

RAILROAD ISLAND COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

Neighbors That Care About Their Community

MINUTES OF MEETING

October 27, 2010

722 Payne Avenue, SPPD Community Room

In Attendance:

RRITF members: Chair, Linda Arnesen, Troy Trooien, Rosemarie Bomersine, Jack Londino, Shirley Thompson, Andy Twedt
Al Oertwig, RRITF and Chair of Payne Phalen District Five Planning Council
Chris Bynes, RRI Police Officer
Reverend Runney Patterson, New Hope Baptist Church (Community Guest)
Wanda Emanuel-Woods, New Hope Baptist Church (Community Guest)
Jim Erchul, Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services
Sheri Pemberton-Hoiby, Planning and Economic Development
Pat Lindgren, City of Saint Paul Ward 2 Councilmember Thune's office
St. Paul Police CITE Officer, Mr. Chris Byrne (CITE Officer for Rail Road Island)
Leslie McMurray, Executive Director of the Payne Phalen District Five Planning Council
Observer: Tom Sanchez, City of Saint Paul, PED

Meeting opened with introductions.

The draft Agenda was approved with a slight shift in the ordering of agenda items.

1. *Vacant Properties Discussion-New Hope Baptist Church*

Linda Arnesen noted that the former Kormann's grocery had been a nuisance property for many years and neighborhood activists and District Five worked hard to eliminate the nuisance behavior associated with the site. The building has since been torn down and the lot is currently a vacant lot owned by the city of Saint Paul's HRA. Neighbors have expressed interest in the future of this site.

Linda asked Reverend Runney Patterson to outline his hopes and vision for a Christian Life Center in the Railroad Island neighborhood and his expressed interests in developing a city-owned vacant lot situated on the southwest corner of Minnehaha Ave E and Beaumont St. (Note: Rev. Patterson's letter of August 10, 2010, was sent to all RRITF members in advance of the meeting. This letter is attached to these minutes).

Rev. Patterson noted he was pleased to meet with the Task Force and that he had arrived in 2004. His Baptist congregation which occupies the former St. Ambrose Church is both committed and interested in the surrounding community. Many congregants reside in areas across the Twin Cities metro area, bringing opportunities for connections to resources outside the immediate neighborhood. He expressed a long term interest in the future of the former Kormann's convenience store, which the neighborhood labored for many years to remove from a list of nuisance properties. Rev. Patterson held

early conversations several years ago with Mike Anderson (former ESND Exec Director) and with former Mayor Randy Kelly regarding possibilities for his church at that location.

Rev. Patterson shared several ideas that his congregation has regarding the potential Christian Life Center. On this particular parcel, they envision a 2-story facility, brick exterior with no basement. They hope to create services and access for youth, seniors, and those conducting job search activities. They hope to work with youth and keep youth engaged in wholesome activities with a forward focus.

With weather and safety deterring people from exercise, they wish to build an indoor walking track to focus on healthy activities. They want to support positive parenting classes. They would not duplicate services but would house services that already exist in the area. They would seek to have a range of activities and services available, with flexible space that allows for interchangeable uses of the space. They would like to have restrooms and offices in the space.

Current facility needs inspired the idea. The current fellowship hall is on a lower level and this is hard to access by seniors. They would like a building at ground level. They would want space for cars. They are considering being able to feed people.

The Church currently hosts a very popular annual barbeque at Weida Park. They have a Thanksgiving meal, coat drive, and other events to support low income families. They hope to expand their charitable outreach with new space. Rev. Patterson noted that with the reported closing of Merrick Community Services (MCS) on Edgerton Avenue and Minnehaha that service gaps in the area would widen. The Church may help to fill those gaps with a new facility. Possibly the Church would consider hosting some of the MCS services at the new building. The Church seeks to market their community in the neighborhood, using flyering and so forth. Hosting events is a good way to reach people. They are slow in gaining members but neighbors do attend services and events.

Andy Twedt asked if non-church members could participate in planned activities. Rev. Patterson said yes – this is the plan.

Rev. Patterson noted that he had worked closely with Sr. Commander Bill Martinez of SPPD and that he'd worked with the God Squad to defuse situations and to be a presence in the area. He was aware of problems at some of the apartment buildings and he worked to establish good relationships with residents – particularly in the rental housing. The Church currently distributes to neighbors in need and will pass out Rainbow and Cub gift cards, and dry goods and clothing exchanges. A new facility would allow the Church to better fulfill its mission.

Rosemarie Bomersine shared some questions and some concerns in response to the proposal. She did not feel that many of the congregants were local residents. Reverend Patterson acknowledged that some of the residents he connects with are arriving from other points (Chicago, Gary Indiana, and Detroit). Sometimes the people they make connections move quickly due to transient housing situations.

Ms. Bomersine was curious about the need for new office space. Rev. Patterson noted that a separate facility would require staff on site and so they planned for an office to be part of a new building.

