

Whittier Alliance – Business Association Meeting
Wednesday, April 11, 2007 – 4:00 PM
Old Arizona -- 2821 Nicollet Ave
MINUTES

Members Present – Paul Jablonsky, Erica Christ, Chris Carrow, Becky Olson, Jeanine Duda, Lisa Vecoli, Aaron McCallum, Jim Walsh, Elizabeth Grzechowiak, Nicole Gruber, Andrew G. Church, Becky Olson

Speakers Present – Elizabeth Trumble, Councilmember Robert Lilligren

Staff Present – Marian Biehn, Eric James

The meeting was **called to order** at 4:20 PM BA Chair Erica Christ; introductions were made and the Standard of Conduct and Conflict of Interest policies were reviewed. The **agenda** was reviewed and **approved**. The **minutes** from the March 14th, 2007 BA meeting were reviewed and **approved**.

Election of BA Chair

A motion to nominate Erica Christ for BA Chair was accepted. A call for other nominations were call in. A **vote** to appoint **passed unanimously**.

Election of BA For Profit & Non-Profit Representatives

Erica noted it's good to have lots of businesses represented on this board to review development proposals. Another member commented that the B.A. representation on the board wasn't always appreciated.

Non-Profits Representatives

A motion to nominate Andrew Church and Lisa Vecoli as non-profit representatives to the Whittier Alliance was made. Both accepted the nomination. Motion **passed unanimously**.

For Profit Representatives

A motion to nominate Elizabeth Grzechowiak as the for-profit business representatives to the Whittier Alliance was made. Both accepted the nomination. Motion **passed unanimously**.

Spotlight on Business – Old Arizona, Elizabeth Trumble

Old Arizona is an 101 year old building which Elizabeth and Darcy have owned for 18 years. It was originally built as a Vaudeville scene paint shop owing to the high ceilings. They converted it to a theater in 2000 and now seats 100-150 people. They also renovated a storefront selling loose leaf teas and feng shui items. Currently they have a license and room prepared for an upscale wine shop.

Elizabeth Trumble thanks those who nominated them for the 2006 Good Business Award. The Log Cabin was very important to them and is a perfect addition. They plan to renovate and reopen it as a flower shop soon. Many men came on Valentine's Day to buy flowers. Old Arizona also has a non-profit café that started in 1995 and provides free after-school programs to teenage girls. Upstairs is a dance studio and a loft where the Jungle Theatre rehearses at. There have been lots of weddings, meetings, special events, wine-tasting and movies. OA has a big loading door and inside a movie projector. The building is a work in progress. They love being part of the neighborhood and seeing how it develops. They plan to be here for quite a few years to come since their hearts and souls have gone into this building. The neighborhood is so embracing of what we've done.

The history of Old Arizona starts when it was one of four scene shops that produced Vaudeville props for the entire nation. It was a very lucrative business so in the basement there is a walk-in safe. There may also be tunnels. An old picture shows a sister building. In 1986 Darcy rented the upstairs loft and then they both bought it in 1989. Before them, some men from Arizona used the place for scene design and called it Arizona Scenes. So Elizabeth and Darcy thought the Arizona theme would be a fun one. Scuffing the floor was then part of the character.

Hours of the tea-shop: Wed-Sat 11-7pm. Café has the same hours. "Beckett's Widow" is playing right now on stage, coming July 4 will be "Bush is Bad" a cabaret style production. In the fall a comedy "How to Mow the Lawn" will feature Peter Moore, Dave Moore's son. Go to our website for more information.

5th Precinct Police Report

CCPSafe Specialist Sarah Mahmud and 5th Precinct Sector Lieutenant Eddie Frizell can't be here today. The Police are going through some change due to the Republican Convention coming in 2008. There is no overtime available. So there are no beat cops and it is likely that there won't be any soon for Nicollet Ave other than at Franklin-Nicollet itself. Whittier

Alliance, Stevens Square, and CM Lilligren are working on an initiative right now to reduce the alcohol related crimes in the Franlin-Nicollet area. Robbery is up again. Close your garages and lock your doors, hold purse close, don't leave things in cars, etc common knowledge prevention steps.

From the Whittier Alliance office, Josie who works on getting information from City Hall crime statistics for the week and working with 5th Precinct and probation people, beat cops, attorney. She tracks chronic offenders in the neighborhood. Between the various systems, they can be identified and taken off the street. It's a pretty efficient process that gets chronic offenders on law enforcement radar. Sometimes an offender can be trespassed out of the neighborhood. A member voiced great appreciation to Josie for doing that work and helping the Whittier. Dave from Stevens Square was the model we emulated.

