

Whittier Business Association – Draft Meeting Minutes

Wednesday May 14, 2008–11:00 AM-1:30 P.M.

Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Present

Erica Christ (Black Forest), Elizabeth (Liz) Grzechowiak (AZIA), Paul Jablonsky (Nicollet Car Wash), Cindy Ohlenkamp (Franklin Bank), Becky Olson (Fair Oaks), Pamela Nordaune (MCAD), Kelly Pederson (NICO products), Ralf Runquist, Dr. Brad Sim (from the office of Dr. Barry Gerst, DDS), Lisa Vecoli (MIA)

Speakers

Amanda Arnold (City of Minneapolis Planner), Inspector Kris Arneson (MPD 5th Precinct), Lt. Eddie Frizell (MPD 5th Precinct), Lisa Vecoli (MIA)

Staff

Marian Biehn, Karin Knudsen

Call to Order by Chair Erica Christ at 11:40, followed by introductions of all present. Erica noted that Black Forest celebrates their 43rd year tomorrow; all are welcome to stop by and help in the celebration. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted. **Motion** to approve the agenda **carried**. The minutes from the April meeting were presented. A **motion** to approve the April 9, 2008 BA Meeting minutes **carried**.

Spotlight on Business –Minneapolis Institute of Arts: Lisa Vecoli (director of Community Relations)

Lisa explained she has been at MIA for 3 ½ years, and for most of that time has been active in the BA, and has served as a BA rep (non-profit) to the Whittier Alliance Board. MIA is an encyclopedic museum, with collections from all over the world, which span over 10,000 years of art and art history. One of their goals is to try to collect an overview of the general history of art around the globe by building up their permanent collection. The idea when the museum was founded was to create a top-notch art collection that would serve the community for years to come. MIA is one of the top 10 encyclopedic museums in the country, with somewhere between 80,000 to 100,000 items in their collection. The permanent collections include everything from sculpture to textiles. MIA holds one of the finest Japanese art collections outside of Japan; the John C Weber special exhibit on Japanese art is currently on exhibit (and will close in just over a week). Among museums of a similar stature, MIA is unique in that access to the permanent collections is always free and open to the public. The museum also has free parking, and is extremely accessible. Every year, the museum is host to about half a million visitors, and over 100 thousand children. A future ambition of the MIA is to encourage their visitors to spend time in the Whittier neighborhood while they are in the area exploring the MIA.

Discussion

In response to a question about how often the **permanent exhibits** are rotated, Lisa noted that the speed of rotation partly depends on the curators, and on the exhibits themselves (media type, size of that collection, the exhibit schedule). For example, the prints and photos are rotated more frequently partly because those collections are more sensitive to light. Lt. Frizell thanked MIA for their **awareness of security issues**, and noted that well-attended events (like Art in Bloom) always run smoothly in terms of traffic in the neighborhood. An attendee asked how the **long-term strategic planning** of the museum was going, and noted that Whittier residents had given lots of input [at past community meetings]. Lisa noted that the museum would like to create a focused strategic plan. They currently have so much good input that part of the process is to narrow down onto what should be prioritized. As the Community Relations Director, Lisa is advocating that the long-term plan include: engaging with the neighboring park (in terms of maintaining contact with the park board, being engaged with and aware of activities in the park); advocating and marketing MIA's proximity to Eat Street; improving the management of buses (because the buses directly impact the livability of the surrounding community); and considering the community input on the exterior and façade of the building. Erica noted that the Japanese exhibit is spectacular, and would encourage anyone who hasn't seen it to go before the exhibit closes.

Nicollet LRT Alignment-review of LRT Task Force consolidated BA/CI resolution (from May 5, 2008)

Erica introduced the consolidated resolution, which came out of the LRT Task Force on May 5. She noted that last month at the BA, another document was considered and amended by the BA. It was forwarded on to the WA Board. The CI also considered and amended a similar resolution, and forwarded it to the Board. Rather than chose between the documents, or merge them into one, the Board directed the LRT Task Force to meet again and create a consolidated document. The Board has encouraged both the CI and the BA to vote on the document without amendments or changes. Erica explained that the differences between the two groups seem to be that the BA wanted to resolution to clearly state opposition to the Nicollet alignment; the CI wanted the position to show there is support for mass transit in the neighborhood, but there are concerns about the 3C alignment. This document is the final compromise between the groups and the task forces. In general, Cedar-Isles/Dean and Kenwood are in support of 3C, Bryn-Mawr and Harrison are against 3C. Whittier is the first neighborhood directly along the proposed 3C route to take a position. The neighborhood resolution (once passed by the Board) would go to the county, and our councilman, as the official position of Whittier.