Ms. Bomersine shared her views that many of the activities described could readily be run out of the MCS site. She wondered if a connection could be made that would help the church deliver services from that existing location. She does not feel the parcel in question can support a 2 story building and that

this would not be in character with the existing residential neighborhood. She wanted more information about the experience record the Church has in delivering neighborhood services. She noted that the neighborhood has been stressed in the past with concentrated problems at that particular corner. She thinks the activity is too much for that parcel.

Andy Twedt noted the valued role of the church in the area and the potential to have church members as valuable mentors or role models to area youth. She felt the church facility was large and could accommodate some of what was being proposed.

Rev. Patterson noted that the Church has already cooperated with MCS – and has provided space as needed for some activities. He works closely with some MCS staff who serve youth. Many times MCS has used the fellowship hall. The Church is not at all in competition with existing service providers.

Al Oertwig thanked Rev. Patterson and Ms. Woods for their presentation. He is glad they have come to connect with the Task Force and he appreciates the role they play in the neighborhood. It's great to have this vibrant urban church in the area, and it has a positive impact. He knows the Church is reaching people that other organizations don't easily reach and engage. He is not worried about service competition. He notes that there seem to be fewer activities for younger people and teens. There is a need for activities for teens.

He did not know if the current MCS facility may become available for rehab and re-use. That existing site may be a real answer to the Church's needs.

Officer Byrne volunteered that he sits on the Board of MCS. The new facility anticipated at the Payne Maryland Project is a focus for Merrick. He knows that some services will still be delivered to lower Payne residents. Some discussion ensued about the disposition of the building at Edgerton and Minnehaha. McMurray reminded the group that past discussions about the need for MCS to develop an exit strategy that preserved youth services – may be part of the impetus of the current plan. There may be a good connection possible between MCS, the building and the hopes of the New Hope Baptist church for a Christian Life facility.

Ms. Pemberton Hoiby noted that she was aware that the building would require some rehab. Merrick owns the property the building is currently listed for sale.

Rev. Patterson noted that he sees the needs for youth ages 14, 15, and 16 and the need for support, jobs and sports. He is not fully aware of what is going to happen with Merrick and its building. They are open to ideas and have inquired about other properties. He thought it was wise to at least get the lot and its location made sense to the church.

Linda noted that she had a strong interest in exploring alternatives for the Church, possibly to expand its programming in a site better suited to its intent. She suggested exploring if they may find a good alternative in the Merrick site.

Troy Trooien raised several questions about the church's capacity, the many ideas for programming and relative size of the lot being discussed. The lot size is 56 x 84. Shirley Thompson knew that a basketball court requires 54 X 94 and 42 X 74 for a junior basketball court. Trooien noted that was a lot of activity on one lot. He felt that a walking track, gym, meeting rooms and so forth sounded expensive. He wanted to know the church's fiscal capacity for this type of project.

Rev. Patterson said the church was exploring the concept and does not have a price tag. The church had fund raised on its own some \$250,000 in the past when they moved into the current building.

Shirley Thompson, a longstanding home owner talked about her interest in encouraging more stability and homeownership in the area. She feels that the neighborhood needs more long-term homeownership to lift up the whole neighborhood. She noted that the area plan calls for the area to be residential and that this was her preferred use for the parcel. She brought forward that the lot abuts a city owned building at 476 that is suitable for rehab but which has no side yard or yard. The lot is "all house". She'd like to see the HRA lot combined with the house and rehabbed to bring new families to the area. She is very concerned about the rampant vacant housing and the speculative investors who will become absentee landlords. She finds that having some of the former nuisance properties emptied has resulted in more peace in the neighborhood. She has high hopes for the parcel and the house to positively impact the neighborhood. Concentrating people, traffic at the corner will likely lead to overuse and a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood. She is very invested in stabilizing the area and increasing the peace for neighbors in the area.

Andy Twedt expressed concern about the children in the area and worries about the void when MCS leaves. She knows many families with basic needs that are not met.

Jack Londino stated that the Church is much respected and is also respectful as a congregation in the neighborhood. Jack's family has occupied his home since 1918 – he feels very aware of what the changes in the neighborhood have created over time – good times and challenging times. The neighborhood worked very hard to remove the nuisance that Kormann's created. The plan as described just is too much for that corner. He thinks there will eventually be a negative spillover effect into the residential area and that the corner lot cannot sustain the plans as described. He'd like to see alternative sites explored for the plan. Programs need to be very well supervised and staffed. There have at times been problems at MCS when more staff were needed.

Al Oertwig hoped the church would be open to talking with MCS. He is grateful that Rev. Patterson and Church can hear the concerns and seem positive to seeking options and demonstrate a willingness to work on the issue with the community. He doesn't think the community can really support more than one service facility but sees some potential for collaboration with MSC and New Hope Baptist.

