

Community Issues Meeting

May 11, 2015, 2015 — 6-8:30pm — Whittier Park

Attendees Laura Jean, Christine Popowski, Kenya Weathers, Marcella Kendall, David Schroth, Jen Kader, Brett Vandebussche, Joanna Krause-Johnson **Staff:** Marian Biehn, Rita Stodolka, Camilla Jamal

Presenters Chelsea Adams – CCP 5th Precinct, Chris Johnson – JCJ Construction, Joe Knaeble – Master Water Seward

Call to Order: 6:14 pm by Brett Vandebussche, CI Chair; introductions were made. The agenda and code of conduct were reviewed. A **Motion** to approve agenda as written **Carried**. The April 13, 2015 minutes were reviewed and a **Motion** to approve the minutes with the addition of David Schroth to attendees and deletion of a text notation **Carried**.

Announcements/Community Comments & Discussion

There was not a 10th ward update

Black Forest Inn – 50th Birthday Party: May 15, 16, 17 - see Black Forest Website for details

5th Precinct Report – Chelsea Adams, 5th Precinct CCP: 5th Precinct Open House -- 5-7 pm. Wed, May 13, FREE -- food, prizes, etc.

Recent homicides – on May 6 a man was killed in the 2100 block of 3rd Ave. Two arrests were made May 9; Chelsea read the Hennepin County Attorney's Office media release stating murder charges were filed against Eugene Watkins; an accomplice was also charged. On May 10 a man was killed near Pillsbury Ave and Lake St; do not have someone in custody at this time. The coroner has yet to release the victim's identity. The precinct is investigating possible links to the May 6 homicide. People can sign up for crime alerts via text, email, etc. There are several available for opt-in.

Burglary and violent crime suppression – a targeted effort funded through what's called a "buy back" – extra money from the budget used to create visibility in specific areas of the neighborhood.

Sex offender info – a notice was sent to residents near 2700 Pillsbury that a Level 3 sex offender had moved in. The state of Minnesota requires the public be notified of Level 3 offenders as to the block they live, when they move etc. The requirement does not apply to Level 2 and 1. Level 3 does not mean a certain type of offense – the documentation on the offender will indicate victim profile (known female, children, unknown, etc.). A "Level 3" means the person is more likely to reoffend. Exact addresses are not given due to fair housing laws, but there is a known property on that block that commonly rents to released sex offenders – it's important to not use the info to harass the individual – don't want to risk losing the ability to keep the info. There might be other conditions of release, which also vary by person (can't live near a school, etc.). The Police Dept. does not have any power to direct where a person lives after they are released from prison. The Predatory Offender Registration Unit maintains data and has a searchable website (by ZIP, address, etc.). The department believes the system is valuable because it allows them to locate a person more quickly. The precinct doesn't know if the program has deterred repeat offenses – the predatory unit has that data.

Burglary trends – more occupied (someone was at home) burglaries were reported. These are taken more seriously because of the potential for victims. Most are entering through unlocked doors. Lock your doors even when home, or if in the yard, etc. Secure windows with stoppers so they can't be opened wide enough to crawl through. Attendees gave ideas on securing windows. Storage unit thefts are still high – recently higher value/risk items were taken: guns, tax papers with SS numbers, etc. Be careful what you store – typically thieves are getting in the building by trailing someone in; the locks on storage units are then easily broken. A new trend is thieves breaking open the key lock-box. Laundry machine thefts are also still high; again without forced exterior entry – once they are in the building there's very little stopping them. Don't let people into the building or prop doors open.

Solicitors are out in full force this time of year. Best to just say no. The person could be scoping your residence for security, etc. As always, call 911 when you see anything suspicious.

2724 & 2728 1st Ave – Chris Johnson, JCJ Construction

The owner of Quang currently lives in the neighborhood and is looking for a smaller place to live as she gets older. She owns a duplex and empty lot at 2724 and 2728 1st Ave. The duplex lot is 58 feet wide and the empty lot is 19 feet. She would like to split the lot so they are both 38'-9" wide. This is about 18 inches short of standard city lot size. She needs to apply for a minor lot adjustment and a variance to accommodate a smaller setback for the proposed new house on the empty lot.

There was not a quorum at the meeting. The Community Issues committee recommends support for the minor lot line adjustment needed to create two lots of equal width and the variance needed to accommodate a reduced side yard setback. Eligible attendees voted in favor of the recommendations 5-0-0. However, Marian noted that approving a variance is premature until a rendering and site plan are submitted. They owner could decide to sell the lot vs build a new house.

Neighboring properties will receive a letter regarding the proposal. Per Chris, they are not aware of the plans at this time. There shouldn't be issues with the duplex on the south side. Having a house there will really improve things – right now it's like a thoroughfare between parking lots and empty lots.