Becky noted we hear that police spend a lot of their time on the same 10-20 people and use up resources. The more we can track them through the system, they won't fall through the cracks with the attorney or jail, etc. More likely that individual's actions will add up and we can have them serve justice. CM Lilligren notes the list is 30 top offenders now up from previous top 20 with full information provided -- personal information, warrants, etc. Elizabeth G says the BA should be given this information so they can watch for them. Marian notes it's difficult to email this information but we have hard copies available. Paul suggests we put this information online or at least email crime alerts more frequently.

Marian reported we're working with Lieutenant Frizell on a neighborhood crime prevention plan. He came up with three areas of focus and specific target goals and accountability focusing on robbery and burglary. We reviewed it and recommended concentrating on street crimes such as prostitution and drug dealing that contribute to the robbery as well.

Lisa announced the Art Institute is hosting a meet and greet for Lt. Frizell Thursday May 31st at MIA's New Wing.

The BA noted it's easier to catch drug crimes than robberies. Erica noted we can only sometimes prove one robbery offense but not all the others. However one individual may contribute to a lot of the same type of crime (window breaking, etc). Aaron suggest a most-wanted lists for businesses to post although there are reservations over city-wide posting.

CRIME ALERT: Scam for money. A man asks for a few dollars to open their locked car or house. Person shows up as a well-dressed business man with grey hair and a mustache. He is very articulate and sometimes poses being new to the area and refers to unlocking "his daughter's house." Aaron said he asked for \$8.00, was denied and then said "you don't have \$10.00?" Elizabeth G noted the same description happened at Temple restaurant in Loring Park so it may be city-wide. Andrew noted at Simpson Church the scammers are very good. One said he knew the Executive Director by name and could lend him the ladder -- the ladder never came back. Elizabeth T said she was asked by a man who wanted \$20 to fix a vandalized window.

6th Ward -- Councilmember Robert Lilligren

Updates include street-sweeping for leaves so watch posted signs or call 311. 2000 rain barrels are now available from the ReUseCenter.com at \$45 each. Community meetings to understand property taxes will be coming up.

Karmel Plaza – new business association, tackling issues

Today there was a press conference at Karmel Plaza regarding a new City interest-free loan tool, mostly targeted to the Muslim community. The press actually showed up: MPR, WCCO, KARE-11. The media event had a good vibe, showing the association that the city is not just the bad guy (inspections, compliance, etc).

With all the issues surrounding Karmel externally and internally, CM Lilligren suggested they create a Business Association so the city could engage directly with the owners instead of landlords. Recently a Karmel BA incorporated with over 100 members. There is tremendous opportunity for this BA to reach out. They're just begging to improve relations with the neighborhood local businesses. Any assistance in facilitating meetings please let me know. There is a lot of livability issues surrounding Karmel, parking, traffic, etc. Now with the new Karmel BA these issues can be dealt with. Marian notes Karmel is totally unaware of Lake Street access project. CM Lilligren has already networked building inspections and other departments to Karmel BA officers about infrastructure changes to the area.

Elizabeth Grzechowiak thinks it's great they're organized. Particularly, if they can get into the mainstream of the neighborhood, that's great. The parking and external things are not going to get solved right away. There is now parking at the K-Mart lot for the employees. Though, there are security issues for the employees leaving. She asks if they are looking to bring in new business or just change perception of the community. CM Lilligren says both.

Some members commented they do not feel comfortable shopping at Karmel. CM Lilligren reported his new aide Nimco held a big celebration there. Barb Lickness attended and she enjoyed it. He notes Global Market just went through a big training to help people feel welcome there. That may now happen at Karmel. It also improves security by interacting with visitors. Damon's experience with Karmel was very friendly and he's glad he finally made the step to walk through there and might do business with a shop there. The Karmel BA is a loose association of the employees and owners, CM noted help from our group can come from our knowledge of organizational, structural information, and guidance.

Lake and Nicollet reopening

In the last couple of months the Sears K-Mart organization has shown interest in rebuilding and reconfiguring that property. They're looking at this site to succeed. Sears controlled the site briefly three years ago and were tremendously interested in reopening it. Then they merged and K-Mart dominated and then waited. Now Sears executives have come back and they're very interested -- assigning an internal project manager. The City has an internal work group, using the Sherman Group work to show what a preferred wholistic project would be. Lands End might also want to locate there. For a corporation they want to think out of the box. The executives are pleased to hear Minneapolis residents do use structured parking as they were apprehensive to building structured parking in a new plan.

