

Stevens Square Community Organization  
Community Participation Program  
2011 Annual Report

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***Background:***

Stevens Square Community Organization, founded in 1976, is the officially recognized citizen participation organization for the Stevens Square-Loring Heights neighborhood of Minneapolis.

Mission Statement

*SSCO provides a respectful forum for community involvement and leadership that builds on neighborhood strengths to promote and improve Stevens Square-Loring Heights as a fun place to live, work, and play.*

*SSCO works to strengthen Stevens Square-Loring Heights by initiating, integrating, and implementing key priorities. 2003 priorities:*

- *Economic development (housing and development)*
- *Community safety*
- *Clean green environment*
- *Building community through the arts*
- *Community involvement*

SSCO serves SS-LH by addressing the issues that make the neighborhood livable: safety, convenience to services, cultural activities, neighborhood attachment, affordable and decent housing, and more. SSCO uses a community-organizing model to involve neighborhood residents in the decisions that impact their neighborhood, and is governed by an all-volunteer, community-elected Board of Directors. SSCO staff includes a full-time executive director (responsible for housing and commercial development and arts programs, in addition to administrative/executive responsibilities), and a full-time safety coordinator (responsible for community safety and outreach activities). SSCO brings on part-time organizers and interns during the spring/summer season to assist in the implementation of arts and gardening activities.

SSCO accomplishes its work through three standing committees: Safety, Neighborhood Development, and Community Engagement. The latter works closely with the Stevens Square Center for the Arts to bring community arts programming to the neighborhood.

## ***2011 Accomplishments***

The major focus of Stevens Square Community Organization in 2011 was the development of our strategic plan. The organization used the strategic plan to adapt and modify its operations in order to better fit the needs of the community. A copy of the strategic plan is available on the Stevens Square Community Organizations website: [www.sscoweb.org](http://www.sscoweb.org)

Stevens Square Community Organization identified problem properties in the neighborhood. Each of these properties were selected through a community engagement process. An action plan for each property was put into action through various committees (safety, neighborhood development and the Board of Directors) to play an active role in creating a vibrant neighborhood.

Our work with the City of Minneapolis, National Parks Service and a developer found footing as the old City of Lakes Building at 110 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street is scheduled for construction in November of 2012. This property was the worst nescience of the neighborhood – drug use, crime, trespassing and general blight were some of the worst problems in Minneapolis.

### *Events:*

SSCO held some major events in 2011 including Red Hot Art, Cinema and Civics, Art Squared and many “sit and sip” get to know your neighbor events.

Red Hot Art, a two day art festival, brought in over 2500 people to view showcased art (both visual, dance and verbal).

Cinema and Civics at Stevens Square Park is intended to keep the park viable for the neighborhood residents by using it for a positive role. In the past this park has been a host to crime, however, SSCO is dedicated to events like these to keep crime at a low point – all while introducing arts and art related activity to those who may not have the chance.

Some other accomplishments:

- 8 mini meetings in public area to introduce the neighborhood and organization
- 42 public meetings related to safety, development and other issues within the neighborhood boundary
- Street car assessment – SSCO actively pursued street cars along Nicollet Avenue. This project is moving forward through the Nicollet-Central Street Car line.
- SSCO had an apartment fire located at 137-17<sup>th</sup> street. The organization helped to coordinate activities with the owner, residents, and non profit organizations
  - This property is currently being rehabbed
- Continued into our 21<sup>st</sup> year of a citizen led block patrol

## **Outreach activities accomplished:**

Stevens Square Community Organization engaged the community in multiple capacities, hosting a variety of events and meetings aimed at strengthening the neighborhood and community ties. The events held in 2011 are listed below and happened in conjunction with 12 board meetings, 12 safety committee meetings, 12 neighborhood development committee meetings and 6 special community concern public meetings.

- Red Hot Art
- Cinema and Civics (7 events)
- Spring Clean up
- Fall Cleanup
- Special Candidate Forum
- Strategic Planning Focus Groups
- Annual Meeting
- Art Squared
- Alcohol task force

SSCO also sent staff or board members to a multitude of meetings to ensure the neighborhood voice was being heard. Such as:

- Met Council transportation advisory board
- I-35W transit Access Pac and Open House
- St. Stephens relocation
- Development conceptual meetings
- City of Minneapolis meetings
- Airport Commission

SSCO found that these outreach activities were successful. However, depending on other events around the area, scheduled at the same time lead to varying attendance rates.

## ***Stakeholder Involvement***

All of our events and meetings are free and open to anyone who wants to come. Advertising is carried out through many mediums, but the most effective at reaching out to new people is flyer distribution in targeted areas.

Encouraging participation by under-represented communities is an on-going effort with mixed results. In 2012, SSCO is partnering with apartment complex managers and staff to create an email database. The neighborhood is around 85% rental, thus a transient population, is hard to create long term participation. However, we feel that over the next five years we should be able to contact nearly 90% of residents at any one time.

**Board Membership**

Our current by laws call for as many as 15 people on our board, however, we currently have 12 members.

**Committee meeting participation**

In fiscal year 2011 approximately 550 people participated in various committee meetings. This does not include event(s) which exceeded 3,000 participants.

**Annual Meeting**

A total of 42 people attended our annual meeting on June 9<sup>th</sup> at Plymouth Church. This number does not include legislative members, City Council Members, City Staff or special guests.

**Publications**

Every month an electronic newsletter is sent to approximately 415 individuals. Our Yahoo! Group has another 125 members. Also, our newsletter, in paper form is sent to every registered address (mailbox) in the neighborhood.

Also, it should be noted that SSCO flyers every multi-unit building with important meeting dates and events.

**Participation**

Given the wide variety of meetings, events and other activities a specific number of people participating in the organization is difficult to define. However, an approximation would be around 3,000 people.

**Financial Reports**

Please see attachment

## ***Supplemental Information Requested***

### *Interactions with City departments*

Much of our time is spent on responding to resident or business owners with either issues or plans. A significant amount of time is also dedicated to planning and working on policy, guidelines or projects that would improve the livability, property values and business vitality.

Also, much of our staff time is dedicated to working with the City Attorney, Probation and Parole as well as the Minneapolis Police Department.

### *City Information – usefulness*

The Planning Department (CPED) has been very useful, as well as, helpful.

Neighborhood and Community Relations Department has also been very knowledgeable and willing to assist in any way necessary.

### *City Communication – timeliness*

We seem to sometimes get too much information on items that do not pertain to Stevens Square or Loring Heights. However, more information is better than none.

### *City Departments*

Neighborhoods should have a listing of people to call directly in each department. Rather than going through 311. We have some items that take a few seconds to answer but do not know who to contact.

It should be said that the new Minneapolis website has broken links and is not user friendly.

### *City Assistance*

For years I have been asking the City to look into if it could provide services in which all neighborhoods need. Such as: accounting, healthcare, insurance and other infrastructure related activities. However, I have never been told if these are feasible or if they have been looked into.

I would also like to see the City host website of neighborhood organizations. This would decrease the cost of operation and provide stability to the city neighborhoods.

### *Other Comments*

I would have to say that I am happy with how NCR has operated in the past couple years. Credit should be given to the Director and Staff on how they handled the transition. The potential for the department to collapse was very real, however, every situation was handled with professionalism.

Also, for those neighborhoods who chose to spend down their NRP funding first (as some NRP staff told neighborhoods to do) should not be punished by a reallocation or reduction of NCR funding.