

Community Participation Program 2013 Annual Report

Neighborhood Organization: Whittier Alliance

Contact person: Marian Biehn, Exec. Director

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1. Stakeholder Involvement

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

- What outreach and engagement activities did you carry out in 2013?

The Whittier Alliance did of outreach and engagement at several levels and formats:

- Regularly scheduled monthly business and community meetings engaged a broad segment of the Whittier neighborhood in a more traditional setting.
 - Monthly community building events, forums, conversations and seminars were sponsored by the Alliance focusing on engaging populations in Whittier who generally don't attend meetings but also included those who do. These events included events such as safety seminars, Dog Days and candidate forums, Artists in Storefronts, game night, neighborhood clean ups, special task forces, etc.
 - An electronic newsletter, updated in 2013 to an easy-to-read format that includes pictures, was distributed each month to inform residents and businesses of general issues, events and opportunities in the neighborhood. Facebook, Nextdoor Neighborhood, the Whittier Website, and mailings were also an important outreach tools to different segments of our population
 - In addition, door knocking and fliering were done on a monthly basis to build awareness of the Whittier Alliance, Whittier neighborhood and create a sense of place.
 - The Whittier Alliance partnered with institutions, organizations, businesses and individuals to expand outreach and sponsor events
- How did you reach out to and involve under-represented communities in 2013?

Monthly meeting agendas were reviewed for issues that impacted segments of the neighborhood. Targeted communication outreach methods such as door knocking and fliering were implemented to reach impacted residents as well as residents who were less likely to participate. Apartment building managers were utilized to help distribute information. Fliering and door knocking are more effective in reaching under represented communities.

More participation by under-represented populations was achieved at events like Dog Days (renter & dogs), World of Whittier Family Fair (minority families), Summer Social in Clinton Field Park (a blend of families and residents from the Brighton Development affordable housing and market rate Fair Oaks Apartments rental units).

In the fall of 2013, we partnered with Lyndale neighborhood to hire a shared Somali Community Organizer. The outreach to the Somali community and the trust and communication within certain areas of the Whittier neighborhood increased dramatically. With the assistance of the Somali organizer, a series of “community conversations” were held with Somali and non-Somali residents. The casual coffee shop conversations revealed some mutual interests and common ground and allowed participants neutral discussion about lifestyles and cultures. Shop Karmel was one of the highlights. Many non-Somali residents had been reluctant to go to Karmel. Many Somali vendors at Karmel and not seen groups of non-Somali shoppers. It was a very “a-ha” experience and dispelled many barriers.

- Did you find any strategies to be particularly successful? Why?

Enlisting the assistance of apartment building managers and/or owners was particularly helpful. Residents who are not on a contact list were reached and questions were addressed. The casual and “no agenda” setting of the Somali/non-Somali Community Conversations created a very welcoming environment. Flyering still seems to be a critical component of our outreach. Participants at meetings and events report that they attended because they received a flier. One on one contact is the most effective and retains the highest level of participation.

- What did not work so well? Why?

One on one contact (telephone or door knocking) is the most effective and also the most time consuming. Getting volunteers to make calls was difficult. Recruiting and/or utilizing youth from the neighborhood to flier did not work out well. They were not available when needed and not always dependable when used.

- How many people did you reach through direct contact (door knocking, meetings, one-on-ones, etc.)?

The Whittier Alliance staff and volunteers had direct contact in the form of monthly meetings, task forces candidate forums, door knocking, community building events, fundraisers, block clubs, community gardens, community partnerships, etc. was well over 1800 people. Many of these events don't have sign in sheets so it is difficult to give a count.

- How many individuals volunteered in organization activities?

130 individuals volunteered for one or more of the Whittier Alliance activities

- How many individuals participated in your organization's activities?

843 attended events during 2013

- How many people receive your print publications?

Monthly Fliers and Mailings: 965

Annual Meeting, Fundraising Invitation, Fundraising Solicitation: 2700

Annual Whittier Calendar with community meeting dates, neighborhood event dates and resources: 7800

- How many people receive your electronic communications?

Monthly: 1075

2. 2013 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?

House Moves:

Whittier is 90% rental housing. Of the 7450 residential structures, only 10.4% or 772 are single family homes. (Mpls average 49.6% - Minnesota Compass Oct. 2011). Many of the single family homes are rental. The high percentage of rental units contributes to approximately 1/3 of the neighborhood moving each year.

