

WILLARD-HOMEWOOD ORGANIZATION

Monthly Block Club Leaders Meeting – Thursday, August 16, 2007
NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center
Human Services Building- Room 108
6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

Meeting called to order at 6:30 by George Roberts.

At the July meeting, the community asked that August meeting be dedicated to a discussion of relationship between WHO and NRRC and clarify mission and goals of each organization, and discuss the future of community participation in our geographic area. George suggested we dispense with a speaker from NorthPoint, take brief committee reports, and spend the bulk of the meeting addressing this issue.

George asked members to think about topics for future meetings and submit requests to him after the meeting, or contact him at 612-588-3723 (georgeroberts@att.net).

1. Committee reports

Organization & Structure Committee: Mike Tabor

In the process of selecting a bank account for finalizing of 501c3 application.

Need to select a mailing address for WHO official registered office.

Electronic voting will be prohibited

In the process of developing a timeline for when by-laws will be voted. This will be presented at September meeting.

Crime Prevention Committee: Mike Tabor

Newsletter and Website publish regular articles on crime and block club issues.

Tim Hammett, CCP/SAFE, is continuing to work on block club mapping

Areas of lesser crimes seem to be where block Clubs are located, so Tim will continue to provide this data for our information and block club organizing.

Communications Committee is also working on the Block Clubs mapping and identifying gaps in the area where no block clubs exist.

There were 52 National Night Out events held, and 20 were in our community of Willard Hay.

Communication Committee: Michelle Lewis

Committee member James Nelson is working on block club mapping and identification, recruitment and contacts of all block clubs within Willard Hay.

We were involved in promoting National Night Out planning and support to local block clubs

Will be working on a "welcome packet" to give to existing block clubs, new block clubs and new residents:

-Linda Fancher, NorthPoint, will work with the committee to develop an information sheet about their services.

-Other ideas, suggestions, comments on this packet are of great value to this committee.

Commercial use of our website – issue came up because of request from a realtor to send listing to WHOMail. We will be developing a policy on commercial use and posting it on the web. Members do not want to be deluged with lots of advertising, but use the site for information about programs, policies and issues related to community.

Block Club Task Force: James Nelson

Compiling a map from many sources - information from CCP/Safe, a response to email from WHO and information from Block Club meetings. Divided Willard Hay area into quadrants to get best up-to-date information on active, inactive, and unorganized blocks. This will include name of block club leader, area served and issues of importance to them. We would also like to get information about the number and ages of young people on each block

We will have overlays on the area map to show things like crime activity, housing problems (vacant, boarded, foreclosures) youth needs, etc.

Question: Does the city provide a map with these issues on it, like lead-based paint, which it has done in the past?

Answer: City may have more information, as well as the county. We will check.

Economic Development Committee: Randall Bradley

No new word to date about Uncle Bills. It remains closed and for sale. Property is in foreclosure and owned by a bank in California.

Question: Is the business license still under appeal?

Answer: Unknown at this point. Ali Mesjehl is the license holder, but issues are that the **building** is under condemnation. Ali cannot bring any power to reopen the business because he is not the building owner, only the business license holder.

George Roberts stated that Economic Development Committee has submitted a letter of interest to the Mayor's Great Cities Design Team on behalf of WHO. If awarded, a team of architects and city planners and designers would work with local residents to develop a vision for Plymouth Avenue between With Park and the Mississippi River. We have solicited and received letters of partnership from NRRC, UofM, NorthPoint and the Minneapolis Park Board. Awaiting other letters of support from other organizations and businesses along Plymouth Ave.

Youth Committee: No representative, no report

2. NRRC, WHO and Community Participation

Sherry Pugh, NRRC Exec Dir, was present for NRRC and to assist in the information flow. Corbin Connell gave a brief report on July BCL meeting and the joint meeting with Bob Miller which discussed citizen participation organization in our area.

What is the plan for WHO regarding NRRC – discussion raised concerns by residents. Block Club leaders and residents voted to spend August BCL meeting in a focused discussion about both organizations. Larry Tucker concurred with the history and can give further information about the meeting with Bob Miller, which he attended.

George asked that we create an agenda for this discussion to make sure all concerns, questions and comments are heard:

1. Bob Miller/NRP information
2. Developers/grants to neighborhood residents
3. Expenditures of NRP dollars. How have Dollars been spent in community.
4. NRRC and WHO. Are we “versus”, “different” “incompatible”?
5. Statement clarification is needed.

Discussion:

~**Bob Miller/NRP did not attend this meeting. All references to Bob Miller/NRP are from the July meeting with the Economic Development Committee.**

~Larry Tucker submitted questions to Bob Miller on how NRP worked. Miller stated that WHO as an organization has a long way to go, needed more community input. There are 15,000 residents in the NRRC area, and this has proven to be too large to organize effectively. Could be better supported if areas were smaller. NRRC has lost faith of the city leaders. NRRC development dollars have not been well spent. Many projects with enormous dollars invested have had no payoff for our community. NRP requested by has not received an audit from NRRC on how dollars have been spent. Larry stated his concern that NRRC Executive should resign in order for NRRC to continue as a community organization, become viable and regain support both of community and political leaders.

