

Community Issues Meeting
Monday, December 14, 2015 — 6-8:30pm — Whittier Park

Attendees: Joseph Amrhein, Jen Kader, Felino de la Pena, Brooke & Collin Ehret, Chris Popowski, Dave La Violette, Michael Malone, Greg Schmidt, Mary Gazca, Mahamed Cali, Erica Christ, Brian Goldberg, Abdi Muse

Staff: Marian Biehn, Paul Shanafelt, Camilla Jamal, Lucy Lawson Ricardo McCurley

Presenters: John Outlaw, Recreation Supervisor; Karen Clark, State Representative; Ted Redmond

Welcome **Call to order** at 6:10 by Brett Vandebussche, Community Issues Committee Chair. Attendees introduced themselves, and reviewed the standard of conduct policy. **Motion** to approve December agenda as written: **Carried**. Attendees reviewed the November 9, 2015 minutes. **Motion** to approve November minutes: **Carried**.

Announcements/Community Comments & Discussion

New Whittier Park Director – John Outlaw

John greeted community members and introduced himself on his first day back in the neighborhood. He has been in the park board system for 25 years. Diane Moe is moving to Pershing Field Park, and John has moved over from Pearl Park. He wants to see more kids involved in basketball, soccer and baseball, and his door is always open to community members.

Whittier Alliance Task Forces update – Paul Shanafelt

- Livable Streets task force is working with Public Works to improve traffic safety in Whittier. Recently Public Works has agreed to install some ‘no parking’ signs near corners to improve visibility at the 1st Avenue and 27th and the 27th and Pleasant intersections. The task force is also working with the Whittier school PTA on road safety – a task force member is addressing the PTA meeting tonight in fact.
- The Crime & Safety Task Force had its first meeting last week.
- The Environmental Sustainability task force will have its first meeting on Tuesday December 15 at 7pm, and will look at lessening the carbon footprint of the n'hood. Get in touch if you want to be involved.
- Attendee raised speeding on Harriet Ave. Changing speed limits is very difficult.
- Attendee asked if WA could update local Somali radio on what is happening in n'hood with crime and safety. It can. Also, minutes of task force meetings will be available on our website, and Chelsea Adams (n'hood crime prevention specialist) would also be a good resource.
- Attendee raised intersection bump outs in n'hood – 25th & 3rd would be a good candidate. Public Works will be adding those as intersection maintenance cycles come up.
- The Livable Streets Task Force will also be surveying the n'hood about traffic issues.

N'hood Announcements– Marian Biehn

WA Board candidacy Board seats are up for election at WA Annual Meeting on March 24. Application forms are on the website. The By-laws stipulate the criteria for being a board member (check the WA website for full criteria in English, Spanish and Somali). Some criteria are: you have to be a registered member, have participated in WA activities during the previous six months, support the aims and purposes of the organization, and be a resident or a property owner. Business owners are voted onto the board through the Business Association. Attendee raised that the by-laws can be difficult for minorities in the neighborhood. The Somali community would like to participate more in the board and n'hood. The **Good Neighbor/Biz Nominations** – are also being accepted and the form will be on the website.

Fall Fundraiser WA is currently soliciting donations from the n'hood. They go into the work of the WA.

Executive Director farewell/welcome

Marian Biehn thanked the n'hood, staff and volunteers and wished them farewell. It has been a privilege to serve the neighborhood and is proud of the work that has been accomplished. She has had a CI meeting every second Monday for 20 years, so on the second Monday in January she will be having a beer.

Ricardo McCurley, who will be stepping in as the new Executive Director, greeted community members. He is coming from the SE Como n'hood, where he did a great deal of work on environmental issues and with the renter population. He is excited to work with the n'hood, and has encountered a lot of positivity. He is fluent in Spanish and comes from an immigrant family, and looks forward to bringing that to the n'hood as well.

Farwell Party The retirement party for Marian is on Thursday, January 14.

