

# UPDC

## Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes

June 20, 2023

Chair: Ellen Fee

Committee Attendance: Jerry Clendenin, Barb Deming, Kirsten Fryer, Jenny Keyser, Aubrey Nistler, David Tierney

Staff: Leah Timberlake Sullivan, Executive Director, Union Park District Council  
Kingsley Hollon-Coleman, UPDC Interim Program Director

### **Assign Note Taker**

Jerry Clendenin will take notes and type the minutes.

### **Introductions/Approval of Agenda**

An agenda was sent out in advance of the meeting. The agenda was accepted without changes.

# Check In on Micro-Grants

The Micro-Grants provide funds for small projects that bring residents together through activities in their communities. Other goals for the Micro-Grant Program are described on the Union Park District Council (UPDC) website.

At the May meeting, the Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee (NSVC) reviewed four applications for Union Park District Council Micro-Grants. Three Micro-Grants were approved:

- ARTS-Us Garden Improvement
- Funding for Picnics for Elders at Midway Peace Park
- Financial support for a theater production by students

## **Bicycle Racks at 520 Prior Avenue N**

A fourth Micro-Grant request was reviewed at the May meeting but not approved.

Benita Warns requested a Micro-Grant to install bicycle racks at 520 Prior Avenue N. and in front of the shop called Mr. Michael Recycles Bicycles. The shop helps low-income people to get bicycles. Benita Warns requested a Micro-Grant of \$400. The grant will be used to get the type of bicycle racks that say “Union Park.”

All NSVC members at the May meeting expressed support for the bike rack project. However, the project will require co-ordination with the Saint Paul Department of Public Works. Committee members were afraid that the project would get tangled up with red tape and regulations. For these reasons, the Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee decided not to vote on the bike rack grant at the May meeting.

To move the project along, Jenny Keyser contacted the City of Saint Paul official in charge of bicycle racks. She said that the City no longer offers the kind of bike racks that identify neighborhoods. The “Union Park” bike racks that Benita wants are not available from the City.

The City of Saint Paul has a website about bicycle racks. The website states that “the Department of Public Works recommends three bike rack styles offered by our vendor.” The city will provide the recommended bike racks free of charge. Saint Paul City workers will also install the recommended racks.

It is easy to request one of the recommended bike racks with a form posted on the City of Saint Paul bike rack website.

At the May meeting, Kirsten Fryer volunteered to contact Benita Warns to clarify some details about the bike rack proposal. After contacting Benita, Kirsten said that Benita still wants bike racks that identify “Union Park.”

We discussed the idea of an “upgrade.” The idea is to work with the city of Saint Paul on a bike rack request. Then we will arrange for an outside vendor to provide a custom design that identifies the neighborhood. The City of Saint Paul website said that bike rack “designs other than the recommended styles may require cost participation from the applicant.”

Kirsten said that Benita wants to put aside the bike rack project for now.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan said that she will bring up the topic of bike racks with the UPDC Transportation Committee. She said that the UPDC, the City, businesses, and neighborhood groups share a clear common interest in bike racks. It is desirable to knit the neighborhoods together with bike racks that identify neighborhoods.

The Micro-Grant request from Benita Warns is still open. We will be working on bike racks at future meetings.

### **A Micro-Grant Application for a Skyline Tower Project**

Demetrius Shaw requested a Micro-Grant for the Skyline Tower Teen Program.

The application was received in June. If approved, the grant will purchase snack food and beverages for young people while they are attending a computer training event.

The snacks will be for approximately 10 young people. They will attend a training class that meets once a week for 8 -10 weeks.

Demetrius is asking for \$400.

Jenny Keyser and other members present expressed support for the idea.

However, Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee members had questions:

- Is the actual cost \$400?
- Will Skyline get additional funds from another source?
- What are the intended goals of the computer training?

Because of the questions, the Committee was not ready to vote on the grant request.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan said that she will contact Demetrius with questions to clarify some details of the grant request.

Kirsten wanted to make progress on the Micro-Grant. To get the project moving, Leah will send an e-mail to committee members. The e-mail will have details of the grant request. Then NSVC members can vote on the grant request by e-mail.

There is a possible conflict of interest problem. Demetrius Shaw is requesting the Micro-Grant and he is the Skyline Tower Teen Program Coordinator. He is also a member of the Union Park District Council Board. The UPDC Board must approve Micro-Grant requests. To deal with the conflict of interest, Demetrius Shaw has promised to abstain from voting on the Skyline Teen Program Micro-Grant request.

