

WHITTIER ALLIANCE - Community Issues Committee - MEETING MINUTES

Monday November 12th, 2007 – 6:00 P.M. - 8:30 P.M.

Whittier International Elementary School

Present Alex Bauman, Nick Boettcher, Tom Bissen, Mary Cable, Erica Christ, Wendy Darst, Katie Doty (KLD Consulting), Pam Nordaune (MCAD), Eric Grumdahl, Eric Katz (Turnstone Group), Tom Kremer, Steven Lang, Kurt Nelson, Thien Nguyen, Jesse Oyervides, Erin Sjoquist, Michelle Stolp (KLD Consulting), Jim Walsh, Lisa Vecoli (MIA)

Speakers Michael O’Keefe (MCAD) & Julie Snow (Snow Architects), Kathy Walker (KLD Consulting)

Staff Marian Biehn, Josie Shardlow, Eric James

Call to Order at 6:10 by Chair Destin Nygard. The Conflict of Interest & Standard of Conduct policies were noted. **Motion** to approve the agenda **carried**. A **motion** to approve the October 8, 2007 minutes **carried**.

Community Comments & Discussion

Blue Sky Guides available to purchase from Whittier Alliance! WA retains 50% of your generous purchase.

Plan Modification \$200,000 Neighborhood Revitalization Phase 1 - 3R Loan Program Income to Phase 2 NRP Implementation: NRP funds for WA will be cut anywhere between 30-70%. To readjust our budget the Alliance needs the neighborhood to reallocate funds to balance out. Erica clarified only income funds (discretionary) generated from loan programs will be used to fund operations. WA is not spending housing or other strategy dollars on implementation.

Josie: *Youth and transportation event* is coming up. *St. Stevens Shelter* is having an open meeting on Mon. Nov. 19 The shelter will be holding more presentations to clarify on their policies.

Fifth Precinct Report – Sector Lieutenant Eddie Frizell: Frizell reported Park Policeman Mark Bedard was killed in the line of duty last weekend and had worked in Whittier.

Whittier recently fell from the top ratings in graffiti and robbery. MPD has made graffiti removal available and worked with businesses around Lyndale. Since the spike in robberies this summer, focus zones were created out of an intensive analysis of the incidents and Whittier received a large portion of resources from 5th Precinct to reduce this crime. Also helping is that reported information is going directly to officers. Frizell commended WA for being an engaged organization.

In Whittier, there is an 11 percent reduction in robberies (1 of every 5). Officers are now near areas of high-crime and have become familiar with residents and children. Burglaries are down by 15.3 percent. Neighbors are calling with detailed information and MPD has made high-profile arrests with weapons. Theft from motor vehicles is down but people are still leaving keys, garage door openers, laptops, purse, etc. A caught criminal who broke into a car full of items had actually thought it was a Police sting. Frizell warned about Minnesota’s cold-weather law; do not leave your keys running in the car anytime. Auto thefts are down 17.8 percent. Crime is no longer concentrated. Criminals are lazy and tend to hit the same spot repeatedly; many of them are now in jail. A resident reported to watch out for counterfeit money. Make sure the hologram matches. Tom noted the n’hood is asking for a fence at Clinton Field Park to address safety concerns. Frizell noted known criminals are being tracked by officers.

O’Keefe thanked Frizell on behalf of MCAD. The Chair inquired about the traffic situation south of 28th at Pillsbury and Pleasant. Frizell noted residents should wait until Lake Street is completed when the problem will be somewhat relieved. A comment was made that the traffic and parking in that area isn’t related to the Lake St. construction. Frizell said that he has spoken several times to the Karmel Business Association on proper parking and that the n’hood has met with the Assn 3-4 times about the traffic and other issues. Josie noted 29th Street residents are applying for critical parking.

Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) – Parking proposals – Michael O’Keefe (MCAD) & Julie Snow (Snow Architects)

- 1) *Review of facility (parking, buildings, and green space) campus needs*
- 2) *Overview of short & long-range campus master plan (10-15 years)*

President O'Keefe introduced MCAD's 10-15-year strategic plan calling for parking of 275-350 slots. MCAD wishes to gauge public reaction from residents, MIA, other interests, etc on several options. No option is ideal. Presenting is Architect Julie Snow, a Mpls architect on the Board of Trustees who is assisting on the parking project. (PowerPoint) Snow said MCAD knows there is an issue with parking. The team looked at how the campus could be more open and porous to the neighborhood as well as have an entrance that highly identifies MCAD.

First option shows a long L shaped academic building along 26th St and Stevens Ave with a parking ramp at ground level on 26th St. The building would be elevated and cantilevered with a pedestrian entrance at the corner of 26th & Stevens. It shows MCAD's control of most of the block. The additional academic buildings are cantilevered above the ground to be open to the n'hood and pedestrians. New buildings will also be transparent (windows, etc) for safety concerns. The existing 2 4Plexes/student housing/historic buildings along 26th St are removed under this proposal. Tom noted MCAD purchased the old historic buildings on the corner recently. Snow noted the preservation of the buildings is questionable and the plan is looking 10-15 years out.

Jim asked about land ownership. Everything north of the main entrance (at 25th ST) is owned by the Park Board (where MIA is). MIA owns the Old Morrison Building and the parking ramp. MCAD has a perpetual lease on the Morrison building. The MCAD parking lease for the MIA lot is expiring and MCAD was given notice 2 years ago that they would have to accommodate their own parking demand.

Second strategy shows parking off 3rd Ave. and tucked behind the building at the corner of 3rd & 26th St. This replaces a building MCAD is using as a dorm. An open plaza is at the corner of 26th and Stevens. Other potential buildings are indicated along Stevens up to and including the current bookstore building. A resident who lives on the corner of Stevens and 25th is concerned over a large new extension to the existing Liberal Arts (LA) Wing. Snow said the college understands the n'hood objections and the buildings will not be masses, they are active and creative spaces, open and transparent. Another resident commented that he liked the vine covered building both for the vines and the height (or lack of). A taller building would not be liked and would be objectionable from a resident perspective like the new MIA addition. The committee noted a 64 foot height limit by zoning code about four stories. The resident said people drive very fast down Stevens and recommended a way to slow down traffic at the area. Snow suggested a speed bump but that with the parking she didn't see it as a speeding street. O'Keefe noted the entrance there needs to have more prominence. Snow said more businesses on 26th would encourage more pedestrian activity in the area.

The third strategy is not the most likely due to cost and engineering. It expands the MIA parking ramp by building over and around it—parking above the existing ramp with housing on the west face. The plan opens a view sight towards the Morrison building from 26th St. More raised housing and academic buildings wrap along the south of the block similar to other strategies.

Strategy four requires a collaboration with the MIA to swap the 1st story Liberal Arts Wing to MIA which could give the MIA additional contiguous exhibit space. That building is also on Park land. The MIA would then give MCAD the former Whittier Health Care building and the flat lot at 25th between Clinton and 3rd Ave. MCAD would build an interior parking ramp with housing on the perimeters. The south block retains similar raised housing/academic concept.

Comments: The Chair appreciated the sightline of 26th Street from the south towards the north. He would like to see a holistic and consistent treatment and landscape of the entire block (all cultural institutions) instead of piecemeal. Snow said strategy 3 and 4 are unlikely (due to cost, timing, feasibility, leadership changes, etc) but interior connections between campus buildings will be included in the final project (skyway or tunnel). The Chair did not like a large parking ramp but preferred strategy 2. Tom said MCAD should consider purchasing buildings off campus and moving all housing elsewhere. Snow said she thinks green space is increased and enhanced by eliminating unused structures in response to Tom's comment about loss of historic buildings. Erica said the academic buildings are unharmonious, uninteresting but the current older buildings on the corner of 26th and 3rd are unique and interesting to look at. Snow wants to increase pedestrian traffic diagonally through the campus. She thinks 26th Street will become an important activity and commuting corridor.