MN State Representative Karen Clark – Legislative update

Karen Clark gave a brief overview of the last legislative session, and asked for assignments from members of the community. The State didn't have a deficit this session, although the money wasn't spent on what she would have liked – education, health and youth, for example. One of the Governor's priorities was to get all 4yr olds access to pre-kindergarten. Achievements included: increase in funding for public schools, and greater recognition of urban agriculture, addressing housing disparities. Till recently Minnesota had the largest racial disparity in the country on home ownership rates – we are now third from the bottom. Her background is in public health nursing, and she has always been concerned by lack of people of color in the medical field. Funding into the U of M residency program has led to a number of Somali doctors who are coming through, which will meet a real need in the community. The Homeline tenant advocacy service was re-funded. Attendees raised some political issues that were important to them:

- Attendee said focus on early childhood education is crucial and also tackling racial disparities in social justice. Rep. Clark talked about Second Chance legislation which allows people with a criminal record to withhold that information till after interviewed for a job.
- Attendee raised housing and education racial disparities. Immigrants often have large families and struggle to find appropriate housing – very few 3BR or 4BR houses.
- Attendee raised child protection services – strong racial disparities in terms of children being removed from their homes are a problem for both African American and Native American communities. Rep. Susan Allen, a Dakota woman, who adjoins this district, does good work in this area.
- Attendee raised n'hood funding – the City wants the State to rewrite the statute so the City can use n'hood funds for other things. It's important to have a grassroots levels at which citizens can interact with police, politicians, etc. Rep. Clark was one of the original authors of the NRP legislation and has been appalled by some of the directions it has been pushed.
- Attendee raised Minnesota Sentencing Board minimum guidelines, and whether legislation could come with Racial Impact Statements.
- Attendee raised whether as part of the trend towards bikes, pedestrians & transit, the driving age could be deferred to 18, from 16 although there might have to be considerations for the outstate farming communities.

Evaluating Development Proposals – Ted Redmond

Ted briefed attendees on how to evaluate development proposals brought forward at community meetings. Ted previously was Chair of the CI meeting, and has also worked on the other side, developing projects as a design member and an architect. The Whittier CI meeting has gone through many iterations, including 150 people, all yelling. Originally it was a development committee – the housing committee. In the mid-2000s there was a lot of development in Minneapolis, in 2008 it stopped and now it's coming back. Lessons from the War Years: Standing up for what you think is very important.

What to listen for when a developer presents:

Firstly, their tone. They should be respectful of this community and n'hood and treat you like a partner. It's a very desirable n'hood – dense, close to downtown and with good access to freeways. Secondly, the specifics

of what they say. If it's a mixed use or residential development, what is their unit mix? If it's all studios, for example, think about what it means for the community now and in the future. Also listen for price points. If the building will be owner-occupied, how much will it cost? If it's rental, what will be the monthly rents?

Clarification: Affordable housing can mean cheap housing, and it can also mean in a technical sense government subsidized housing.

Ted made further comments about evaluating development proposals, and various attendees asked him questions and raised concerns, including:

