

Community Participation Program 2012 Annual Report

Neighborhood Organization: Seward Neighborhood Group

Contact person: Kerry Cashman

Date of Board Approval: April 24, 2013 ____

1. *Stakeholder Involvement*

Reviewing your CPP activities in 2012, Please provide information about:

- **What outreach and engagement activities did you carry out in 2012?**

1. In August of this year we had our grand opening of Spokes; our new community Bike Walk Center (about 175 people attended the grand opening). Since the opening Spokes has been a hub of activity in the neighborhood, including: twice weekly open shop times, monthly women or transgender shop night, weekly community rides, weekly volunteer nights, two learn to ride classes and a Girl Scout bicycle maintenance class. Participation in these events has been diverse racially and includes a younger demographic than SNG has reached in recent years.
2. We have also created a new committee the Community Building Committee with a group of all new volunteers. These volunteers have been creative in coming up with new events to encourage participation by previously unconnected residents. Some of these new events include:
 - i) *A neighborhood day at the dog park* where we provided coffee and treats and a new place for neighbors to connect;
 - ii) *A community picnic and scavenger hunt* that promoted visiting all corners of the neighborhood;
 - iii) *A Garden Tour* which highlighted 10 of our beautiful gardens and
 - iv) Finally a *kick-off to our annual Seward Arts Festival* where we worked with artists and the Playwright's Center to host an evening of spoken word, dance and music.

Some new connections we made with the above events are with Fun City Dogs, a neighborhood business; The Playwright's Center, Touchstone Mental Health and 10 active gardeners.

3. We collaborated with the Seward Civic and Commerce Association (SCCA) to combine the annual Franklin Frolic, an SCCA event, and the Seward Arts Festival, SNG's annual arts event. The SCCA has hired SNG to organize their portion of this event, resulting in broader contacts with the business community for SNG and demonstrating the symbiotic relationship of a strong neighborhood group and strong business association.

- **How did you reach out to and involve under-represented communities in 2012?**

- 1) We are thrilled with the increased immigrant participation in our *Learn to Ride* programs at Spokes. We are confident that Spokes is serving an

important role helping our new neighbors feel more comfortable riding a bicycle and also giving people access to a bike who previously would not have been able to own one. We have a full time community organizer who works in the Seward Towers and a part time organizer at SPOKES, both of whom live in the Seward Towers. This has made a huge difference in our connection in the towers. On the other hand our goal of increased integration and community participation with our new neighbors has been mixed.

- **Did you find any strategies to be particularly successful? Why?**
- **What did not work so well? Why?**

The answer to our success and our struggles go hand in hand so I want to answer them together:

Our goal of increased participation with immigrant residents has had mixed results. While we have seen an increase of immigrants walking in the neighborhood following our focus on the Seward Walkers, we still find that our board and the majority of our volunteers do not come from our immigrant population. Our community organizer Nasra is successful at inviting and bringing Somali women to our annual meeting, on walks of the Seward Walkers and to other events, but we find if Nasra is not available then we are back at the beginning. Each year we successfully add new immigrants to our board but seem to be unable to keep them on the board throughout the year. Some of this is due to the transient nature of our immigrant population.

On the other hand, we are seeing increased participation of our immigrant population with Spokes Bike Walk Connect, our new bike walk center. We have hired an organizer to specifically work with Spokes and our immigrant population. We believe that this is a program that will increase diversity in SNG's activities. We continue to strategize on this issue.

- **How many people did you reach through direct contact (door knocking, meetings, one-on-ones, etc.)? I don't know how this is different than the question regarding participation below. 2615**
- **How many individuals volunteered in organization activities?**
260
- **How many individuals participated in your organization's activities?**
Total 5,099
- **How many people receive your print publications?**
4500

- **How many people receive your electronic communications?**

811 Newsletter

827 e-democracy (there is overlap but we aren't able to compare the lists)

45 SPOKES email newsletter (again, some overlap with the first two)

2012 Highlights

Please describe one or two major highlights, and if possible, please include digital photos or illustrations:

- What was the issue or opportunity the neighborhood was facing?
- Who was impacted?
- What steps did you take to address the issue or opportunity?
- What was the outcome?