Discussion

It was asked if the Southwest Transit group had looked at the Whittier document; Erica noted that the WA rep to the Community Advisory Committee of the Southwest Transit group [Alex Bauman] was involved in writing the document. An attendee asked why

the neighborhood couldn't **send two positions** to the county; Erica responded that the Board does not want to send two. Marian noted that the county has asked for a single neighborhood position [not positions from the businesses, and also from the community]. Erica noted that some **individual businesses** have sent their own letters to the county; she would encourage anyone who still has concerns to do so on their own. It was confirmed that the Board would like the committee to simply vote on the issue and not make any changes or additions to the document. Liz said that her opinion still stands: she feels that the order within the document is backward. She would like to see the thesis of the resolution come first in the document, rather than come last. Another attendee said that she felt the document was a little confusing. Lisa explained that part of the difficulty is that the document has to say two things at once; she also mentioned that the Board discussion on the resolution last month was very passionate. Erica remarked that at the **CI meeting** [held Monday May 12], there was mention of the resolution being confusing, but that it did pass without much conflict. Lisa noted that the document does clearly say that the WA does not support 3C, which is the most important overall impression of the document.

BA Motion 1: The Business Association moves to approve the "Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution" [dated May 5, 2008]. **Motion Carried.**

Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan: Amanda Arnold, South Minneapolis City Planner

Amanda, who works in the long-range planning department for the City of Minneapolis, introduced the Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan. The Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan will be a **community-based vision** for that area, augmenting the City of Minneapolis' generalized plan for the whole city. The goal is to come up with a more detailed plan for that area of the city, especially as it is an important activity center. Uptown's Small Area Planning committee began work about 2 years ago, and it was decided at that time to treat Uptown and Lyn-Lake as separate activity centers. The **vision of the Lyn-Lake Plan** is primarily focused on land use, including parking, transportation, etc. The committee just began talks last month; it hopes to have a document by the end of this year. The **steering committee** was set up to represent all 4 concerned neighborhoods, the Midtown Greenway, and includes appointees by Councilman Remington and Councilman Lilligren. (It was noted that Larry Ludeman and Mark Trehus were WA appointees to the planning committee, and that Alex Bauman, Barb Lickness, Ahmad Hawari, and Jim Walsh were appointed by Councilman Lilligren.) Amanda explained that they have yet to finalize the **study boundaries**, but that the City would like to cover Bryant to Blaisdell. The question is really how far up and down Lyndale (from the intersection with Lake) should be included. They will likely end up with a two-tiered plan, focusing on the intersection of Lyndale and Lake, and on the secondary surrounding streets. She noted that all are welcome at the **steering committee meetings**, because the input of the community is so valuable. She hopes the steering meetings will help guide the process, and that committee members will communicate with the groups they represent, as well as serve as sounding boards on proposed ideas before they are presented at the larger community meetings. Those **community meetings** will take place at key points in the process; next will be the vision meeting, followed by action by the committee (collecting data, hiring consultants, etc.) Ultimately the plan will be adopted by the City and will become part of the larger plan for the City of Minneapolis. On the project website, all meeting summaries and agendas will be posted [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/Lyn-Lake]. There is also an email list you can join for updates and announcements.