- **Q:** What do you do if project specifications change after the proposal is brought to n'hood? **A:** Can take notes and get specifications in meeting minutes, and raise changes with the City.
- Listen for how far long the developer is in the process. Community consultation is usually at the start of the process – often the developer doesn't own the land or have financing. They have an idea for a project and they get an architect to develop a proposal for them. If they are applying for any conditional use permits (CUPs) or variances, the City requires them to take the proposal to the n'hood.
- Quality of a development is hard to determine, but it's important for the n'hood if interior or exterior is junk. Ask about their structural system, construction materials and exterior materials. If they're using brick it means one thing; stucco is a lower quality. Unit mix also gives you a sense of quality.
- **Q:** Recent proposal on 26th and Stevens had some red flags: 20yr life for materials, back of the building had no design, and all studios and 1BRs. **A:** Lack of unit mix is usually not a good thing – it often indicates that the developer wants to get in and out.
- **Q:** What exactly does unit mix indicate? **A:** Think about whether the development will attract families, or all students, etc. Neither is good nor bad, but it tells a story.
- **Q:** Developers bringing forward all studio/1BR projects always say it's the market – how do you get at whether that is true, or whether they're trying to make the least possible investment? How do you inspire something better? **A:** You can never peel back the truth of financials – even architects don't get shown everything by developers, and every project costs more than you would think it would. It's useful to compare their proposal to other developments in the n'hood that look better. If nervous about a project, you may need to do some research and find comparable examples. Look for projects nearby on similar streets.
- **Q:** What about pushback where the developer says you can't have both affordability and attractive exteriors, such as brick and meeting the n'hood design guidelines. **A:** Not always a lot you can do.
- There will be developers in this meeting next month for the former Rex Hardware site. It's a large proposal – they will be taking out two houses as well as the vacant lot. If that project needs variances or CUPs, they can become a leverage point for the n'hood to get concessions – for example, saving one of the single family homes.
- **Q:** What about developers who build and run? **A:** The first question you can ask is 'Are you flipping it?' The developer may not be certain, but other indicators may be: patently cheap materials, design seems geared to how quickly they can fill it, and low quality of plumbing systems, mechanical systems, electrical systems. Get experts in n'hood to come in to ask specific questions.
- **Q:** Are CPED and City's guidelines too restrictive to allow good design. **A:** No.
- Stacking of units is a reality of multi-family developments. Designing all the bathrooms and kitchens on top of one another just works much better with plumbing and so on.
- If a developer comes to n'hood but is not asking for CUPs or variances, or licensure, such as liquor licenses – if they have an ask – that is an opportunity to negotiate to get n'hood preferences reflected in the project. If they're not asking for any variances, you can still make requests.
- Get developers to be specific about materials. Not 'masonry unit' but 'brick' or 'concrete block'. Ask for heights. A developer with lot of units is probably asking for a density variance, which is a big deal. Ask for brick or more windows or less windows (or whatever the n'hood wants) before you give up a variance.
- The City won't necessarily listen to the n'hood – different representatives are more or less responsive. However, go the Planning Commission, show up and speak, put the n'hood views forward.

- Attendee who is n'hood member is also the Mayor's housing policy aide , and commented that he would be willing to facilitate with CPED.
- **Q:** In order to get permits from City and pricing the developer must have an idea of what specific materials they intend to use? **A:** It might still be early in the process, but they will have estimates. You can feel out whether the developer is open and honest about these issues.
- You will get more of what you want if you get ahead of developers and do planning as a community. Whittier has n'hood design guidelines. In the past created a master plan for Nicollet Ave, and gave it to City but also actively solicited projects. This led to several development projects, because good developers will find that attractive. The community has the right to plan its future.
- **Q:** The n'hood is always trying to encourage developers to do something different. How can we encourage them to get out of their rut? **A:** The CUP & variance is the leverage. Make them work for what they're asking for.
- Attendee commented that the WA could create a checklist of questions that could be applied to any development, without value judgements – a community checklist.
- Attendee commented that the City Hall does want mixed use housing, so don't expect so much pushback on that. The NRP plan supports mixed housing. Also, being inclusive in terms of the conversation helps – if everyone objecting is all white folks it is off-putting.
- Attendee proposed a committee that puts forward building guidelines for Whittier. (they exist in the Development Guidelines done by Whittier and online)
- Ask the developer who the housing manager will be – ask for phone numbers, websites and past examples. If they're asking for density, ask 'What do we get out of it?' If they have a laundry list of code variations, what does the n'hood get out of it? The answer should not be 'You get a project'. If the land is blank for a couple more years, something will go in eventually – it's a desirable n'hood.
- If the development has a commercial component, ask about what sort of retail will go in, and whether they will be asking for a liquor license.
- **Q:** How can you learn more about the time lines for a development? **A:** Ask the developer/designer, but you can also talk to the City Planning Department. The City Planner assigned to the n'hood is Brian Schaffer. You can get in contact with him, and also ask him to brief the CI meeting on the process.
- Whittier already has pedestrian overlay and design guidelines in place – the overlay is enforceable and the design guidelines are not.

Old and New Business:

Reopen Nicollet Ave Workshops #4 & #5

Next one is January 6, most likely at the City of Lakes Waldorf School, and final one is on January 26. Workshops 1- 3 materials are on the WA website.

Next CI meeting is Jan 11th, and may include BA.

Motion to Adjourn: 8:20pm. Motion Carried.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Lucy Lawson