

**Whittier Business Association – Meeting Minutes**  
Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 – 4:00 P.M.-5:30 P.M.  
Old Arizona – 2821 Nicollet Ave S

**Present** Erica Christ (Chair, Black Forest), Elizabeth Grzechowiak (AZIA), Paul Jablonsky (Nicollet Car Wash), Pam Nordaune (MCAD), Felino de la Pena (WA Board), Marcy Tollefson (Washburn Child Care), Elizabeth Trumble (Old Arizona)

**Staff** Marian Biehn, Eric James

Call to Order at 4:18 by Chair Erica Christ. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted.  
**Motion** to approve the agenda as amended **carried**. **Motion** to approve November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007 minutes **carried**.

**Spotlight on Business – Old Arizona – Elizabeth Trumble**

Old Arizona has a for profit (café, wine bar, storefront) and the non-profit operates the performance space (theatre, music, private events, etc). They are continuing their work with teen youth focusing on girls who are from the area. Have been in the n'hood for several years and feel they have some sway on this end of Nicollet. They are talking with the owner of the GFI site and negotiating overnight parking there to take out the overnight semis which have been an issue with neighbors. She talked about the unique space.

They won a Good Business award earlier this year. Also, Darcy Knight was awarded a 2007 McKnight Humanitarian Award. In Minnesota Monthly they listed Old Arizona has one of five date hotspots. They were thinking of closing the wine bar because of slow business Jan-March but are not going to because of Valentine's Day. She reported many people have lunch at the café coming from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. They had thought Old Arizona was one of the worst locations. Liz acknowledged the work with youth as an important early leadership step. She recommended a press release be sent out about the McKnight award.

Darcy was a visionary and stakeholders like Coldwell Banker thought she was crazy. Old Arizona is a valuable property and she noted caution over a new GFI development and LRT. They spoke with Hen. Cty Commissioner Gail Dorfmann who did not know what was currently planned for GFI. The Chair noted Councilmember Lilligren reported Sear's is seeking to develop a unique product at the K-Mart site for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the City Council agrees everyone wants to reopen Nicollet. There are One-Acts performances coming up which is also a fundraiser for Old Arizona, check the website. The café is open for lunch Wed-Sat.

**SouthWest Light Rail Transit Update**

SW LRT is moving forward on the Environmental Impact Study which reviews the three alternative routes (two through Kenilworth and one up Nicollet). The review will last about 18 months and Whittier will put in comments. The Chair said CM Lilligren suggested Nicollet would not be feasible due to high costs as well as no new ridership attraction since residents are already transit-users.

Some residents at the last CI were not fully against LRT however some did note it would disrupt the existing bus service which is reliable. Paul asked about the trolley proposals. There are seven lines planned but is in the long-term since no funding is available. The Midtown Coalition is likely working on a public-private partnership with employers. The Chair speculated if a large development went into GFI it could negotiate for a transit station. Marian noted the Midtown Greenway Land Use Plan focuses on transit and high density.

**Development Update**

**2600 Nicollet:** The Chair debunked a rumor of Trader Joe's going in. They are looking for \$19/square feet and want a high-end restaurant on the front end. Not zoned for a pawn shop but the owners are planning on a "financial" business going in on the 26<sup>th</sup> St side of Butler. The Pawn America people own the building.

**ACE Icehouse Redevelopment at 2528-2550 Nicollet:** Going in front of Planning Commission on Mon. Dec. 17 and planned for groundbreaking in the spring of 2008.

**Empty Lots:** The empty lot next to Christo's and 2437-41 Nicollet are for sale. Michael Pham owns them. Marian said that they had a restorative justice volunteer who cleaned up the lot at 27<sup>th</sup> and Nicollet and she called Pham about the litter. He blamed the n'hood for not supporting his development design.

**15 East Franklin Ave - Eat Street Flats:** CVS will open soon. BA heard a Little Caesar's or a Subway was moving in but no confirmation of that.

**Cook Site on Lyndale:** The development at Greenway and Lyndale is underway. Businesses are suffering due to reconstruction at Lyn-Lake and the Cook site construction

**2601-07 Lyndale Ave S Rex Hardware:** The Rex Hardware project is still stalled.

**2309 Lyndale Ave S Le Parisien:** Le Parisien on Lyndale is now rental but few people have reported seeing any renters in the building.

