

**Whittier Alliance – Business Association
Meeting Minutes**

May 9, 2007 – 4:00PM - 5:30PM
AZIA – 2550 Nicollet Ave S

Present – Larisa Battake, Tom Bissen, Mark Burgess, Chris Carrow, Erica Christ, Andrew G. Church, Huey Fung, Nicole Gruber, Elizabeth Grzechowiak, Prudence Morrison, Pam Nordaune, Cindy Ohlenkamp, Becky Olson, Marcy Tollefson, Lisa Vecoli, Craig Wilson

Speakers Present – Mark Burgess & William Dohman- U+B, Amanda Arnold, Becca Farrar-City of Mpls

Staff Present – Marian Biehn, Eric James

The meeting was **called to order** at 4:06 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 April 19th, 2007 BA meeting were reviewed and **approved**.

Spotlight on Business

Elizabeth Grzechowiak introduced AZIA. Tom Pham of Phamas Group opened Azia on January 10, 2003. They added Caterpillar Lounge 10 months after opening and added Anemonie Sushi & Oyster Bar two years ago. They hoped to create an eating experience of before, during and after. A lot of changes on 26th and Nicollet have been seen since opening. AZIA likes to be part of those changes and see the neighborhood grow and thrive.

Tom also opened a new restaurant Temple (formerly Tiburon Restaurant) with French Asian fusion cuisine for lunch and dinner. There are DJs at night. Hours are lunch 11am-2:30pm and dinner 5-11pm. It has excellent lunch deals, a wonderful place downtown, and is quiet enough to cater a client or have a nice getaway. They're very excited for that project and recommend all to check out Temple.

BA 1

Tom proposed to address concern over construction across the Greenway from Karmel Square.

BA 1 Motion: Whittier Alliance Business Association moves to appoint the Executive Director, on behalf of the Association, to file a grievance with the City of Minneapolis regarding construction at 29th and Pleasant (across the Greenway from Karmel Square).

Motion carried 9 / 0 / 1

Jasmine 26 – Liquor License Request (8 East 26th Street) -- Le Truong

Jasmine 26 is opening next to The Bad Waitress and applied for a Class E liquor license for wine, beer and liquor with no entertainment. Hours will be Monday through Friday from 11:30-12:30am. Saturdays and Sundays open 8am until 12:30.

Tom asked about parking spaces. They currently have 6 parking stalls and asked for a parking variance a year ago. There is also rented parking from Duc Loi for 12 stalls during the daytime and 32 for evening and they have a two year lease on a lot on First Avenue which is not being rented by anyone else. Also they are talking to the landlord of the parking lot next to AZIA on Nicollet for more parking. They may apply for a valet variance.

Marian asked about issues with the lease arrangement and Jasmine 26's ability to serve liquor. Truong will be in a spot if the liquor licensed is not approved. Apparently the Bad Waitress has a wine and beer exclusion clause that Jasmine was not aware or told of when the lease was signed. The landlord, Masters, has just recently informed Truong. If she cannot get a license it will jeopardize her business. The zoning and all other requirements allow her a liquor license so she will continue to proceed.

Truong wants to offer the neighborhood a Vietnamese restaurant with fine liquor that stays open longer than others.

The price point is sticking with the neighborhood. Minimum appetizer is \$3.50 and main courses are \$10.95. Pricier seafood is about \$20. Jasmine 26 will seat 87 people. Jasmine Deli will remain open because of MCAD student popularity. Also Truong is not going to compete with herself. Jasmine 26 will expand to new menu items. Outdoor seating will be available. The sidewalk will not be able to fit many people with current allowance of two table toppers.

Liz inquired what Jasmine 26 will bring to the neighborhood. Truong responded with Vietnamese restaurants, she can only think of two major fine dining ones: Mai Village and Quang (which is an equivalent Jasmine Deli but bigger). She hopes Jasmine 26 to be a little more upscale with table cloth. Fondues and hot pots will be on the menu instead of just traditional Vietnamese food.

