

Whittier Business Association – Draft Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 13th, 2008 – 4:00 P.M.-5:30 P.M.

AZIA Restaurant's Caterpillar Lounge

Present Andrew Church (WA), Erica Christ (Chair), Paula Horan (WA), Paul Jablonsky, Maximo Mena, Cindy Ohlenkamp, Joan & Lisa Poppenhagen, Marcy Tollefson, Hillary Askew-MCAD

Speakers Council member Robert Lilligren

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. MCAD update added to agenda. **Motion** to approve the agenda as amended **carried**.

The minutes of the Joint Meeting of Community Issues and the Business Association were reviewed. The Chair noted the debate over the LRT line. A **motion** to approve the January 14th, 2007 Joint Meeting minutes **carried**.

Nicollet LRT Task Force: The Chair reported the Whittier Board of Directors referred the Joint Meeting's motion opposing the LRT line back to Task Force instead of forwarding it on. The Task Force, composed of anyone who wishes to be on it, will be charged with doing the Environmental Impact Study (i.e.: identifying all the factors impacting Whittier), and also to re-address the n'hood position again. To participate let WA office know soon.

Next Nicollet LRT Task Force: Wednesday, February 14, 6:30pm

Spotlight on Business – AZIA Restaurant, 2550 Nicollet - Ken Anderson: Chef Thom Pham's AZIA hit its five-year mark last month and is doing well. AZIA has since opened the Caterpillar Lounge featuring DJs after 5pm and also the Anemoni Sushi Bar which is doing well. The restaurant cuisine is Asian Fusion with happy hour in the afternoon and late night. A member asked if AZIA will be doing naked sushi any time soon. Ken noted Pham's other restaurant, Temple, will be featuring naked sushi which has been big in L.A. and New York. It features naked models both men and women who serve as the table upon which sushi is served. It probably won't happen at Anemoni since Pham keeps his restaurants separate from each other. Paula asked if naked sushi has the same requirements as a strip club. Ken said there is a special license for nudity they will have to obtain at Temple. The license also makes it difficult to have it in the n'hoods. Ken reported about 60 people work at AZIA. The Chair asked how many of the 60 live in the n'hood. Ken said a good portion did, probably two-thirds, and he lives six blocks away. She commented AZIA is a big employer.

Paul asked if there was an **update on the Icehouse Redevelopment project**. Ken hasn't heard anything. The Chair reported May was the soft groundbreaking. Ken said he is slowly seeing the site's businesses relocating out.

Façade Improvement Grant: There are pots of money for business façade improvements: CPED-BA funds, a new City grant (with up to \$5,000 grant \$\$ that need to be matched) and the Whittier Alliance NRP funds for commercial corridor improvement. Theoretically someone could do an \$11k-12k project and be matched for half of it. Applications have been received for the BA-CPED façade grant. Marcy Tollefson of Washburn Center for Children described their grant request. When they changed their name from Washburn Child Guidance Center, they also updated their logo and colors. The awning has already been replaced and the grant will help fund exterior painting and other façade touch-ups. Marian noted Armor Security has applied for painting and Old Arizona has applied to do the exterior of the Log Cabin and new windows. Also, this improvement round has a small grant award even though most of projects are estimated for over \$5,000. The grant includes consultation with an architect who will evaluate the request and advise on maximizing the improvements. The Chair said the City's grants are looking to leverage larger projects with its matching funds. Marian noted the \$400,000 pot that all the n'hoods are competing for with a maximum award of \$50K. Money will be awarded later this summer.

Last year, BA funds were spent on computer enhancements of volunteering properties. U+B Architects was contracted to do the visual enhancements and show how the building could be improved and look better. It was eye-opening in that although all proposed improvements were beyond the owner's concept, there were many little things that did not actually cost that much to do. Maximo Mena of Mena's International, who had volunteered his property, noted he did perform a few of those improvements.

Marcy said they are looking to purchase the vacant lots across the street for parking and need to do landscaping. The Chair said the City improvement grants would not apply, however WA NRP commercial corridor funds could fit such a project. WA funds include curb-appeal and promoting the area beyond traditional capital projects. WA will also need to send photo-documentation to the City of Lake Street, Lyndale, Nicollet, etc of facades that could use help in Whittier.

