

FOR APPROVAL AT THE MAY 2020 MEETING

**Whittier Alliance Board Meeting Minutes
April 23rd, 2020 6-8:30 PM
Zoom Meeting**

Present: Cyndi Hovey, Nate Rastetter, Michael Perez, Justin Kader, Brigid Higgins, Aldona Martinka, Jen Kader, Abbie Speller, Christine Popowski, Stephanie Brown, Nate Broadbridge, Erin Sjoquist, Katie Heimer

Absent:

Late:

Staff: Kaley Brown, Marcus VanderSanden

Guests: Nitin Savant

Call to Order at 6:10 pm by Jen Kader, Chair

Introductions.

Standard of conduct and conflict of interest policies were reviewed.

Motion to approve agenda. **Seconded.** Motion **Carries.**

Board Community Agreements are reviewed.

Secretary's Report

Abbie Speller

Attendance: 2-0, 4-1,4-2, 3-3, 1-4, 0-5, Reinstated-2, Resigned- 5, Terminated-1, Vacancies-4 Board Seats: 23

Motion to approve the March meeting minutes. Motion **seconded.** Motion **carries unanimously.**

Next Board Meeting: May 28th, 2020 6:00-8:30 pm on Zoom

Finance Report: Michael Perez

Hennepin County contract will be closed out next month. Marcus was using that to do recycling outreach. Some of Marcus's hours were miscoded for January and February, so that will alter the January and February totals slightly.

Overall, things have been under budget due to COVID-19.

We applied for the SBA loan program but the money ran out, so we would have to resubmit. While we haven't had to lay off staff, we will surely have lost grant funding due to COVID-19, and we won't be holding our Eat Street Festival.

We did get the MRAC Grant for the festival, but they aren't being very flexible if we have to cancel the festival as planned. We would have to do it before the end of June 2021 or give back the money. The State Arts Board Festival Grant was cancelled for this year.

We didn't get the COVID-19 response grant from the Minneapolis Foundation. The City's Great Street Grant Report from 2019's award was submitted, and Kaley is submitting another proposal to the Minneapolis Health Department for COVID-19 response.

Motion to accept February financials. **Seconded.** Motion passes.

Business Engagement Presentation

Marcus compiled a report from his 2019 contract and also reflections from his time working with the business community in Whittier. He feels that we lost momentum when the BA lost some continuity in elected reps and over the course of staff transitions, though the involvement even at peak times was not overwhelming. We need to continue working hard to allocate our staff resources and funding in a way that will position WA as more of an asset to the business community rather than an

organization always asking for unreciprocated financial or in-kind support, which is how some organizations have felt WA operated in past decades.

Marcus is a proponent of regular meetings though without the traditional formality. This could take the form of an Accessory committee under the Whittier Alliance, but a distinction should be made between activities of a typical business “association” that engages in member dues collection in exchange for legislative lobbying, for example.

The Whittier Alliance should continue to offer Business support programs such as the recycling grant program through Hennepin County, regular distribution of the dining guide, and the Facade Improvement Matching Grant. These allow us to truly be an asset to businesses, and we should focus on ways to make them more visible and accessible to business community members.

The business community might be longing for more lobbying within the organization like they used to do. We should continue to advocate for affordable commercial space in the neighborhood because it is part of the WA’s strategic plan.

If a Whittier Business Association were to become a separate entity again as it was in past decades, we can still work alongside them as a partner organization much like we currently do with the Lyn-Lake Business Association.

COVID19

Paycheck Protection Program: We are currently not at risk of losing any Neighborhoods 2020 money, but that could change as the city has had to reroute money to COVID19 responses.

We could get \$26,000 from the PPP if we got approved which would mean we would save on the amount of NRP funds draw-down for payroll this year.

Whittier Cares: There have been neighborhood block leaders that have stepped up to organize in the neighborhood.

Karmel Mall: The city's gap funding ended up being a lottery, Karmel Mall was not included in the map and they aren’t able to get SBA loans. The community there feels very left out. Ukasha and Kaley are trying to help people get the resources they need. They’ve contacted Lisa Bender’s office, but there hasn’t yet been any promising response to it.

Small Business Support Campaign: The WA is putting together a campaign to spread consumer buying power. People would be eligible to win gift cards to spend at Whittier businesses by posting photos with the associated hashtags. Brigid connected staff with a local artist to design a poster and other digital campaign assets that can be public facing and businesses can promote it on their social media.

Board Appointments and Annual Meeting: Some neighborhood organizations have postponed or moved annual meetings to Zoom. Tangletown is doing a Zoom meeting because it’s uncontested. We could also appoint all of our applicants by board action so that they could serve on the board now and jump in to help with ongoing efforts. We have the ability per our bylaws to appoint board members to vacant seats, and we have those seats vacant currently.

Motion to appoint the 2020 board candidates pending their continued interest. Motion **seconded**. Motion **carries**. Motion **passed**.

Concerns from the Community: An encampment on Stevens Avenue was brought to the WA’s attention by a neighbor on the block. Currently no legal action is authorized to disband or support relocation of the individuals residing there due to Governor Walz’s executive order. It is being monitored daily by the Fifth Precinct team and the St. Stephen’s Street Outreach Team have been visiting regularly to engage with the folks there. The neighbor is not happy with the way it’s being handled. WA staff have worked to stay in communication with elected officials and decision makers, but we do not have power or authority to change the situation as it stands. The neighbor would like Whittier Alliance to publicly oppose the encampment and the relevant government entities’ ownership/management of the parcel, in general.

Motion that the Whittier Alliance will not take a stand on the property dispute at 2835 Stevens Avenue. Motion **seconded**. Motion **carries**. Motion **passed unanimously**.

Eat Street Festival: We are behind in Eat Street Festival planning. It also wouldn’t be right to ask for business sponsorships; it would also be difficult for many businesses to participate. It isn’t realistic to have it this fall. An idea is discussed to adapt the Great Whittier Get Together in the fall to use some of the grant money. There was also an idea for a take-out day or something we could host virtually that would be an acknowledgement of what we would have done on the day of the Festival. A group of board members will continue working with staff to brainstorm and shift plans accordingly.

Reports From Acting Committees

Housing Issues: The 4th Avenue development was presented at the last Housing Issues meeting. Committee members have deep concerns about the business practices and rent levels. They are proposing renting for about \$3.29/sqft which is well above the

average for buildings built after 2017. It isn't a luxury building and the value for the rent doesn't seem justified. The developer was a previous partner at CPM and has a poor reputation among tenants for attempting to drastically raise rents with little notice. The HI Committee does not object to the development of the lot or the number of stories, but they feel as a total project it does not meet the needs of the neighborhood. If we want to object, we should write a letter to the planning commission soon. Members can look through the documents and do an E-vote on the letter later. A small group of board members will work with Stephanie to determine next steps.

Census 2020

We still haven't gotten a decision on the census grant. We are currently running a KRSM radio ad about the census. The deadline for responding has been extended until October 31st.

Announcements /Next Steps

- The Whittier Plant Sale is trying to find a way to continue with little volunteer power.
- Calvary will not host the Whittier Farmers market this year due to the new regulations.

Motion to adjourn. Seconded. Motion carries.

Adjourn 8:40PM | Minutes respectfully submitted by Abbie Speller.