Jasmine 26 will not have a separate bar area because the interior space has already been divided for restaurant seating. Truong said a bar is not suitable for her establishment and will not have one. Two full time managers will be working. Truong noted she runs her business different and doesn't want staff present all day -- only for lunch and dinner. They will work 5 days a week and she will work the rest.

BA 2 Motion: The Whittier Alliance Business Association moves to support the Class E liquor license for Jasmine 26. Motion carried 7 / 1 / 4

Pedestrian Overlay – Amanda Arnold, City Planner and Becca Farrar, CPED Planner

PO work started last August 2006 when the City Council enacted a moratorium on Nicollet from Greenway to Franklin. CM Lilligren wanted to ensure development kept historical form on Nicollet. Arnold met regularly with Whittier Alliance for several months deciding what issues can be answered by base zoning, design guidelines and overlay. Now a proposal must be brought to the Planning Commission and City Council so something is passed before the moratorium ends. Planning Commission language is nearly finalized and a public input forum will be held June 5th at Whittier International School with a formal 45 day public input period afterwards.

The PO Study Area map was passed out. Arnold informed the BA that a PO is an added level of regulation to the base zoning. Different kinds of overlays relate to natural resources and environment. Uptown also has a PO. Hiawatha Line also has PO districts being added. During the process there were some issues that couldn't be answered by a PO, for example wanting to have more retail space along Nicollet. Also, Nicollet Avenue is designated as an activity center. We're recommending up-zoning from C1 to C2 and C3-A to get more density and height differences along Nicollet. There will be a lot of non-conforming properties with the up-zoning. Primarily a PO limits some automotive uses and buildings are brought up to the property line or no more than an 8' set back. It makes the environment more comfortable for walking, increases window spaces and more uses for people on the street, not cars. Erica noted the overlay was extended from Blaisdell to 35W because of commercial uses in that direction. In terms of grandfathering, nonconforming properties will be allowed until they do significant new construction or are destroyed and need to rebuild. They are given a period to reapply in order to maintain their nonconforming status otherwise they fall under the new regulations.

Some new regulations include: signage lighting limited for sidewalk not car visibility, increase in shared parking lots, cap on parking spaces over required amounts, requirement for bicycle parking, requirement for travel management plan for significant impact developments (more than 10k commercial sq.ft. or 75 residential units or more), cannot reduce the size of a building (can't shave off a second story), minimum Floor Area Ratio – building size to the site (a FAR of 1 can fill an entire site with a building but because of other site requirements, this will force buildings up to 2 stories), corner cuts/visibility are required, and limited linear footage of one retail use at 120 feet (the building can be longer but you cannot fill an entire block with one storefront use).

Erica asked about parking facilities. Parking lots and garages are only limited. Tom asked what happens if somebody builds parking for other people. Principle use permits to have public parking is different from accessory parking attached to an individual business. Farrar said she is not clear on ongoing updates to these requirements. A guest asked about opportunity for variance which is allowed as long as it's not prohibited.

A guest asked about PO limits on developer actions. Farrar said developers consult with Public Works who help correlate parking and engineering parameters with them. Based on input the City will develop guidelines to fit in zoning and code requirements. All documents are public domain since developers will go through approval processes and anyone can see them. Erica talked the absence of green-space requirements because the City is implementing a city-wide green improvement initiative. Arnold noted the committee tried to avoid conflict with neighboring overlays. The Whittier PO goes right up to Midtown Greenway and Stevens Square. Another conflict is that more urban requirements (setbacks, density, etc) might not necessarily incorporate green space. Marian noted design guidelines are not enforceable but they will identify preferred or encouraged steps for developers. A guest noted a variance is a hurdle for owners. Nonconforming lots include Frenz Brake, Car Wash, McDonalds, Wendy's, and GFI.