Whittier's Strategic Plan calls for the retention and recapture of single family homes that will offer housing to residents or families who might otherwise have to move out of the neighborhood to accommodate a lifestyle change.

The Whittier Alliance was presented the opportunity to purchase two, side-by-side homes owned by the Mpls College of Art and Design (MCAD) for \$1 each. Two tax forfeited, side-by-side lots were also available. Through the summer of 2013, the Whittier Alliance negotiated the purchase of the houses, the forfeited lots, secured a rehab loan through the city as well as dedicating WA reserve funds, worked with MCAD to move the houses, worked with a contractor to bid code compliant and rehab plans and initiated rehab of the houses.

Foundations were dug, the homes were moved to their new location in Nov and work continued through winter. The homes will be made available to members of the Whittier neighborhood for owner occupancy in 2014 at a price consistent with neighborhood housing.

Arts Initiatives:

The Whittier neighborhood had several vacant and underutilized storefronts and spaces along its commercial corridors. Artists in Storefronts and the Artist Quarter Murals by Uruguayan muralists were 2 highly successful and visible initiatives introduced by individual Whittier residents and realized with the support and assistance of the Whittier Alliance. The initiatives engaged broad sections of the neighborhood and created permanent destinations for viewing public art on private property. The projects supported community building, arts & culture and commercial corridor promotion. The initiatives were supported by volunteer and partnership assistance, grants and donations and CPP events and outreach funds. The result are that the Whittier neighborhood now has 6 more public art pieces available for all to appreciate and 7 previously vacant storefronts are now filled, neighborhood & metro wide people were brought together for creative tours (after dark laser sword tour and dog walking tour) and events.

Artists in Storefront was an ongoing project but really took off in 2013. The Whittier Alliance, working with the arts coordinator, hosted three rotations of calls for artists to place art in vacant or under-utilized storefronts. The intent of the final installation in Dec of 2013 was to light the winter nights. Videos of short films by Whittier and other local filmmakers lit up storefronts throughout Whittier. Free feature films shown every Thursday evening for 3 months brought 20-50 viewers out of their homes during the long winter.

Some data from AiS:

Whittier's Artists in Storefronts project matches local artists with vacant storefronts to create a non-traditional gallery and exhibit space accessible for all to enjoy.

- over 120 local artists, known and unknown, ranging in age from 5-80 years old have exhibited
- 66 vacant, underutilized storefronts or frequently graffitied walls have been used as exhibit space
- Each storefront exhibit is posted with a narrative in English and Spanish identifying the number of the exhibit on the walking tour, the artist and an explanation of the work
- 7 vacant commercial spaces with a combined vacancy of nearly 15 years have been leased
- 6 permanent public murals have been installed
- 30 public walking or biking tours of the Artists in Storefront exhibits have been sponsored -- these are free and open to the public. An average of 15 people participated in each tour. (NUSA was one of the tours)
- AiS hosted over 45 live performances in alternative spaces including the wildly successful "Outlet Performance Series".
- AiS hosted multiple community engaging activities and events such as a children's coloring party at Whittier Park, an ethnic dance celebration, a runway presentation, a live mural event on the Greenway, and animation of the 24th Street Pedestrian bridge and subsequent community party.
- AiS has generated huge amounts of publicity for Whittier—both local and national, engaged the local residents and businesses, brought business and visitors to the neighborhood and has leased vacant store fronts
- The work (coordination, space cleaning, exhibit installation, etc.) is done by primarily by volunteers. The permanent art installations were done at a deep discount
- AiS addresses one of Whittier's Strategic Plan Commercial Corridor goals by visually linking one area of the neighborhood to another via self-guided or guided walking tours that highlight the art and neighborhood
- It was an organic process from idea to implementation to repeating rounds. It came from a community member who wanted to do this for the

community, it drew on many artists and volunteers and participants from the community and it inspired others in the community to find a way to be a part of it or contribute to it.

In the summer of 2013, a Whittier resident and muralist with links to Uruguay offered the talent of 2 visiting Uruguayan muralists to paint and install a mural in Whittier. The Whittier Alliance located a privately owned installation sight with public exposure and gained permission to use the sight. The WA then worked with the muralist on 8 panel concepts that represented the International character and history of the Whittier neighborhood as told through their art. Contacts at the U of M were tapped into to provide paint and weather proof panels and the Whittier resident provided hospitality. The murals filled 8 gaping “window” openings to a half-walled & windowed street level parking lot. The openings had been empty for at least 7 years and are now an engaging view from 26th St. They are vibrant and reflect the history, culture and ethnicity of the Whittier neighborhood.