Andrew asked if all the improvements have to be on a commercial corridor. Marian clarified they cannot be residential. The Chair said WA is including 26th and 28th Street into the grant to the City along with other corridors. Though the City does not officially recognize them as corridors, they do have commercial zoning. The BA was in support of the neighborhood applying for the city façade improvement program citing the advantage of grant funds and the need for a stimulus to encourage building owners to make improvements. The addition of subsidized architectural consultation will help assure a more cohesive image for the commercial corridors. Comments concluded that the façade program could be a very big asset to Nicollet Ave and the Whittier neighborhood.

Youth Partnership for Cleanup Initiative, Marian Biehn: Lyndale N'hood Assoc & Lake Street Council have a program where they partner with youth and have them go to the streets to clean, pick up, do graffiti removal, etc providing civic engagement. It could be a summer project for Nicollet, 26th, and Franklin. If a business is interested contact WA Office. Marian doesn't know if or how the youth are compensated but the partnership is meant to build character. She stated there is always clean-up to do in the n'hood and this would be a way to involve youth and have a better street. Marcy said WA a few years ago did partner with youth and businesses paid WA for clean-up helpers. Marian said she doesn't know how much the Special Service Dist. does clean-up but they do pick up trash. SSD used to do street sweeping but that seems to have fallen off. The Chair commented the issue of oversight for the youth needs to be addressed.

Framework for the Future: The Chair recapped NRP was a state-mandated Legislature program that will run out in 2009. The City is working on a plan as to what happens when it runs out since NRP has funded their n'hoods. There is a chance the Legislature can approve something different but for now WA is stuck with the City's plan. The Framework cannot be called NRP--it's now the Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP). The draft proposed framework is not very detailed. They are setting up three pots of money: 1) smaller administrative fund which may be pro-rated on size of n'hood, 2) pot for general n'hood projects, and 3) pot for competitive grants. NRP is many millions of dollars but NIP would be much less. The program would become part of the City and overseen by it.

The Chair said a few inner n'hoods are in a peculiar situation. They have used a lot of NRP money and been very successful in revitalization as opposed to smaller dollars in the more stable, wealthier n'hoods. This is at odds with the City who traditionally dumped a lot of issues upon inner n'hoods (affordable housing, services, etc). Whittier and others have the least amount of trust with the City. WA has used as much as \$12 million in NRP funds and the WA budget includes staff, accounting, expenses, lighting, etc at \$150k/year. Whittier is a big n'hood with a big organization and a community that is very well organized. WA is vocal, thorough and detailed to City officials, which may instigate why the City is reluctant to give so much power and resource to n'hoods. The City is asking for feedback so the WA NRP Task Force will comb through the details of the framework and address it. Anyone can join this task force at any time and its best to join early on. If there are opinions or comments regarding the City's plans, contact WA office.

Cindy asked about **Neighbors for NRP**--though dollars are being lost, local control will be diminished, should WA join in with their cause. WA has been a model of local control and decision-making. The Chair said Neighbors approached the n'hood at a Community Issues meeting and were very focused on lobbying for NRP at the time and not changing it. Now, the City has said the model will definitely change and to give up on the save NRP cause. Neighbors may have changed focus now to examining the new framework. The Chair noted there is not a lot of fund allocation for administrative and n'hood autonomy is vague. Also, making NIP part of the City's bureaucratic process is not helpful. Andrew commented the City is positioning "I know what's best for you" mentality. The general meetings to weigh opinions have passed but the comment period is still open. Email, letter or call in until March 17th.