Community Development Committee:

In 2012 we hosted 2 CDC meetings that prevented potential rezoning issues from ballooning into controversial neighborhood problems.

The Birchwood Café has needed to expand for some time. Its kitchen was crowded and too small, there was not enough food storage space and the restroom facilities were inadequate. Unfortunately some of their options in the past have met with neighborhood resistance. This year The Birchwood Cafe and SNG worked together to host listening session to talk to the neighborhood about potential plans and give residents the opportunity to give feedback. After the listening session we hosted a Community Development Committee meeting with 170 attendees discussing the expansion of the Birchwood Café and the necessary rezoning needed to accomplish this. What has been a controversial topic in the past was discussed openly and positively allowing SNG to show support for the rezoning in a residential area that allowed this successful, popular local business to survive while keeping two houses that could have been torn down for the business.

SNG has worked closely with Seward Redesign on the Seward Commons project, which entails the redevelopment of an industrial area located adjacent to the LRT near the Franklin Avenue Station. The SNG Community Development Committee has held a number of meetings to discuss the first two phases of the project. Phase 1 proposed by Touchstone Mental Health includes 40 apartments and a health and wellness center for people with mental illness. The second phase is a 60 unit senior apartment building proposed by CommonBond. In response to some concerns raised about the Touchstone project, SNG hosted a neighborhood meeting at SPOKES about the Seward Commons project at the site. This open discussion seemed to end the potential controversy about having an assisted living facility for people with significant mental illness problems built in the

neighborhood. The Touchstone project began construction in 2012 and will be completed this year. The senior project is scheduled to begin construction in 2013.

Opening SPOKES Bike Walk Connect:

In early 2011, in response to an RFP from Bike Walk Twin Cities, the idea for a community bike center in Seward was born. Through conversations with residents, staff of a number of organizations, a small survey, and data from other sources, it was found that the East African population in Seward used bikes much less than the rest of the population. Further research found that this was because of a number of factors: not knowing how to bike, being uncomfortable biking in an urban environment, the cost of new bikes, and no safe bike storage.

After a number of iterations, in September, 2011 Bike Walk Twin Cities approved a grant to the Seward Neighborhood Group to start a bike walk center with a primary service area of Seward, Cedar-Riverside and Phillips; with a concentration in the first two years of getting more East Africans biking and walking. SPOKES had it's grand opening on August 22, 2012.

In 2012, because of the late start, SPOKES concentrated its efforts in the Seward neighborhood. In 2012, 44 people volunteered in SPOKES programs and SPOKES had over 600 participants. With secure start-up funding for two years, the goal is to make SPOKES a lasting program serving this part of south Minneapolis.

2. 2012 Accomplishments

Please provide information about your other accomplishments in 2012:

- What were your organization's major accomplishments?