Rev. Patterson asked for leads on next steps to move the dialogue further. It was suggested that he talk with MCS.

District Five will provide some contacts and resources to Rev. Patterson and suggested a meeting perhaps with Ward 2 in the future – once the facts about the MCS site are known.

Pat Lindgren of Ward Two was present and can be a resource to the Church.

Linda Arnesen emphasized the interest of RRITF in working to find good outcomes for the neighborhood's development and thanked Rev. Patterson and Ms. Woods for their presentation the resulting discussion.

2. *Vacant Property – Walking Tour discussion*

Linda Arnesen thanked those RRITF residents who participated on the tour of HRA owned Vacant Homes on October 14, 2010 along with Jeff Hawkins of Dept. of Safety and Inspections (DSI), Sheri Pemberton – Hoiby (PED – Neighborhood Stabilization Program), Jim Erchul (Dayton's' Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services), and Leslie McMurray (District Five Planning Council).

This work is a continuation of RRITF efforts to address the vacant housing issue in the area and to identify community interests and plans for the preservation, rehab or marketing, or demolition of vacant properties.

Linda Arnesen reviewed with the group the following properties and consensus was developed around the options. See the October Walk-through summary attached.

Additional comments on these properties were also discussed.

500 Hopkins

Consensus was to rehab this property - Possibly as a duplex (Mother-in-law apt) or a single family home. Sheri stated this property has always been a duplex and could be either a single family house or a duplex. (ITA funds)

Hopkins 506

Large white 4-plex is not to be rehabilitated. It is too big and rehabilitation costs would far out way what it could sell at after rehab. Who would want a single family home this large? We don't need more rental property.

560 Brunson

Only a ½ basement, \$130k to rehab, would not be able to sell the property for over \$100k; it does have a big lot.

704 Desoto

There is a serious problem with the 704 Desoto property. Parts of the outer support wall have been removed and its basement is caving in. Not to be rehabilitated.

476 Minnehaha

The property at 476 Minnehaha currently has no lot. The house is well kept and has its original wood work and lots of it. Actually offers an interesting layout. With the old Korman lot included this property could sell for a single family home after rehabilitation. It needs a garage, possibly with a work/study above. One comment was to place the garage close to the house for convenience and to leave the lot as yard space for family activities -- Possibly a fence around the lot for privacy.

Someone asked if this property should be boarded up to protect from vandalism. But there are pros & cons to doing this. If boarded, you cannot see inside if there are unauthorized personnel inside doing damage. The consensus is to save this property.

752 Bradley

This property is to be rehabilitated. It has its original oak woodwork. It possesses an octopus furnace, and the kitchen also needs updating. It has a sizeable backyard which needs work. But all in all it is worth saving.

648-656 Bush

These properties on these parcels of land are designated in the long-term plan for potential business/residential improvement. It is a prime location kitty corner from Phalen Blvd's development. With the A1 Appliance, Cornerstone, and Midwest Metal property this has potential for a sizeable development.

The concern about uncovered metal waste/products at the Wollner's site was raised. It is a violation to have this metal products dumped outside. We asked neighbors to call in with specific concerns to the Citizen Service Office because only when this is done will there be a City response. Please call in observed issues to 651-266-8989.

765 Edgerton

This property is large and impressive from the brick exterior to the sheer size of it. It offers interesting architecture. It has 6 gas meters in basement. The City needs direction on what to do with this

property. Should it be a duplex? tri-? How many units? Should we allow it to be a rental property? It could offer a walkout since it has a 12 foot basement. There is parking in the back. It is zoned residential. Someone envisioned that a medical facility could utilize this large house for medical purposes such as recovery, therapy, or other medical purpose.

There was an agreement to have this property as a duplex or tri- and allow it to be rental property. Ideally, we need to research if there is a medical facility that is in need of a very large home with multi rooms and levels.

751 Edgerton

Rehabilitate this property. It has been used as a duplex back to return to a single family. There was some discussion on zoning. Single family use has a restriction that is invariable.

If a home has been vacant for 365 days it can revert to past zoning which is more intensive.

3. District Five updates

Al Oertwig shared updates on the Metropolitan Airport Commission September meeting. He thanked RRITF for due diligence. It was a major victory for RRI.

1. LAZB approved zoning changes. RRI can remain as it is. Infill housing permitted.
2. The Rivoli Bluff project went through the 7460 Process and it would allow permits for one year. Any structure under 60 feet almost guaranteed to be allowable.
3. Ponding permitted – below 800 feet.
4. The MN DOT hearing will be held for final approval.

Al gave updates on several District 5 activities.

East Metro Rail Capacity Study – implications for RR Island. District 5 is seeking community process at the front end of the study. They are asking that their consultant meets with the entities doing planning in the area.

Meeting adjourned.

An email notice will be sent out for the next meeting. Those without email will get a letter. RRITF is meeting on an as need bases.