MCAD Campus Expansion, Hillary Askew: MCAD would like to relocate the blue house structure preferably within the Washburn Fair Oaks Historic District. They prefer it go to a non-profit but are open to talking to individuals. If anyone is interested, knows of anyone, or has ideas of commercial or residential sites for this opportunity please contact Brock Rasmussen, VP of Facilities who can respond to questions. 612.874.3611

Paul asked if the house relocation is part of the land-clearing project. Hillary confirmed this space will be future campus expansion for students. Paula asked why the preference for remaining in the Historic District. Brock could speak more on the project but since the house is in a historic district already it would be beneficial for it to stay in that area. Marian said it wouldn't have to, but since it's moving there are a couple lots in the district available. The house can't be demolished it has to be moved. Paula wondered if it had been moved before, as the basement appears not original. The Chair commented it is a narrow house and would fit on many of the available empty lots. Paul asked if it could be moved within the MCAD block and operated as a rental property for students. Hillary said they don't have a lot land space and it doesn't meet the needs of students. It is currently a duplex but can be returned to a single-family home. The Chair applauded MCAD wishes to move the building and while it's probably worth something, they are kind to donate it. Andrew said it has to happen in a hurry if MCAD wants it out by July. Marian asked if there is pricing for moving a house of this size. Brock will know. Paul suggested it about \$40-50k to move.

CM Lilligren who recently moved a house said the real cost is not in moving but setting it down. Foundation is \$30-40k and \$10k per system. Moving is only 30k\$. Costs are fairly constant even with a smaller house. The biggest concern is having large enough lot and a route to get it there. He commented he loves moving buildings as a preservationist at heart. He has encountered buildings which could not be moved.

Annual Meeting: Thursday, April 3rd, 2008. WA will elect new Board members, review and approve the annual budget and present Good Neighbor, Good Business awards. Consider nominating someone or nominate yourself if you'd like. WA is very interested in recognizing businesses for what they contribute to the n'hood. Though the win carries no monetary value, a business will receive a plaque and recognition. **Good Neighbors:** One year it was given to a couple who renovated their historic house in an extravagant way. A good neighbor can be someone fighting crime on their block, working with police, etc. **Good Business:** It's given to businesses who have done something to help the n'hood. For example, Isidro did major façade improvements to his properties (Marissa's Bakery, etc), Old Arizona for saving the Log

Cabin, and Black Forest's owners for 40 years of being in the n'hood. It doesn't have to be an amazing feat, the application simply asks how someone deserves recognition.

Restaurant Brochure: The Homemade Tile Association is hosting the 7th Annual Minnesota Tile Festival at the Swedish Institute on Park in September and is asking for food brochures to send participants to Whittier/Eat Street. WA would like to print 2,000 brochures and possibly more for the Republican National Convention. There are currently Eat Street brochures that stretch the whole street but are outdated and don't include Lyndale. If you can contribute an amount (\$25+) for printing WA would really appreciate it.

Councilmember Robert Lilligren: He has lived at 29th and 3rd for 20 years (West Phillips). He invites all to watch the new relocated house in progress. He spoke on topics requested by WA staff.

Welfare of Whittier: Low crime was highlighted at a police banquet he attended last night and showcased the unbelievably good crime stats that come out of Whittier. In 2007 it was the only n'hood in Mpls that had a reduction of burglary and theft. Whittier beat cops Killebrew and Downing are up for Officer of the Year. There will always be safety issues for all to be aware of and to work together but Whittier is doing great work so far. This reflects the participation of block clubs and communicating/organizing by WA.

Safety dollars on preventing youth violence. This initiative started under CM Natalie Johnson Lee which shifted youth violence into a public health issue and it has given the City a more holistic and proactive approach. There is now the Truancy Center which is an intervention center for when youth are stopped for loitering, truancy violations, etc, and it brings in resources from county, state, and schools to support them before they can progress to bigger crimes. This early intervention model is a huge help in avoiding youth ending up into gangs and guns. The Chair commented it takes heat off the Police, who can deliver them to the center and step out of the process. CM noted in the past when youth are arrested, it ties up a lot of resources to process them but now it's a faster program with more results. The Chair said it parallels the Heading Home Hennepin program which approaches homelessness by addressing the top resource users and focusing all resources on them. CM said this is the first time he has seen government aligned all on one issue (Fed, State, Local). This brings more jurisdictions in alignment with funds and goals.