Environmental Concern-Salt on Sidewalks – Joe Knaeble, Water Steward and Lowry Hill East Neighborhood Association (LHENA) environmental committee

The LHENA Environmental Committee started a salt project after learning how salt is negatively affecting water quality of the Lakes and Mississippi River. One salt enters these waterways, it's there forever. At the current rate, these bodies of water will not be able to sustain aquatic life in the not too distant future. Storm water runoff is the leading contributor to this contamination. The runoff from Whittier enters both Lake of the Isles and the Mississippi River.

The group discovered that most de-icing salt is used in the commercial areas – many of which are organized into special service districts: Uptown, Lyn-Lake, South Hennepin, Nicollet Ave. These service districts contract with the city to provide a variety of maintenance – including sidewalks. Whittier needs to find out if winter sidewalk clearing is part of the Nicollet Ave special service district. After walking around the commercial nodes, it was clear that the sidewalk contractors were overusing/leaving excess salt/spilling salt. The contracting company should be notified that excess salt is being applied. Or, contacting an owner to let them know if you see excess salt.

To reduce salt getting into the waterways, the group created a flyer with best practices and less toxic ways to maintain sidewalks in the winter. One of the easiest is to simply shovel when it snows. Many are using salt instead of shoveling. Each special service district has its own contract and decides which services to have. Lyn-Lake was open to updating their contract with the best practices and it appears salt use was down. However, there isn't a compliance piece to the contract. Need to motivate businesses to want to comply – even if they are interested in saving waterways, for some it's too much work. One suggestion is to show them the costs they will incur if they need to replace sidewalks or store flooring once it's ruined by salt. Other debris flows to the waterways through the storm grates. The city will come out to clean them if they are clogged – call 311. Otherwise, it's everyone's responsibility to keep yard waste and litter out of the street so it doesn't flow to the grates.

Open Discussion

The Whittier Alliance Strategic Plan identifies the areas of focus for the organization. The group commented on Stakeholder Engagement: need to have a consistent effort – seems to gain momentum, then stalls. This area is a priority in the process of filling the role of Manager, Community Engagement for the Whittier Alliance. Engaging younger renters has been difficult; attendees in that demographic stated that they don't care or have any interest; they don't know it's a "thing", how it affects them, etc. Flyers aren't necessarily going to reach this audience. Changing the design from month to month, giving it a fresh look might cause people to take notice.

Need to add the salt issue discussed earlier into the meeting to the Environmental portion of the strategic plan. And, address how to make these and other issues that affect everyone known in the neighborhood. For example, renters are affected by excess salt – gets into their home; they could ask the landlord to change. One idea was to change language – talk about residents rather than homeowners and renters. Another idea is to have a task force specific to addressing renter – esp. first-time renters – concerns (fix a leak, basic maintenance, etc.). Renters could be part of the task force to find out what they are interested in. The format for agendas could be less formal. Instead of listing such and such business is requesting a liquor license, spin it to say find out the hot new place in the n'hood.

The Whittier Alliance does have a loan program for rental property owners. It helps if everyone that is engaged invites a neighbor.

We are mailing to many residents that have unit numbers as part of their address (some may be owner occupied) – percentage of mailings to rental unit mirrors the n'hood percentage of rental units. The return rate for the Annual Meeting mailing also mirrored the rental ratio. Reaching more people – could use a service from USPS that would go to every address – or, get more email addresses. Overall its less about how many we send out and more about how we frame things/language. For young people in the Somali community, if they think something is interesting they will call everyone they know to attend. And, if the Elders say it's important, that will bring the older generations.

Using Facebook advertising is apparently an affordable and could be used to reach many where paper advertising won't. Nextdoor is social media for specific neighborhoods – great way to target messages. Typically posts lost cat or for sale items, but can be used for other announcements.

Families with young kids aren't as involved. Pockets show up for certain events and not for others – field day is very popular. For many, the monthly meeting time isn't convenient but they attend an ice cream social or other event. Suggest WA could get more free tickets – sporting events, etc. WA does get tix for theater, etc. since that's what's in the n'hood. Consensus is the WA needs to offer more free stuff to get people to things. People like free stuff. There have been meetings with food and childcare – didn't up the attendance. Suggestion to do a once a year n'hood potluck. Change the format.

There are a lot of organizations in Whittier that serve youth. The Whittier Alliance has a grant program that gives these organizations money to support their efforts with youth specifically in Whittier. The WA doesn't fund all of the organizations – there is an RFP process and a committee makes the decisions about which orgs to fund. Need to make these orgs more visible to the Whittier community – esp. the ones that get WA funds. MCADs postcard does clearly point out the support from Whittier Alliance. The back of the calendar lists most n'hood resources –youth and otherwise.

Old/New Business: **May Day Soirée recap:** 115 people in the room, \$10,000 in the bank Friday. Still have some cash coming in from the credit card sales. The income and attendance was down a bit from last year.

Adjourn: 8:11

Minutes respectfully submitted by Rita Stodolka, Admin Assistant