Discussion

Erica asked how this plan intersected with the **streetscape plan** that is currently being implemented from Minnehaha Creek to Lake St. Amanda said that that project is different. They will go on concurrently but there is no current plan to complete the streetscape from Lake to the 94 freeway. It was asked is there was **planning for CPTED near Lyn-Lake**: Amanda remarked that it would be good to have some police department involvement with the planning committee, because it is important to focus on public safety within the design guidelines. In response to a question about the **project timeline**, Amanda explained that the City would like most of the community work to be done by the end of the year, but acknowledged that the city approval process won't take place until 2009. She estimated that it will take somewhere between 6 months and 2 years. Erica asked if there was a **standard plan** that was the start of most small area plans. Amanda noted that the idea is to tailor each plan to its specific area, but that all plans will cover some of the same issues (cf. density, height, parking, transportation). The area on Lake/I-35 was identified as a problematic spot, given that it seems to fall under other existing and perhaps conflicting plans. Kmart was also mentioned as a barrier to the ability to implement an area plan. It was noted that the funding for the development of the Kmart site has been identified for 2009. Amanda noted the difficulty of the City in working with a multitude of plans adopted by the City Council at different times throughout the City's history.

Motion to amend agenda, to add a 5th Precinct Report from the officers present, was made and **carried**.

5th Precinct Crime Report: Lt. Frizell and Inspector Kris Arneson of 5th Precinct

Inspector Kris Arneson updated the BA on the **crime activity within the neighborhood**. She noted that due to robbery issues, the area from 1st to Pillsbury, and 25/27th Street, has been the focus of the last couple weeks. The force will continue to focus on and add extra patrol and search in that area. Usually this type of police presence will effectively move the crime to a different area by dispersing (or arresting) those involved. The precinct averages 9 robberies per week (yearly); but the neighborhood has been averaging 4 to 5 per week for the last few months. Thursday night the **5th Precinct** will host an **open house** from 5-7pm, which will include light refreshments. It is a chance to put a face to your local civil forces, and there will be information about the horse patrol, K9 unit, and other personnel. Near Kmart/Lake Street, a new beat cop has been added to the Tuesday-Saturday day shift patrol, and is doing a good job stopping afternoon activity. "No Trespassing" signs have been also added to limit loitering in that area. Last year, Whittier had an overall decrease in crime by 10%; which may be due to extra cops on patrol in the area. The precinct tries to place officers where crime patterns are happening. For example, last year there were established patterns of crime in the northeast corner of

the neighborhood; extra officers were placed there, and there have been a reduced number of robberies in response. They plan to add more officers in that same area by Memorial Day, in anticipation of increased summer crime activity.

Lt. Frizell noted the **crime statistics for this year** compared to last: robbery is down 38%, burglaries are down 60%, auto theft has decreased by 28%. Overall, Whittier is down 27% (through March '08/compared to March '07). He noted they have been working with **St. Stevens** to reduce the impact of the chronic homeless who eat dinner at the shelter. He noted that there has been some impact on the **corner of Nicollet and 24th**, in terms of teenagers gathering there at the bus stops. He has met with both Waldorf and Watershed High, and they came up with a comprehensive plan that has been in place for the last 7 days and seems to be working.

Discussion

Erica remarked that she lives next door to **St. Stevens**, and they have made good strides in improving their impact on the neighborhood. She noted, though, there is a lot of garbage that comes from there (likely due to the increased give-away of food that comes pre-packaged). She noted that the **abundance of litter** in that area--through the alley, and over to Clinton and 22nd--is a livability issue for those nearby. Lisa noted that fast food establishments often have a rule to go out once/day to pick up trash on their property; this may serve as a precedent that the neighborhood could ask them to follow [Wendy's follows such an edict]. Liz added that downtown liquor establishments follow a similar litter rule. It was generally suggested that the neighborhood could ask St. Stevens to follow a similar rule.

It was asked if, due to housing trends leading to property foreclosures, there were raised levels of squatting in the homes or **problem properties** that should be identified within the neighborhood. Lt. Frizell replied there were a couple of problem properties and noted there was a lieutenant designated for those issues. He noted there have been issues with squatting, and that increased police presence seemed to help with the problem. Lisa thanked the officers and the police force in general for their handling of the recent situation with the hostage at MIA. She noted that the MIA staff has had positive comments about how the situation was handled; and that under the circumstances; they felt it went respectfully and as well as they could hope for.

An attendee asked for more details about the **robberies around 25/27 and Pillsbury**. Lt. Frizzle noted that the suspect description is too general to release, but that the general details involved two men approaching people as they came out of bars or restaurants and were returning to their cars. They did arrest someone last week who admitted to involvement.