Crime & Public Safety Funding: In 2008 there will be \$6 million new dollars in public safety investment. He showed a 2002 to 2008 chart that depicts the drop in state aid for public safety and the resulting higher increase in property taxes to pay for public safety. Residents are paying more for public safety. Another graph showed how Public Works infrastructure funding has remained consistent while more money is diverted into safety. In 2008 there will be more 911 operators and a big technology focus (cameras, shot spotters). CM said the technology works as shown on Bloomington Avenue. There is also increased investment of the City Attorney at Precincts with community attorneys and prosecutors at every police precinct.

Andrew asked about what happened to the red light cameras--the program has been shown to work. CM recapped the red light technology. The Council at the time knew there were legal issues around it. The City tried a legislative strategy to ticket the vehicle instead of the driver – however the Mpls legislator killed the bill in committee and squashed the attempt. The judicial strategy was the same and the City hoped to collect enough evidence that people are safer (and they are) to justify ticketing vehicles. That did not prevail with the Supreme Court deciding Mpls has no statutory right to ticket cars instead of drivers. The infrastructure is being kept in place and hope to expand the system one day. They are paying an admin fee to keep it working.

Paul asked about MPD resources for RNC. CM said the **impact of the Republican National Convention** is enormous but most of the resources are funded by Federal funds (Homeland Security). Paul clarified they are concerned about Police being taken out of Whittier. CM clarified Police are being brought in from the five state area and Canada to supplement. There will actually be more police in the n'hoods than we see normally because there is a focus to have attendees and media stay in nearby n'hoods. Paul said it's surprising there is a small group of 40,000 at the convention but the protest and media side will add 20-30,000 more people. Most people are staying at the convention hotels in Minneapolis and most media stories will byline Minneapolis and the City predicts a bigger impact on Mpls than St. Paul. The Chair noted all hotel rooms those weeks are booked as far as Rochester and suggested people start renting their rooms out now. Paula asked when the influx will happen. It will start a couple weeks beforehand.

The Chair commented to the CM that **beat cops are important to Whittier** because it is a pedestrian friendly area and business opens late. WA uses NRP funds to pay them time and half when the City could be paying regular time for more officers. It would make sense to compromise on n'hood funds if more public safety and basic service allocations were part of the city's equation towards n'hoods ahead of time. CM noted the Police force is back up to pre-2003 level. Marian noted the current beat cops operate Franklin and Stevens and do not come down Nicollet anymore. CM asked if the n'hood is funding the weekend beat cops. Last summer WA did. CM said the Council does understand that precious n'hoods dollars shouldn't be spent in this way. The Chair said more Police makes a big difference and additional street level presence is helpful.

CM said a common theme at MPD now is **visibility equals livability**. Their strategies are to be visible and it is fortunate that Precinct Commander Kris Arneson understands this and will put resources toward it. He will emphasize with her. Paul asked if this action is discretionary by the Precinct Commander. CM said it is within her budget to direct officers if they can and in the 5th Precinct, attention is drawn on Whittier because it does get more crime than the rest of the precinct. Members can also express to Arneson the need for visibility.

Minneapolis Plan 2030 and Streetcar Transit: The CM recapped the comprehensive plan required by all cities for the Met Council. On transit, the parallel discussion to the LRT is the Mpls Streetcar Plan. The City has invested a million dollars over the last two years in developing a streetcar plan. It's not a difficult thing to do because Mpls use to be a streetcar city. Nicollet fares very well in the discussion and is in the running for the first piece of streetcar to be built. The problem is, there are no capital funds to build, and after two years of planning, the City is now identifying potential funding schemes at local and Federal level. Most cities work off of the Portland model where property owners fund the line as they recognize the increased value to their land. CM noted he focuses on transportation for the Council and as an optimist, he believes there will be interest in starting small-rail projects from Federal and State gov't in the near future. Currently there are limited funds for small startup projects and very competitive to get at. As the region struggles to mitigate congestion along with climate change/global warming, there will be greater interest from the Federal gov't in funding cleaner alternative transportation options. He is hopeful there will be streetcars in Mpls soon which are not as expensive as LRT. The Chair said if more funding is available, would a line along Nicollet or Greenway trump LRT. CM confirmed, it would. He noted there was discussion by the SouthWest LRT Advisory group identifying some of the challenges with the Nicollet alignment which included the streetcar proposal.

