated funds raised for it. Seconded. **Motion passes.**

Brigid and Kaley will come up with options in the meantime for the board to consider next month.

Other Financial Business

The Treasurer is gathering feedback from the board for a 101 on accounting training. Anyone who would like to share their interests and questions should direct them to him.

Kaley and the Treasurer are going to make one final pass at the fiscal policies draft and then aim to share key changes at the next meeting.

Motion to accept June and July financials. Seconded. **Motion passes.**

HOME Line VISTA

The board discussed if WA should supplement the modest stipend given to the Homeline VISTA WA will work with in 2021. It will be a one year full time commitment from this person. At minimum WA is required to contribute \$5,000 to Homeline the organizing entity. We can add more for the person's housing stipend, bus card, etc. It is basically their pay.

Board members discussed pros and cons of providing different levels of income. Members discussed that the program often attracts people who have the privilege to afford the ability to be a part of the program. Many members expressed being in the middle of the proposed fees.

The Treasurer stated that WA can afford to support an increase to the housing stipend and that WA should pick a line item that would allow this person to live and work in this neighborhood. A member asked if WA's internship funds (\$10,000) were used already?

Motion to roll over the funds and provide a wage cost add of \$5.07 in total \$15,545.60 for the Vista. Seconded. All in favor. **Motion carries.**

Neighborhoods 2020 Campaign Letter to the City

Kaley asked if there were any questions about the letter provided in the board packet. Seeing none, **Motion to support this project with the letter in the board packed.** Seconded. **Motion Carries.**

Food/Supplies Distribution site fiscal sponsorship

MCAD, Pimento, Provision are merging operations and forming one entity called CANMN. The CANMN group is looking for a new location. WA asked the group to draft a site needs list for WA to consider. CANMN's goal is to begin serving the Whittier community together as soon as possible. This group has applied for one grant and are interested in others. They are an informal group so do not have 501c3 status. The board was asked if WA wants to serve as their fiscal sponsor. To provide context, Kaley talked about the loose organization of the group and their responsibilities. She was asked if we are clear on whether our current insurance would cover their operations, or whether additional insurance would be needed? If they work out of our office our insurance holds. We can add another address to our insurance, but it depends on the circumstances. A member stated the need to really focus on the insurance liability when building in the fiscal agent fee. The partner makes all the difference.

It is WA's understanding at this time that fiscal agency does not mean we are doing any of the programming. Also it may not mean that WA's insurance needs to change, but we would want to have confidence in how we are protecting ourselves against a unexpected issue. The length of the agreement is not yet clear.

Staff worked through the idea with our accountant when thinking about this in regards to Whittier School families. WA would have to set up a disbursement process that would be time efficient. Reviewing the agreement with someone who has a legal background is recommended.

A member asked if their intent is to flow all their funds through WA? Answer is no, but a fiscal sponsorship may require it. The Treasurer is willing to offer his time to set up a process that works for WA.

The board's general consensus: if we understand the fiduciary and legal obligations we want to do it. This supports community efforts that support neighbors. While they are trying to figure out a site we can go over this with legal experts and create a terms sheet/contract for the next Exec meeting.

Acting Committees Asks or Discussions

The HI committee asked for a board endorsement for a letter of support for St. Stevens as they seek funding for their new development. No questions.

Motion to approve. Seconded. **Motion carries.**

Ongoing Projects, Board Projects List

The board reviewed the document and reviewed our goal of becoming a working board. Projects included are short term and long term. Board members should take at least one project. Those of who already signed up are thanked; others are asked to send staff an email with what project(s) they'd like to help with.

Festival: It was added that WA needs to repurpose the MRAC grant and that the great streets grant RFP was released this week. It still fits the festival for 2021. Staff are reaching out to businesses to get commitments and plans in place for next year. Knowing that the deadline is in a couple of weeks staff is looking for board feedback. Board members expressed interest despite the grey area.

Census and Voter Reg: Will be a focus in Sept and Oct. Flyering and tabling opportunities especially in the SE pocket of Whittier need support as the Census deadline is now Sept 30.

Bylaw Review 2.0 is underway; Cyndi is going to send out a brief google survey about the mission and vision statement as that will be useful when finding a consultant to help us with this project in addition to board trainings around anti-racism and equity. Board members were asked to complete that by next Tuesday.

Special Meeting: WA is looking at the week of November 16th, the week before Thanksgiving. It will be a virtual Zoom meeting. WA needs to get 50 people minimum to approve the new bylaws. An HI meeting is set for the 17th, so WA is looking at the 18th or 19th. Are there any major red flags? WA needs to send a save the date out at the end of the month. The HI chair offered to cancel that month's HI meeting so there aren't two meetings in one week. Members agreed that Kaley can choose the date.

Announcements, next steps

National Night Out is September 15. National night out is organized with Minneapolis Police. It does help build important connections with neighbors. An alternative for that night is National Night In which is being organized by Black Visions Collective. Additionally, alternative block events are being organized by neighbors for a date in October. A member asked, how do we use this night to unpack racist practices in our neighborhood and beyond? He suggested Dr. Bettina Love as a potential speaker for a training.

Next Board Meeting: Thurs. Sept, 24th, 2020, 6:00-8:30pm (TBD)

Motion to adjourn. Seconded. Motion carries.

Adjourn 8:15 PM | Minutes respectfully submitted by Julie Strand.