An attendee asked if the neighborhood should be aware of any new citywide trends (in crime, drugs). Lt. Frizell noted that they aren't aware of anything, but that trends like that would be sent on the weekly update emails. He noted the officers also leave flyers on vehicles/etc to alert people to the things they do that encourage/allow for **crimes of opportunity** (like leaving their garages open, bikes unlocked, laptops or purses on the seats of their vehicles). He explained that they had recently partnered with MDOT to create "No Trespassing" signs to put up around the construction on 35; it seems to be helping with trespassing in that area. Lt. Frizell said they could create signs to post in local businesses that alert patrons to the possibility of crime. Liz explained the difficulty for businesses in Whittier to strike a balance between assuring their customers that the neighborhood is safe, and telling them to beware of potential crime. It was noted that one of the goals of the neighborhood is to increase business (partly by assuring people it is safe to be here), so that businesses in general are trying to avoid the impression that the neighborhood is unsafe; **hanging signs** within their establishment might give that impression. Inspector Arneson noted that the valet service used downtown is often successful in making people feel safe in that area. An attendee suggested posting those crime/safety signs on the parking signposts rather than within the businesses might be the answer.

Erica asked about **suspicious person calls**, noting that the dispatchers seem to be asking much more specific questions. Lt. Frisell explained that the more specific those call are, the more helpful they are to the officers, and can actually be used to stop crime in progress. (He noted there were zero burglaries of business in sector 1 last week). Inspector Arneson noted that the force is starting to get black and white vehicles, and that their old patrol cars will be phased out over the next 3 years. She also explained that the 5th Precinct has an ongoing **domestic abuse pilot project**, designed to result in an increased charge rate on misdemeanor assault. The project includes a more in-depth investigation of reported assaults, including arrest of the suspect; videotaping the arrest, the Miranda, and the ride to the precinct; pictures of the crime scene; and written victim statements. Over the three months the project has been operating, the charge rate for misdemeanor assault has risen from 50 to 73%. Although the process takes more time, the precinct hopes that it will lead to fewer second incidents, with the ultimate goal of preventing all domestic homicides. If the project is deemed a success, it will go city wide (last year, the City had 18,000 misdemeanor assaults).

BA-CPED Grant report: Marian Biehn

Marian noted that the WA has until **May 31** to spend the rest of **CPED grant**. Most of the money is spoken for, but there are some funds still available (for example, the money earmarked for **marketing**). Erica explained that the WA had developed a façade improvement program in which the WA offered to match the money a business spent on façade improvement 70/30. The idea was to encourage improvements related to business' street image (like painting, updating window and doors, and landscaping). People took advantage of the opportunity and all the funds were distributed. Now the City has come up with a **façade improvement grant** (similar to the one developed by the WA BA), which the WA applied for and was granted. The WA now has \$50,000 to grant over the next 2 years. The funds will be matched 2/1 by the City [3/1 if the development is on Lyndale]. The grant encourages façade improvement for commercial properties along the corridors (but does not include landscaping). Erica noted that it would be good to create a brochure that explains the program for those who might be interested. She also explained that ideally, 4-10 businesses would ask for and spend a significant portion of the grant, but that improvements of all size and scope are encouraged.

Marian introduced a "**Guide to Whittier Restaurants**," including Eat Street and Lyndale. The handout was designed by Eric James, the former WA Admin Asst. The Tile Makers convention being held at the Swedish Institute had requested a brochure directing people to Whittier for dining. It was noted that such a guide might also help draw people into Whittier during the Republican National

Convention later this summer. The WA would like to print and distribute the handout to local businesses and to the Convention Center to market the neighborhood.

Discussion

Erica suggested that, in the future, maybe the MIA could partner with MIA to distribute the brochures; given the number of people MIA draws into the neighborhood. Lisa noted that if D'Amico [at MIA] was added to the brochure, that might make the brochure more appealing to MIA; however she couldn't commit at this time. It was noted that there was a previous brochure of food in the area, but that it did not include Lyn-Lake. It was suggested that asking businesses to help pay for the costs of the pamphlet (and then highlighting those businesses within it) might help to defray the costs of printing them. It was noted in response that part of the reason for this pamphlet was to highlight all of the eateries in Whittier, rather than just a few. An attendee suggested that adding corporate sponsorship (like Wendy's or McDonalds, or The Wedge) could help with costs, though it was agreed that the brochure was already very full of information. It was suggested that with the upcoming RNC, putting these guides in the hands of cabbies who service the area might encourage them to talk up the dining in Whittier.