2012 in Review

- Collaborated with neighborhood businesses and over **35 Block Clubs** on **National Night Out**.
- Coordinated **Garage Sale Days** in May with over 100 sales.
- Organized and promoted the first ever "*Seward Day at the Dog Park*", a community event for local dogs and their owners.
- Continued publication of **The Profile Quarterly**, distributing it to over **4500 Seward homes and businesses**.
- Received and fulfilled a **\$5000 new and increased donor Match** from Mcknight Foundation.
- Organized the **kick-off to the Seward Winter Frolic** at the Playwright's Center, highlighting the work of over 20 performance artists, entertaining over 100+ guests and raising over \$1400 for SNG.
- Recreated the *Seward Garden Tour*, exhibiting 10 beautiful gardens and raising \$1000 for SNG.
- Launched our community bike and walk center--**SPOKES**- with a **grand opening** in August. SPOKES promotes biking and walking in and around Seward. Open shop hours started in September. Classes started in June.
- Created a neighborhood wide **Scavenger Hunt** that sent neighbors to all corners of the neighborhood.
- Hosted a **Community Picnic** at Matthew's Park, our neighborhood Park.
- Continued support of **Hub of Heaven Community Garden**.
- Collaborated with Seward Civic and Commerce Association to create the *Seward Winter Frolic: Art in the 'Hood* a business, neighborhood and arts event in December.
- *Awarded Conservation Grants of \$150 each to Seward homeowners who carried out energy-saving improvements in their homes.*
- *Monitored and promoted recycling and composting pilots being conducted in Seward by Minneapolis Solid Waste and Recycling.*
- Revamped the **SNG home improvement loan programs** to make them more accessible and attractive. The revolving loan program was expanded to include rental property (with 4 or less units), townhouses and condominiums. A separate emergency loan program was set up for homeowners experiencing emergency repairs. The income limits were raised to 115% of area median income and the interest rate has recently been lowered to 2.75%.
- Worked with Seward Redesign on the **Seward Commons project** including approval of the Touchstone project, the Seward Senior Housing project and street reconstruction projects in the Seward Commons project area. In 2012, construction started on the Touchstone project and 22nd Street was extended to Cedar Avenue.
- **Advocated for improvements** to Franklin Avenue west of Minnehaha Avenue including extension of the bike lanes, improved pedestrian safety and development of the median and boulevards in the LRT station area.

- Through Community Development Committee, **reviewed and made recommendations** on requests for **rezoning, Conditional Use Permits, Variances and expansion of nonconforming uses**.
- Worked on programs to educate and encourage Seward households to reduce reliance on practices and products releasing toxic components into neighborhood air and water—namely “**Make Seward Green**” and “**Great Green Yards**”.
- Continued support of the **Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice Partnership**, through which 32 youth have participated in restorative conferences in the last 12 months, totaling \$130 returned to victims, 146 volunteer hours contributed to the community and 46 written and verbal apologies to those harmed.
- Grew our on-line presence. The E-Democracy Seward Neighbors Forum has become an important way for SNG to communicate with the neighborhood. The forum has grown to 827 members in 2012 and averages 3 posts each day. The Seward Profile site broadcasts items like community reports from the Minneapolis Police Department and information on neighborhood events and feeds the SewardTweets twitter account. A community calendar is also in place where community groups can directly add their events.
- Through a Legacy Fund Research Grant, a Seward Co-op Community Fund Grant, and a generous donation from a Seward resident, enlisted twenty neighborhood writers to do archival research, conduct oral history interviews, write, edit and consult in the History Committee's **Seward History Book Project**. This unique, collaborative way of telling a neighborhood's story is being recognized by others. Staff of the Special Collections Room at Hennepin County's Central Library, are touting the book project as a model of what other neighborhoods could and should be doing.

3. *Housing*

What percentage of time did your organization spend on housing-related activities?

35%

4. *Financial Reports*

Please provide an income and expense report for your organization for the year.
(Please include all funding sources).

See separate document.

In addition to your annual report, please take time to describe your interactions with City departments and other jurisdictions.

1. ***Impact***

What interactions with City departments occupied a major part of your time?
What worked well? What could be improved?

Housing, CPED, City Council (5)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate your overall experience with your interactions with the City? 4

2. ***City Communications - effectiveness***

Is the information that you receive from the City understandable and useful?

Yes

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate overall communications from the City? 4

3. ***City Communications - timeliness***

Do you receive adequate notice of City activities in your neighborhood? If not, did your organization inform somebody at the City of this? Did the City respond in a positive manner? Please explain.

Yes

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the timeliness of communications from the City? 3 - 4

4. ***City Departments***

How can City departments improve the way in which they function in your neighborhood?

5. ***City Assistance***

How can the Neighborhood and Community Relations Department improve the assistance it provides to your organization as a community participation group?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the assistance provided to your neighborhood by NCR? 4.5

6. *Other comments?*