221 W. 28<sup>th</sup> St. Three brownstones have a new for sale sign. Marian said they had been foreclosed on and the bank owned them. There must have been a change in status or the bank is marketing them.

## **BA Funds**

### **Façade Improvement Grants**

There is BA-CPED money for the façade improvements. The goal of the funds is to encourage property owners to make small improvements which can big differences in street and pedestrian appeal (ie: new door, paint, sign, window, etc). Guidelines were written and are user friendly, letting business owners decide for themselves where to put the money as well as making it accessible to people.

Elizabeth (Old Arizona) asked where exactly improvements could go since Old Arizona's entrance is sort of at the side of the building. The Chair said a case can be made for certain businesses since it improves the pedestrian environment overall. The Chair said MPD repeatedly states that the n'hood "looks crappy" and if things aren't repaired or improved then more criminals will continue to think its ok to be in the n'hood.

Visual examples of façade improvements were distributed. They are computer generated but show how a little investment can have a big impact. If many people apply for the façade improvement grant, there are other funds from NRP that could be used to subsidize the BA-CPED grant.

### **Advertise and Promote Retail and Restaurant Businesses**

BA wishes to create a cookbook which involves the entire n'hood. The Erica and Marian have met with the DesignWorks dept at MCAD for a consultation on the cookbook. The options are huge. It was suggested anyone can submit, not just restaurants, and that it could feature resident opinions (where they like to go, special stories, restaurants that use to be). Caterers can be involved too. It will be important to find the balance between being a useful cookbook and an anthology. It is an aggressive undertaking and since the project is so big it can't be done by the 2008 May Day Soiree. It will require leg work to get people to actually get recipes, convert them to family size, test, photograph the food etc. Exec is thinking of hiring an intern to do this work and a committee to test and taste recipes. The BA enjoyed the historical value of the project. The Chair reminisced about the former Artist Quarter which use to have a breakfast called the "Right Now." Paul Jablonsky recommended a section for kids to guarantee more sales and to get featured dish recipes from area chefs.

BA would like to involve larger businesses and corporations in the area such as new condos which could preorder books for all their new residents. They are looking at logistics now, how many pages, design vs information, etc. It was noted there is also some money set aside for an outdoor event but is difficult to pull off right now.

Discussion turned to other ways of promoting retail uses of the Whittier commercial corridors. Elizabeth mentioned that Azia is participating in an Eat Street Crawl organized by Kitchen Window—Black Forest is also participating. It will be around mid-May and limited to 60 people. Paul suggested restaurants could promote themselves at commencement and offer dinners, a food passport where after a number of punches they get a free real and would be consistent all year. The Chair noted businesses hesitate at giving away free meals but would prefer discounts or an extra item. The passport should also raise money for the Whittier Alliance.

### **Nicollet Commercial Corridor**

Marian introduced a discussion regarding marketing Nicollet Avenue to fill the store fronts. She feels an proactive approach is needed to avoid the Dollar Store in-fill and to direct the growth and interest of Nicollet Ave. as a place for businesses to locate and thrive. Expertise is needed—identifying needed retail, assessing a fair price per sq.ft. From what she has heard, the Whittier demographics currently don't support something like a Bibelot Shop or Patina. Paul noted large commercial tenants want to know the income, demographics and trends of the n'hood in order to justify high rent. Elizabeth Grzechowiak said they are looking at smaller businesses such as flower shops, stores, etc. Paul said property owners have extremely high taxes and are using tenants as debt service. Because buildings are at so high cost and paid out, existing tenants don't have room to grow or acquire the building at the true cost, they are trapped. He said a list of available properties should be put out to attract new businesses that will be moving in the winter time (ie to real estate agencies). The Chair also recommended a home tour to fill out the rental buildings and show the amenities available. Marian suggested that the demographics of the MIA & CTC patrons be looked at and included in a demographic study to attract retail.

Paul recommended it's time to break the mold of the Whittier Alliance in order to stabilize the economy, bring new jobs in and promote economic activity. The City is not going to do this and since NRP dollars are being threatened, then property owners should be brought together to see how the n'hood organization should go.

**Next Meeting:** Joint Meeting with Residents and Businesses, January 14, 2007, SouthWest LRT  
**Meeting adjourned at 5:38 p.m.** Minutes submitted by Eric James, Whittier Alliance.