In response to discussion about **cost and the number of brochures** that should be printed, Marian noted that there was only \$200 set aside for marketing, and that she planned to print 5,000 or more. She explained that while the grant ends May 31 (with reporting and a new application in June), this could be a continuing project if new monies were granted in August. An attendee suggested in response that the project needs to think bigger than just 5,000 copies, and that perhaps non-food related sponsorship was the answer, as well as expanding the brochures to a bigger size sheet to incorporate more information. Another attendee noted that the Whittier business website address might be incorporated on the brochure, given that most people have extensive and nearly-constant internet access; this would help keep the information on the brochure manageable, while giving interested parties access to more information if desired.

Old and New Business

Erica announced the **26th Annual Hennepin Lake Liquor Wine tasting**, June 11, 6-9 pm: proceeds from the event go to South Minneapolis neighborhoods. The proceeds from any tickets sold through the Whittier Alliance go directly to the WA. Tickets are available in advance for \$25; contact the WA for more details. It should be a fun and happening event.

Meeting adjourned at 1:11pm. Minutes submitted by Karin Knudsen.

Next Meeting: June 11, 2008, exact time and place to be announced

Attachments: Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution (dated May 5, 2008)

Whittier Alliance Light Rail Transit Task Force Resolution -- May 5, 2008

The Whittier Alliance (representing the residents, businesses, and property owners of the Whittier neighborhood) has given significant consideration to the alternate routes of the proposed Southwest LRT. The Nicollet Alignment (3C) was extensively considered, as its selection would have major impacts on the neighborhood. Based upon robust public discussions of the alternatives with a wide range of stakeholders, The Whittier Alliance has reached the following findings:

The Whittier Alliance supports the Kenilworth Alignment (3A).

The Whittier Alliance recognizes that the Nicollet Alignment (3C) could provide meaningful benefits for the neighborhood.

- Improved transit speed, reliability, frequency and connectivity
- Access to increased customer and investment base
- The possibility of minimized traffic congestion through grade separation

The Whittier Alliance has significant concerns about the Nicollet Alignment (3C) for the following reasons:

- The reduced likelihood of a Midtown Greenway Streetcar serving all of the Midtown neighborhoods and connecting between Southwest and Hiawatha LRT, with the potential to extend to the river and beyond
- The preclusion of a future Nicollet Avenue Streetcar, whose more frequent stops might better serve our dense, near-downtown neighborhood
- The likelihood of reduced, rerouted or eliminated bus service currently serving the area
- The proposed line and station locations poorly serve the commercial nodes at 26th & Nicollet and Lake & Nicollet
- Vehicular traffic currently along Nicollet may be forced on to the residential streets
- The physical and technical requirements of the Nicollet Avenue tunnel, and specifically it's entry portals near the Midtown Greenway and Franklin Avenue, may have the following undesirable impacts:
 - Render Nicollet Ave useless as a through street
 - Render reopening of Nicollet at Kmart infeasible
 - Isolate and render nearly useless the area between Cecil Newman (29th St) and Kmart
 - Eliminate Nicollet Ave parking
 - In the short term and likely in the long term, be detrimental to the commercial and retail business along Nicollet Ave
 - Be disruptive of the urban fabric of Nicollet Ave, the Greenway and the neighborhood
- Even without factoring in the immediate (and possible long term) negative economic impacts to the Nicollet commercial corridor, the projected cost of construction for the trench and cut-and-cover tunnel doesn't appear to provide for the well executed system that The Whittier Alliance would expect in order to truly benefit the neighborhood. Given recent experience with the Central Corridor planning, The Whittier Alliance fears that should such amenities and mitigation efforts not be fully accounted for and explicitly included at an early stage, they may disappear from the plan during later budget cuts.

Based on the currently presented alternatives and for the above reasons, **The Whittier Alliance does not support the Nicollet Alignment (3C), and supports the Kenilworth Alignment (3A), supplemented by a Nicollet Ave Streetcar and a Midtown Greenway Streetcar, as the best option for the neighborhood.**