~Concern that dollars must be spent to stabilize and support our neighborhood. We have tremendous challenges facing us, and the City will not work with NRRC.

~Larry feels concern that City designation of WHO mapping is gerrymandered effort to work on problems.

~Liz Samuels agreed that there were statements she wanted discussed and clarified.

~Al McFarlane asked what is the story of funds that other communities have that we don't have.

~Randall Bradley stated we have a problem getting new people interested in living here, negatively impacting housing and business development. Half of the \$8 million dollars from Phase 1 NRP was designed to impact housing. The Housing Committee developed a “no income limit home rehab loan” in near north. \$450,000 in single family home loans turned over at least four (4) times, which enabled a greater number of grants to homeowners for housing rehab in this community. Issues in north Minneapolis come from policies that keep our community “poor” and “negatively impacted”. Randall believes the issue of WHO's existence is different from the issue of NRRC's existence.

~Diane Bradley worked on the Phase 1 NRP committee and gave a history of NRP housing programs in northside. NRP dollars were spent on housing issues to cover ALL areas of the northside. NRP did not track expenditures anywhere in the City. Northside housing's plan and use of NRP funds was touted as one of the best citywide. Some NRP housing dollars were distributed through Northside Housing Services Single Family Home Improvement Rehab Loans.

~Question: How many African Americans got loans? How many African American's participated in the loan program?

Answer: No information, citywide, was gathered and no tracking was done by NRP on these statistics.

~Michelle Lewis had a concern that there is a contradiction in NRP's sense of community boundaries. Bob Miller stated that we should have smaller areas to organize, yet we should follow the city designated boundaries for neighborhood designation. The original neighborhood boundaries were determined by “walking time” to local schools, which no longer exist.

~Issues that make the neighborhood unattractive are lack of amenities, which is due to lack of investment. What is the economic viability of this community? Residents want to enjoy the lifestyle in the community before they invest here. We need jobs and discretionary income to make our community work.

~Sherry Pugh spoke about NRRC and her leadership.

She came in when NRP Phase 1 was winding down. The number of vacant lots was down from 200 to less than 25. There had been a 30% jump in housing values. Plymouth Avenue was full of vacant lots and the environmental problems along Plymouth Avenue were not equitable throughout the northside. NRRC did an “identity” study of Plymouth Avenue, and worked on putting in trees and pocket gardens.

NRRC's strategies have been Economic Development, Environmental, and Transportation. They have added 70 trees along Plymouth, worked to slow traffic by adding bike paths, and improving MTC services. Developers will not come to this community to invest, so NRRC went after national dollars for development. Bob Miller, through NRP, said that there would be no more money for the Shopping Center.

Properties on Plymouth Avenue between Russell and Penn were not able to be developed. These properties are now for sale.

The condo market crashed and NRRC lost developers. NRRC is selling the shopping center to the U of M, and has dropped back on rental housing and selling. They have tried to change poverty by stabilizing families in their homes, through foreclosure counseling. NRRC's staff has been downsized. They have finished Phase 2 of NRP. NRRC got the largest allocation, with 70% going to housing issues. Foreclosures in north Mpls are becoming the central issue of stability for families here.

~Tania Johnson said that NRRC does not reach out to community and her area is fighting crime. WHO is replicating NRRC's history, the committees are the same and development desire is the same. She doesn't feel welcomed at either organization. Many new homes are boarded. People will move because of the crime and safety issues. How do we keep people in this community?

~Cub came in and paid low wages. The crises issues and lack of jobs here help keep families unstable.

~Concerns with both WHO and NRRC. NRRC did not hire professional consultants to work on development. Multi-housing WILL NOT work on Plymouth Avenue and any consultant could have told them that.

~The flavor of WHO as excluding people and having no desire for diverse membership is not a broad experience. WHO has many African American resident participants. City's position has not been helpful to this community because it puts too many poor people into one geographic area. We will have to get aggressive politically.

~"Eliminating poverty" has had no effort, and no dollars spent here. We have to hold the City accountable. "Best practices" around the country should be studied. We need more aggressive planning to deal with housing foreclosures. Mistakes being made by how we talk about our problems.

~Jerry Moore asked how we can begin to cross "boundaries" in each of our neighborhoods and begin to make some broad coalitions to address joint issues.

~Al McFarlane called for an action from this body. He thanked everyone for an open and honest discussion and deliberation of the issues. He moved that WHO Block Club meeting express support for NRRC as an organization that should succeed. He suggested we generate a letter in support of NRRC mission, goals and programs.

-Tania said NRRC should do more with citizen participation.

-Randall asked if AL supports WHO's formation. Al said he is vested as a resident and business owner in the success of Willard Hay.

Vote: 25 yeah 0 nay 1 abstain

Motion Carried. Al McFarlane will draft letter.

Meeting adjourned.

**Next meeting of WHO Block Club Leaders and Residents will be on
Thursday, September 20, 6:30-8:30pm at NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center**