

## Community Participation Program 2013 Annual Report

Neighborhood Organization: Southeast Como Improvement Association (SECIA)

Contact person: Ricardo McCurley

Date of Board Approval: May 6, 2014

### **1. Stakeholder Involvement**

Reviewing your CPP activities in 2013, Please provide information about:

- What outreach and engagement activities did you carry out in 2013?  
**Como Cookout with new activities which successfully enhanced interaction between neighbors, Blueprint Public meetings, Board Meetings, Environment Committee meetings, Livability Committee meetings, FairShare Farm gardening days and monthly events to draw Como residents to FairShare for learning and eating activities, Como Corner Gardening days, Talmage Crossing Upgrade to allow for rain garden, National Community garden day, National Night Out, Initiated three new projects: the first titled *Como Corner Comotion* (expected to become yearly events), that combined gardening, live music, children's activities, neighborhood artists Demonstrations and Market; the second was the creation of the *Community Building* Committee to focus on planning and implement Events; and the third began the process of sending *Welcome Letters* whenever a SE Como property was sold. Letters went to both residents and landlords for rental properties. November brought the news that many homes in Como had toxic Trichloroethylene (TCE) vapors coming up from the ground water. SECIA is filling a crucial gap, educating and advocating for the neighborhood during this emotional and confusing process. This has stretched office and staff resources, using nearly half our weekly staff hours in the last 6 weeks of 2013 and requiring extra paper mailings. As of this report, the TCE issue has used 342 hours of staff time, extra mailings, the hiring of environmental consultant and a TCE intern.**
  - How did you reach out to and involve under-represented communities in 2013?  
**We created internship positions to bring students and seniors to work together on projects. We communicated with Project for Pride Living (PPL) staff who manage mixed-income and recovery housing in Como to better connect and inform their residents of our activities. Staff attended their Resident Council meetings and a resident was elected to the SECIA Board of Directors. We continued expanding the Como Cookout, as well as gardening activities. We have greatly enhanced the involvement of student residents in community events and activities**
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- Did you find any strategies to be particularly successful? Why?  
**We introduced new seating and games at the Cookout with the goal of making it a more intimate experience. The event's longevity and variety of activities (food, music, resources fair, arm wrestling tournament, tomato tasting, etc.) make it bigger each year. Our internship program connects with students so profoundly that must continue to work with us after their required time is completed. The *Como Corner Comotion* was a great success and we believe will continue to grow as it becomes an annual event. The creation of a new storm water retention garden at Talmage and 21<sup>st</sup> Ave SE brought new people and energy to the organization. We created an Event intern position to support our event calendar.**
- What did not work so well? Why? **The creation and population of our new Community Building Committee was strong at the beginning of the year, but tapered and has not regained footing. The committee's focus was event planning. While neighbors are willing to support the day-of needs of our events, they don't seem motivated to help with the long-term planning.**
- How many people did you reach through direct contact (door knocking, meetings, one-on-ones, etc.)? **Approximately 185**
- How many individuals volunteered in organization activities? **About 95 student interns, committee members, gardeners, focus group members and neighbors**
- How many individuals participated in your organization's activities? **Over 1000!**
- How many people receive your print publications? **2700**
- How many people receive your electronic communications? **485**

## 2. 2013 Highlights

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

- **We created a new event, The Como Corner Comotion. In it's first year, the CCC brought over 300 people to enjoy art, food, music and the gardens. Southeast Como is a hidden gem and this event is meant to showcase our neighbor. We planned it in conjunction with Community Garden Day and got lots of traffic from other community gardens. We invited local artists and food vendors to sell wares on the street in front of our Como Corner garden. It was such a success, we will continue it this year.**
- **We signed a lease with Burlington Northern for our Como Corner and Talmage gardens.**



**We negotiated with BNSF for over 4 years to continue gardening at our Como Corner garden. A misunderstanding about where are gardens were located created an opportunity to start a new garden. We reallocated funds to start a storm water retention garden that will eventually collect storm water from Talmage Ave, preventing runoff toxins from reaching the river. The lease alleviated stress for our Como Corner gardeners and created a new set of Talmage gardeners.**



### **3. 2013 Accomplishments**

Please provide information about your other accomplishments in 2013:

- What were your organization's major accomplishments?
  - **Creating a Senior (60+) Intern program with Eastside Neighborhood Services and through SCSEP**
  - **Continuing our successful Communal Gardening model at FairShare Farm**
  - **Installing fences at our Como Corner and new Talmage Gardens , making gardening by the train tracks safer**
  - **Planning 3 successful events, including the new Como Corner Comotion art fair.**
  - **Coordinating communication between City, State and General Mills Inc. officials to better serve neighbor needs during the TCE cleanup**
- How were individuals in your community directly impacted by your work?

**SECIA empowered neighbors and students to created and improve green spaces, educated people on the artists that live in the community and the toxins in our soils, connected residence to city services and to each other and gave learning opportunities to students and seniors through our internships.**

**4. *Housing***

What percentage of time did your organization spend on housing-related activities?  
**Prior to the TCE issue, we were spending about 25% of our time on housing issues. Our welcome letter program engaged new property owners quickly and gave them important information. The TCE issue directly affects landlords, renters and home owners alike. SECIA has advocated for our neighbors in a variety of housing issues including property values, environmental justice and ordinance changes.**

**5. *Financial Reports***

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

**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? **We work often with City Council members, Public works, CPED and NCR. What worked well? CM Gordon has always been communicative and helpful, especially with the recent TCE issues. Public works helps us with water and sewer access for our gardens and are always friendly. Haila Maze has helped our Blueprint Committee with their work writing our Small Area Plan. Stacy Sorenson is great! Available and informative, we have a wonderful partner in all our projects.**

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?   4  

4. ***City Departments***

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

**We hope Waste Management will continue to work with us and the University of Minnesota to find sustainable ways to improve the trash mounds during the move out and move periods for students.**

5. ***City Assistance***

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

**Quickly finish the Emergency Funding protocols an our TCE issue requires immediate support**

On a scale of 1 to5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the assistance provided to your neighborhood by NCR? 4

6. ***Other comments?***