U+B Architects on Nicollet Avenue Visioning – Virtual Building Facades – Mark Burgess, U+B Principal Architect

Three generations of building facades were presented: one with a setback yard, one with a parking lot and one up to the sidewalk. At Mean's there is a lot of signage with each new tenant creating visual chaos. The Palm building includes brick pilasters, the fence & planting, but it's an effort to hold the street edge and it is all parking lot with the same signage problem with a less unified façade. The Florida Market/Mai Woa has some nondurable materials along the base. Each entrance is a different door, not very unified. More historically correct windows would be better as well.

The new proposal for Mena's includes a central sign that becomes part of the visual character of the building. A brick retaining wall at the sidewalk holds the street edge. It also gives people a place to sit down and blocks garbage blowing across the front lawn. Trees are planted on each side to frame the building. The building has consistent canopies and color. A planting bed in the middle brings visual interest (plaza, benches, etc). Both doors have pathways and entrances and the connection between sidewalk and front door is improved. Lighting is important so trees could have up lighting. Flower boxes are added.

The next case for Palm was very tough. The street edge is strengthened by more planting with additional street trees. This makes up for the façade that isn't there. There isn't a good entrance from the street to the front door. So a pedestrian access in the middle of the parking lot is added which gives space for benches and planting. Also added are consistent signage and canopies. There is a net loss of parking places but it creates a in/out path for the cars and a green island rather than solid asphalt.

For Mai's, there is a fairly minimal intervention, only more awnings, clean signage and new windows. The building is already nicely proportioned. A low cost alternative to replacing the windows with period appropriate ones would be painting the windows a color matching the building. The three doors also should match one another. Flower boxes with perennials are added. Additional trees flank each side of the building.

Liz noted all proposals are beautiful upgrades but is worried about businesses losing character. She wonders how to approach people with different perspectives who create an ethnically diverse neighborhood that a cookie cutter style is preferred. She noted picking up litter is important but telling people their signage looks like litter is problematic. She thinks it will be a hard balance to strike with owners. Erica suggests traffic along Nicollet is generated because of the street's unique character opposed to Uptown. She doesn't want to walk up to an Asian grocery and feel like she's at a corporate grocery store.

Burgess suggested more consistency can be in buildings. It's not necessarily that colors are matched but that each building becomes unified. Liz pointed out Excelsior & Grand being far too consistent with no differentiation and character. Tom noted definite eyesores out there and if everybody does a little improvement it will show. Le said most businesses are just focused on making money and never step back and think about the building image. For example at Mai's, the proposed tree would be seen as

blocking the sign but she wouldn't use Mai's as an example to her nephews as an attractive Vietnamese business

Erica noted the BA does want Nicollet to remain its own character and not become Hennepin or Excelsior & Grand. However, by concentrating on each building, it is a good step to see how each can be improved individually. The proposals are thoughts to keep in mind as Whittier sells the Pedestrian Overlay and Design Guidelines. A guest noted the vernacular look is funky but that communication of less chaos is more.

Old & New Business

BA CPED Grant

Remaining funds must be spent May 31st, about \$500-\$700. Suggestions were taken to spend the funds including an ad to promote Whittier, website updates, clean-up days, flowers and landscaping.

BA 3 Motion: Whittier Alliance Business Association moves to direct Whittier Alliance staff to spend the remaining BA CPED funds consistent with BA goals. Motion carried unanimously.

Ad for Whittier Businesses

Make sure to talk about all businesses.

Be Neighborly-pick up debris & remove graffiti

A new chair must be appointed to the Business Association with Erica now the newly elected Board Chair. Also a for-profit business representative seat is open. The term is one year, for this term 11 months, and ends March 2008. It requires a commitment of a couple meetings and volunteer time. It's a great chance to have a say on Nicollet Avenue.

Adjourn

The meeting was **adjourned** at 5:26 PM. Minutes submitted by Eric James. Next meeting: Los Amigos