3. 2013 Accomplishments

Please provide information about your other accomplishments in 2013:

- What were your organization's major accomplishments?
- How were individuals in your community directly impacted by your work?

One of the most under-recognized accomplishments and constants is the availability of the Whittier Alliance to the neighborhood, our daily interaction with residents and business on both basic and critical issues, and the resources we either provide or recommend as a value that can't be provided by other than an organization that is in touch with the neighborhood. It is hard to measure this daily (including weekends) interaction and the benefit that it brings to the neighborhood and the City. Our doors are always open and our days are long. The range is broad—advising and responding to questions like where can I get free school supplies to providing a neighborhood forum on a sex offender moving in next door to launching a project such as Artists in Storefronts.

Other more "contained" accomplishments include providing support for our businesses and helping them stay viable in the market place. With the assistance of a contract techie, the Whittier Alliance updated the digital mapping of Whittier business on 5 major digital mapping sources. 68% of the 642 Whittier businesses checked needed corrections to one or more mapping sites. 35% or 65 businesses were added to the mapping sites. This was a very important service provided by the Whittier Alliance to Whittier businesses who increasingly rely on accurate electronic representation for smart phone users and others to drive business to their location.

The Whittier Alliance showed its commitment to youth and fostering opportunities for them by supporting youth serving organizations in the neighborhood. In 2013 \$11,583 of NRP Youth funds were distributed totaling \$54,332 in grants over the past 4 years. In addition, the Whittier Alliance co-sponsored the World of Whittier Family Fair. Over 300 youth and adults attended this free event which features youth performers, crafts, activities, resource tables and food.

During 2013, the Whittier Alliance increased its presence and activity in social media by approximately 50%. Increasing our social media presence is one of our Strategic Plan goals and it provides important outreach to a growing demographic in the Whittier neighborhood.

The Whittier Calendar has proven to be an effective tool in building awareness of Whittier Alliance and Neighborhood amenities, destinations, meetings and events. The 2013 Whittier Art & Artists Calendar was delivered to 7400 households and businesses in Whittier and highlighted the arts organizations, street murals and sculptures and multi-talented Whittier residents. In the fall of 2013 the 2014 Whittier calendar featuring the Whittier Community Gardens and gardening, water conservation and environmentally friendly was completed for Dec 2013 delivery.

The Whittier Alliance also engaged the community in furthering neighborhood goals as outlined the 2012-17 Whittier Strategic Plan: Stakeholder Engagement, Housing, Historic Preservation, Environmental Sustainability, and Commercial Corridor Development & Organizational Sustainability. NRP housing, youth and safety strategies continue to be part of the Whittier Alliance work.

As mentioned earlier, one of the more successful commitments and activities of the Whittier Alliance was the partnership with Lyndale in hiring a Somali Community Organizer. The contacts and good will achieved between the Somali and broader community were and continue to be valuable relationships. Relationships and partnerships with the LEG (law enforcement group at the 5th Precinct), the Faith Base Group, Whittier & Minneapolis Park and Rec, Whittier Elementary School and PTA, Youth Providers, Mpls Institute of Arts and Minneapolis College of Art and Design and managers at the affordable housing buildings in the Whittier reach other Whittier stakeholders in ways we might not be aware.

Finally, the Whittier Alliance put in place a board task force and actions to explore and assure financial and organizational sustainability into the future to serve the businesses and residents of the Whittier neighborhood. Board members attended a development series at the University of St Thomas School of Business for non-profit organizations. The series laid a foundation for planned giving, endowment planning and other long range public relations and funding development options. All board members took an active part in fundraising with their financial support of the organization and their active roles in soliciting contributions and participation.

4. Housing

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

The Whittier Alliance dedicates approximately 38% of its time to housing. In 2013 significant time was dedicated to the purchase, move, financing and rehab of the Stevens Ave Houses. But other housing initiatives were equally important. The 2 loan programs for single and multi-family improvement loans were marketed. The Whittier Alliance also works with rental property owners to assure curb appeal and healthy management practices. The WA also works in partnership with rental property owners and the 5th precinct on problem properties.

In 2013 a partnership with the U of M Preservation Master's Program resulted in a survey report of homes between Pillsbury and Blaisdell Aves and Franklin Ave and 27th St that are recommended for additional research for historic preservation. The Whittier Alliance also obtained the Southwest Transit Historic Transit Study which provides a "building biography" for individual properties in Whittier. This information will be used as a guide by the Historic Preservation Task Force as they implement the Preservation goals.