Elizabeth G asked about variance applications if Whittier would be able to review and adjust these processes. CM Lilligren assures public input is a necessary step before the project starts. Becky noted the Sherman work was three years of dedication and was tremendous, please do not discard it. CM Lilligren reports exclusive development rights have expired so we've done planning showing that area as a priority. We have capital funds down the road. A lot of policy is into place that can make this happen.

Paul suggested the GFI plant be the new K-Mart site while renovation occurs. Those guys don't know what to do with it right now. Erica asked about a call for community input, charrette, etc. CM Lilligren said it's also a necessary step. The SuperValu site has also changed, the entire site is under one control. Erica inquired about profitability. CM Lilligren said it is one of the most profitable stores in this region -- however, it's an aging facility. The Sears organization is flexible and looking to succeed in an urban market. She notes the neighborhood is very different than before. We can do better than the current configuration, we can support a new store. They want a product that's half-sears, half-Kmart however come branding issues. The BA agreed the lot is huge and they can do a lot.

Elizabeth T asked about the light rail project. Lilligren said the LRT has yet to come to make a decision. For street cars, though we're down to 6-7 corridors in the running and Nicollet is a top contender. Nicollet must be reopened in order to put a street car. Paul noted the current K-Mart configuration is not going to be supported by the same neighborhood. CM Lilligren agrees Whittier is a different area than when Nicollet was closed off. We need them to come to the table as willing partners and now this seems to be the direction. Their government relations person use to live on Lyndale. She is very excited to see it happen. People advising this process understand it. Erica noted we need a lot of retail into this area. Restaurants and homeowners are already here.

Fair Oaks Park partnership

Recently a meeting was held involving 30-plus stakeholders from all sides: park, community, religious, non-profit, residents, businesses, etc. This was prompted by so many people who wanted something to happen at Fair Oaks Park and unknown to me has been ongoing for over a century. They want more information on how a partnership is structured. We have presenters educating the community about non-profit structures. From there we'll leave it to the citizens to drive the work. Many plans have come forward since 1915. The Park Board has the most recent plan and it will be a starting point. The obstacle before was lack of good agreement between partners. Right now, the main driver for this project is potential increase in crime and to ensure the park does not become paved over. Also there is concern about the health of the orchard and vegetation. The space needs more use. The Park Board wants this to move along.

Blaisdell affordable housing proposal

The proposed project by Scott Mann and Chip Johnson include 150-units proposed for Federal tax credits and Minnesota Multi-Family Housing Bonds placing all 5 apartment buildings under 30-year affordable housing covenants. Affordable constitutes 50 percent of metro medium income for a family of four (about \$40,000) and by Federal standards, 60-80 percent. Whittier Board of Directors voted against this project and the City's Community Development passed 4-2 with CM Lilligren against.

Damon noted Councilmember Benson would reconsider. The councilmember is looking at the project as a rehab project, not as locking into affordable housing. CM Lilligren noted these types of projects occur very frequently. He says the accumulated affect of concentrating AH and effects on the market are not understood by those who do not live in Whittier.

He has instructed staff to propose a plan to use these tax-credits towards non-concentrated areas. He wants projects that don't become 100% affordable and instead be mixed. This type of project is not consistent with the city's goals of de-concentrating poverty.

Elizabeth G notes that the project is too massive to subsidize at first and then ask for more public money to rehab and subsidize the rent. There's nothing wrong with taking one building, improving it under covenant and then acquiring next ones. Erica notes the buildings are not very bad, they need some minor work to bring them to market-rate housing.

CM Lilligren notes if the Council delays, the developer's financing might fall apart. He met directly with Scott and Chip and noted they had not realized the effect of their proposal on the neighborhood. The culture of city staff is to generally run for Federal dollars when they come in. I'm promoting policies to aggressively market these tools towards non-concentrated areas or areas without any affordable housing. The statistics for de-concentration show low-income families succeed, they save more money and their children succeed. There's opportunity now to use this debate to do better at city hall.

Old & New Business

May Day Soiree is May 1st. Please see if you know of any more silent auction items that can be donated to the benefit. Service auctions are also welcome such as offering home improvement or computer help. This year is hosted by Blaisdell Manor. Lori Dokken, Al Franken. CM Lilligren with Barb Lickness emcee. Chuck Lilligren, celebrity auctioneer

Nicollet – Franklin Overlay Report

Looking for professional company to write a draft of our Pedestrian Overlay.

Be Neighborly – pick up debris & remove graffiti

Adjourn

The meeting was **adjourned** at 6:00 PM. Minutes respectfully submitted by Eric James.
Next meeting: Meeting at Los Amigos.