

REVITALIZING NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE - Meeting Minutes 9/18/07

Present: John Gussenbauer, Mike Williams, Christine Helms-Maletic, Gail Heffner, Tom Bulten, Jasper Azizi, Paul Haan, Frank Lynn, Mike Cary, and Carol Townsend

The meeting was called to order by Paul Haan, Chair.

Carol presented proposed changes to the letter to the City Commission on the New Zoning Code. An item will be added recommending that members of the Board of Zoning Appeals engage in some kind of training in order to be eligible for re-appointment. This training could take the form of online courses (e.g. Citizen Planner modules) or city staff-led sessions. Mike Cary suggested that BZA and Planning Commission appointees should be required to pass the zoning portion of the test for housing inspectors. The other item that will be added to the letter is a recommendation that the new Code incorporate language to allow for the regulated use of high-impact businesses. The Committee approved the changes; Carol will draft the letter for Paul's signature and send it to the Commission.

In Heather's absence, Carol and Paul addressed the need for defining economic indicators to be used for measuring neighborhood improvement outcomes. A few months ago the RNC designated a sub-committee to work with Gustavo at the Community Research Institute to develop such indicators, but it will require some guidance as to what should be measured and how. Frank suggested that the Economic Development Sub-committee look at existing models for numbers/types of businesses that can be sustained within a given distance. Other items for consideration by the sub-committee would be job creation for local residents, the benefits of neighborhood business district investment in terms of existing infrastructure (bus lines, housing, parking, etc.), and the attraction of non-resident dollars to "destination" businesses (art galleries, antique stores). Christine suggested that the Economic Development sub-committee select a neighborhood or two to study and pursue funding for hiring a consultant to train neighborhood staff or volunteers to collect and analyze economic data and to make recommendations for the neighborhood based on that study. This could then be used as a model for replication in other neighborhoods. Paul will ask Heather to convene the sub-committee (Tom Cary, Jill Myer, Kim Van Dyke and Russ Lewis have volunteered to participate) to begin developing a plan.

Carol reported on the need for a meeting with GR Planning Director Suzanne Schulz and the RNC to discuss a joint project for distributing information about the new Zoning Code, once it is approved by the City Commission. Under Suzanne's direction, the Committee will need to determine the content of the printed materials (zoning brochures), the manner of their distribution, and the need for workshops or other training mechanisms for neighborhood residents and business owners. The conversation with Suzanne should also cover potential changes to the Code in the new year, including suggestions for incentives for "green" building and other sustainable practices by developers. The RNC's Zoning Sub-committee has drafted some criteria for sustainable building that we would like to recommend to Suzanne for inclusion in this part of the Code. These include Zero-Step standards, stakeholder input requirements, and other

neighborhood-centric recommendations. Carol is also interested in whether the Planning Department is proposing to publish Neighborhood Profile booklets, similar to the one they produced in 1990. If not, perhaps this could be a project for the RNC working together with Gustavo at CRI.

Carol reminded the Committee of the availability of Dr. Zenia Kotval to do a follow-up workshop to the one she conducted last year on neighborhood economic development. The Committee decided that it needed more input from neighborhood groups about what kinds of workshops/trainings would be valuable to them before scheduling anything; Carol will construct and distribute an online survey via Survey Monkey and report the results at our next meeting.

Tom Bulten of Oakdale Neighbors introduced his Americorps intern and described a corridor planning project that the neighborhood is working on with Fuller Area Neighbors, the South East End Neighborhood Association, the Boston Square Business Association and other stakeholders. The goal is to develop an Area Specific Plan with the help of MSU Urban Planning Practicum students. Tom is planning to request support from the Dyer-Ives Foundation to pay the \$2,500 fee associated with the Practicum project, but he asked the RNC to consider donating \$1,000 toward that cost if Dyer-Ives is unable to provide funding for the entire cost. The RNC unanimously agreed to recommend that the United Growth Board support the project with a \$1,000 donation, if it is needed.

Carol reminded everyone about the October 12 Brown Bag Luncheon with a presentation by Dr. Rich Jelier on the State of Michigan's Cities. Gail announced an event hosted by Calvin College related to a photography exhibit and discussion on neighborhood revitalization at Calvin's Art Center; she'll email invitations to RNC members. Christine announced that the Midtown/East Hills House Hop has been rescheduled for October 20-21 and that sponsors are still needed.

Meeting adjourned at 10:50.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Christine Helms-Maletic  
Secretary*