5. Financial Reports

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

See Attached

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?

With the Stevens house moves, we worked extensively with the single family housing department of CPED. It was a test of patience and repetitiveness. Slow response time, unclear information, delays for unknown reasons, lost documents, etc. The project unfortunately got pushed into the fall and winter due to the delays.

Working with the department of Civil Rights for the EEOC compliance for the Stevens Ave house contracting was another problem. The staff people we were working with did not reply, lost documents and ultimately left the dept without telling us and we had to start over with different staff and resubmit documents.

We had limited/observational assistance from NCR at our 2013 Annual Meeting. It was helpful for NCR department staff to see some of the challenges from a faction in the Whittier neighborhood and the board and community's response.

Over all, if you can get ahold of a city employee in any department and have a one on one conversation, the response and resolution is pretty effective. We had 18" deep alley ruts this past winter with lots of complaints from residents whose cars got hung up in the ruts or lost the bottoms of their cars. A call to public works and a personal conversation resulted in the clearing of the identified alleys. Meanwhile calls to 311 went unnoticed, the problems unresolved and the follow up non-existent. A call to 311 might get it on the record, but it doesn't get a response.

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?

Experience with Lot purchases, contract development and mgmt. in CPED Single Family housing dept and Civil Rights Dept.	1
311 calls for assistance or to report a problem	1

2. *City Communications - effectiveness*

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

The electronic Planning application notices are efficient and informative. They give the applicant, address, request and planner contact.

The mailed notices for ordinance changes are totally uninformative. They just list the ordinance number with no info regarding the topic

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate overall communications from the City? ___5 on electronic ___2___ on general ordinance notices

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 and no. The electronic notice seems to be early in the process but once we see the notice on a planning application it is frequently too late to get the applicant to the neighborhood to present the plan.

The Planning Staff report is published the Thursday prior to the Planning Commission meeting and if there hasn't been a neighborhood presentation on the topic, it is virtually impossible to learn enough about the project to speak in an informed matter at the PC or solicit opinion from the impacted neighbors or neighborhood in general. The planning application asks if the neighborhood has responded to the application. In most cases, there has not been any way for the neighborhood to comment on an application. If that is a criteria of the application, the City should insist that the applicant present their request in the neighborhood.

Planners should direct an applicant to present to the neighborhood prior to accepting an application and putting it in the city process. The practice now is to only "notify" the neighborhood and that frequently doesn't happen. This undermines the decision making process at the local level and disenfranchises the people most directly affected.

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? ___2___

4. *City Departments*

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

Be willing to come out and speak at neighborhood meetings.
Make their direct phone number available
Respect neighborhood strategic and/or land use plans
Insist that development plans be presented in the neighborhood prior to submitting city applications

5. ***City Assistance***

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

In 2013 the Whittier Alliance had cause to utilize the services and expertise of the NCR department. The guidance was good and helped facilitate the Annual Meeting as well as some other difficult situations. The NCR staff was responsive and knowledgeable working on a one on one basis and on a specific topic. We were fortunate to have NCR as a resource.

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? 3

6. ***Other comments?***

On a one on one, NCR has been a helpful resource and guide to the Whittier Alliance and neighborhood. We are grateful for the guidance and observations. However, in the bigger picture, it seems that NCR is adopting the City's model in its expectations, oversight and offerings. From a neighborhood view, that might be more bureaucratic than productive. NRP was not a perfect model but it had a "can do/let's find a way" attitude.

From a neighborhood perspective, the CPED development Planning Staff certainly defends and paves the way for the developers. NeighborhoodCR should do the same for neighborhoods – lobby CPED to insist that neighborhood plans be recognized, that development or transit plans be presented to the neighborhood for neighborhood review, etc. Defend and promote the neighborhoods. Each neighborhood is different which contributes to the texture of the city yet there seems to be a trending toward practices and policies that groom neighborhoods to conformity.

Engaged neighborhoods are just a bunch of neighbors trying to do their best for a place they love. Most of the work accomplished in a neighborhood is done by volunteers, volunteer boards and dedicated staff. It's not always a sophisticated process. A lot gets accomplished in neighborhood despite occasional imperfect documentation and permissions. Encourage and recognize the ability, commitment and knowledge of people in the neighborhood and promote that to other City offices and departments.