

RAILROAD ISLAND COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

Neighbors That Care About Their Community

MINUTES OF MEETING

Thursday, May 27, 2010

In attendance: Linda Arnesen, Rosemarie Bomersine, Mary Brauer, Erin Cunnien, Jim Erchul, Jimmy Gerding, Andy Noble, Andy Twedt, Buzz Wilson

1. **Call to Order.**
2. **Introductions.**
3. **Approval of Agenda.**
4. **Rivoli Bluff Update (Jim Erchul)**

Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services (DBNHS) received approval from the FAA to proceed with building houses on the Rivoli Bluff site. However, the process took much longer than expected, and Jim said it would be onerous for anyone who was trying to move forward on development. He suggested we continue to work with the Joint Airport Zoning Board to come up with a less cumbersome process as it would really discourage development on Railroad Island.

Jim reported that the Met Council will not grant an extension to use the \$.5 million grant for sewer and road work (the sewer has to go out to Lafayette.) The loss of the grant, in conjunction with the big hit to the real estate market, makes the project look even more unfeasible, at least in the short term; it could delay further development for at least a year. On a positive note, the City was able to obtain approval from the legislature to get the area designated as a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) zone. TIF allows the funding of development on vacant land by taking part of the tax money from houses that are built to help pay for the development. St. Paul had received a TIF designation in the 1990s, but St. Paul never used up all of the available money. This legislation gives permission to reinstate it.

DBNHS is having their construction manager look at two properties on Minnehaha that are behind the old Kormann's market to evaluate having them bid out for rehabilitation. Kormann's has been acquired by the city and is expected to be demolished.

Jim asked the Task Force to evaluate the two vacant houses on Hopkins (near Payne) and to make a recommendation on whether they should be rehabilitated or demolished. An attendee who lives close to the properties requested that they be demolished as they have been sources of trouble for many years. Also, one of the properties is a four-plex that has no place for parking and no place for snow.

Andy Noble suggested that the task force consider having the properties rezoned. There is a city ordinance that states that if a vacant property has been vacant for one year or more, the zoning can be changed to a lower density.

2. Metropolitan Airports Commission Zoning Ordinance (Mary Brauer)

Mary reported that the Joint Downtown Airport Zoning Board is in continuing discussions with the FAA regarding establishing some flexibility in the height restrictions in established residential neighborhoods like Railroad Island. They hope to come to some agreement this summer. However, even if the FAA is in agreement, it doesn't mean that MnDot will agree. The revised draft ordinance process has been delayed, and there will probably not be another meeting until this fall.

3. Vacant Properties (Andy Noble)

Andy has been working on establishing a database for properties on Railroad Island, including vacant properties. He is trying to create a database that pulls together information from several different sources. He distributed a list of proposed fields to be included in the database and asked for suggestions of additional fields. A suggestion was made to include police calls (nuisance properties) and adding the Category (1-2-3) to vacant houses. Another attendee pointed out that City Council agendas also contain important information about vacant properties, including notices of abatements and assessments. Andy asked that suggestions be forwarded to him as soon as possible and he will start working on setting up the database in Access. The database may be expanded to all of District 5.

4. Zoning Request Ordinance (Mary Brauer)

Mary reported that she heard that the request to create a parking lot at 687 Preble was withdrawn by the church because it was too small.

5. District 5 Updates (Andy Noble)

Andy reported that there were no Railroad Island issues discussed at the last CPED meeting.

6. Swede Hollow Update (Linda Arnesen)

Linda reported that the city has been working for several weeks on the drainage in Swede Hollow to keep water off the path, and they are almost done with the project. They found that the sewers had not been checked for thirty years, so they cleaned out lots of rock.

The Plein Air Fest was held and there were many positive comments, despite having a thunderstorm roll through right in the middle of the festival. Friends of Swede Hollow hopes to hold it again next year.

7. Election of Officers (Linda Arnesen)

Linda informed attendees that new officers need to be elected in June (per task force guidelines). Linda is stepping down as chair, and Mary Brauer is stepping down as Vice Chair, so volunteers are needed to keep the task force going. It was suggested that perhaps the task force could meet bimonthly or quarterly to reduce the workload for officers.

8. Other

An attendee suggested that the task force send notes of appreciation to City departments that have been helpful over the years, particularly Sheri Pemberton. A note should also go to the head of PED, the Police Chief, DSI, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation.

9. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on June 24, 2010 at 6:30 at the Eastside Police Precinct at 6:30 p.m. **PLEASE NOTE: June meeting has subsequently been cancelled due to a scheduling conflict.**