Barb criticized the Portland model: Most of the business owners on Nicollet are family owned business and are very pragmatic in how money is invested. What would be the *impetus to invest in streetcar* when there is already bus transit? CM said the PDX model is not as applicable to Mpls. There are conditions in Portland that don't exist here – PDX had vast underdeveloped areas of vacant land and low market value. A handful of people owned most of the properties. That doesn't exist on Nicollet. He would never envision a PDX model in Mpls where the local property owners invested and built the line. Nicollet would not rate as high since most development is in-fill. In addressing the operational part, that is up for debate whether buses or streetcars are better. The benefits are cleaner trains, increased ridership, etc. The Chair said streetcar studies showed people like trains for specific reasons (smoother ride, less noise, etc). Paula asked if the system was powered with overhead lines. Yes. She asked what the alignment down the street was. CM said looking at PDX, it would operate in existing lane space. It's not a dedicated lane. Historically it has operated in that way. His grandfather was a trolley conductor on Lake Street. The Greenway line doesn't compete very well but there is huge interest with employers there to connect to Hiawatha or Southwest. CM said identifying a facility yard means that area get the first piece of the line. CM clarified the pot of money at the Fed gov't competes with hundreds of other lines and will fund very few.

Paul asked about **Nicollet Reopening**. CM said Sears has expressed interest in redoing the store. The City is at a point to stop talking about it and is putting a strategy in place to do it. The strategy is regaining site control. The Grocery-store side is interested now that it's under one control. Sears-Kmart they would be interested in reconfiguring the store so the street can be opened up. Gaining site control is important. There are three levels of property control: ground control (Sears Kmart), and the underlining owner is a Trust that has little motivational interest in changing the current status and could be harmed by the change. The development community has expressed interest in assisting (Ryan Companies). CM said he is hopeful about it. Barb asked if Empowerment Zone funding can be used. CM said the EZ program has sunset at the Fed level, there has never been a steady stream of funding for such a zone. There is bonding capacity that could be brought to the discussion. Barb asked what if the Biomass didn't happen. CM said yes the bonding capacity would be available.

Paul asked about the **GFI site at the end of Nicollet & 29th**. CM said it has been discussed very publicly. Hennepin County Health Services formerly HCMC has expressed interest. They were given \$38 million of bonding funds to rebuild the clinic currently south of Lake Street. They want to be in the area and identified the GFI site. There is a pause as the community/gov't side convinces the HHS board to expand their vision and do multi-use at GFI. Strategically the right kind of development can put pressure to reopen Nicollet. The largest issue for HHS is time, they want their health clinic open soon. Another concern is that HHS wants a medical facility that anyone in the metro area is comfortable going to: attractive, secure, complements the n'hood. There is concern that the clinic will become a service center of the WA n'hood. However in looking at the 28th corridor, it becomes attractive with Wells Fargo and other hospitals. The Chair noted HHS does not need the entire site (3 acres). CM said HHS has an option in the site control. The HHS Board would prefer dialogue with officials instead since it's their first project and CM will work to communicate WA issues.

Lisa Poppenhagen of Lee's Cleaners. 107 East 26th Street: Lisa is waiting on the City to approve their Site Plan. The City also wants a fence along the street. The Chair said they did submit their site plan before the grandfathering period expired. Lisa said she is aware of what the n'hood wants to see, up to sidewalk and two stories but was underinsured and does not have funding to build that. She has seriously considered what else could be done on the building and what kind of offer she would take to purchase the building a lot. She would need a large return to sell. CM said details can be worked out with Planning Dept and asked Lisa to speak with his office later on. What was there will be rebuilt. Lisa commented she has spent a lot already – paying an architect \$11k to just have the site plan drawn.

Volunteer your business to host the March 12th BA meeting, contact WA office!

Meeting adjourned at 5:38 p.m. Minutes submitted by Eric Fu-Wah James, Whittier Alliance.