Tom asked why MCAD hadn't acted more quickly to resolve their parking problem since they have known about losing parking for 2 years.. He prefers strategy 4. O'Keefe noted MIA is in a leadership change and the options have been presented to their Board of Trustees. No official response has been made though they are negative about strategy 3, building atop the existing ramp. Strategy 4 is a creative idea and they are not likely to pursue that. Lisa reported that MIA Board of Trustees meeting the parking issue had been discussed. She noted the MIA Board is not prepared at this time or interested to swap properties or build on existing structures.

The resident noted a wall is being created along Stevens (with MIA new addition). He said in all options, Morrison Hall feels closed off to the public. Lower stories should be built on the street side and higher stories in the rear. He also noted concern about the utilities and trucks. Snow agreed on moving the loading dock elsewhere.

Marian expressed concern about rushing a decision and basing all future design and esthetics on the location parking ramp and MCAD should explore as many alternative options as possible. The need for parking should not be driving the strategic planning. O'Keefe said the plan also proposes new academic buildings but the immediate concern is to collectively build parking and the Master program studio space. The college is at 800 students. A new building will conceal the parking. Tom again expressed concern over elimination of the historic buildings. A resident asked about a timeline for the project. Snow indicated June of 2009 as completion of the first phase and construction to begin soon. The group will return with the n'hood as they develop the plan.

Southwest Transit – Information and Community Input – Kathy Walker (KLD Consulting)

The proposed Southwest Transitway goes through Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, St. Louis Park, and through Minneapolis neighborhoods to downtown. An alternatives analysis was completed earlier this year to look at finalized modes and routes.

Walker reviewed the light rail route through Whittier which included a tunnel on Nicollet to Franklin and onto Nicollet Mall. She said the Access Minneapolis committee is ruling out the 2nd and Marquette alternative alignment. The environmental impact stage begins early next year. The group is getting close to selecting the final route within the next year and the line is to be operational by 2015. The community impact section will include input such as n'hoods being separated by the route. The committee that Alex is on will not determine the final route but educate the final decision by the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority by bring up issues that need to be included in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Chair asked why the 3A Route was not chosen in the earlier phase. Walker said that route did not have enough community input to justify its continuation. None of the station locations or numbers of are fixed. Erica noted there was no economic impact section addressed in the community impact portion. The Chair noted 26th and Nicollet is an identified activity center by the City and is odd there is no station located there. The proposed route is a major disruption to area businesses with no benefit to the n'hood afterwards. In response to Tom's comment about streetcar feasibility, the group is looking at cost-effectiveness in terms of where funds will come and Minneapolis is competing for Federal dollars. However streetcar and light rail will not go down the same corridor.

Thien Nguyen, Seafood Palace and property owner, voiced concern for businesses along the Nicollet corridor with the underground tunnel causing vibrations on 100 year old buildings. She asked how the county will address repercussions for businesses. Walker said the county will hire an engineering firm and issues such as tunneling and vibrations will be addressed.

Alex asked why there is a tunnel for Nicollet Avenue. Walker noted the route is cost-competitive as tunneling reduces travel time. Erica asked about the Park and Portland plan which was brought up after the alternatives were completed. Walker said that new alternative is being studied. Marian asked about the necessary turn radius of the light rail tunnel at the Greenway. Walker noted property acquisition would be necessary. The Chair noted there is not much gain for this route when Nicollet is one of the best-served bus routes. Walker pointed out the focus on new and regional rider-ship. A resident asked how the system works with existing bus routes. Metro Transit will realign its routes. Doty said Metro Transit noted bus routes in dense areas will likely continue to run downtown.

In terms of some engineering facts: A 40 foot right-away is needed for the two tracks on Nicollet. The current tunnel exit is mid-way on the block before Franklin. Hennepin County already owns track in the Kenwood area and has sufficient footage there.

Meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m. Minutes submitted by Eric Fu-Wah James, Whittier Alliance.