# Keeping Track of Micro-Grant Funds

Ellen Fee reviewed how much of the Micro-Grant money we have spent and how much we have left.

The total amount of Micro-Grant money made available for 2023 was \$1600.

The three Micro-Grants that have been approved are listed below.

ARTS-Us Garden Improvement	\$400
Funding for Picnics for Elders at Midway Peace Park	\$400
Financial support for a theater production by students	\$350

If we approve the Micro-Grant for the Skyline Tower Teen Program, the total of the grants will be \$1,550. We will have spent all of the funds available with \$50 left over.

The money for Micro-Grants does not come from the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund.

## Tracking Cell Tower Fund Spending & Projects

We had a discussion about doing better monitoring of the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund. The annual revenue from the fund is usually around \$17,000.

There is a tower in Merriam Park that supports telephone equipment. The communication companies pay rent to keep their equipment on the cell tower. The rent money goes to an account at the City of Saint Paul. The account is called the Cell Tower Fund. Money from the fund is used to pay for improvements to parks and also for public events in the parks. The Union Park District Council (UPDC) determines how the money is spent.

The discussion on June 20 focused on two sub topics:

- 1) How to keep track of Cell Tower Fund dollars and
- 2) How to keep track of Cell Tower Fund projects.

Some Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee (NSVC) members want to focus first on getting a better command of Cell Tower Fund dollars.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan would like to determine:

- How much money is in the Cell Tower Fund at a given time?
- How much money can we spend this year?
- How do we access funds for projects?

Some NSVC members and Leah would also like “solid accounting” of the finances with a line-item list of projects and costs.

### **Determining the Status of Projects**

Barb Deming and others said that they would like to track the status of projects. Which projects have been completed? Which projects have been started but are not yet complete? Which projects have not been started?

Financing for many projects has been approved by the Union Park District Council, but work on constructing the projects was never even started.

The February, 2023, NSVC minutes have a discussion with Andy Rodriguez, Director of Saint Paul Parks & Recreation. The discussion stated why many projects that require construction work do not get done. Some reasons include:

- Construction companies do not bid on small projects.
- There is turnover of people at Parks & Recreation and at UPDC. No one follows through on most projects.
- Projects are not completed by funding deadlines.

Leah said that it is difficult to determine the status of the different construction projects. Also, when we get into the status of projects, she said that we also get into complicated discussions about “why didn’t that get done?”

Leah said that it is easier to get a clear financial statement the Cell Tower Fund.

### **A Letter to Start the Accounting Process**

Leah suggests an informal process.

She suggests that she draft a letter that she will send to Andy Rodriguez, the Director of the Parks & Recreation Dept.

The letter will request a financial statement Leah would also like to ask for “solid accounting” of the finances with a line-item list of projects and costs.

Leah said that we will feel better if we have a clear financial picture.

Kirsten said that it will be a good start to get a clear financial picture. She said that after we get a good financial report, we can develop a report on the status of the projects that require construction work.

Jenny Keyser said that the proposed letter is “exactly what we need.” We can determine our financial position first and then determine the status of projects.

She is also concerned to verify that the Parks & Rec Department has set aside funds for Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam and other events.

Ellen Fee brought up the topic of how the NSVC should approve the draft letter.

After some discussion, the Committee members present decided that Leah should draft a letter. Then Leah will send a draft of the letter to each NSVC member by e-mail. We will have some time to respond if we want to comment or request changes.

Unless someone objects, Leah will go ahead and send the letter to Director Andy Rodriguez.

## **Play Streets and Block Parties**

David Tierney led a discussion about play streets and block parties.

The Union Park District Council supports a program that allows adults to close off part of a street to create a temporary play area for children. Cars are blocked from driving on a section of a street.

An example of a play street is on Herschel Street. Herschel is closed to cars from Shields Avenue to Saint Anthony Avenue. Herschel is closed on every Sunday afternoon and every Wednesday evening through August. Lisa Nelson from the UPDC Transportation Committee organized this play street.

To close off a street, residents must first get an Event Permit from the City of Saint Paul. The electronic application is available on the City of Saint Paul website. After they get the Event Permit from the City, citizens can rent street barriers from Union Park District Council.

Information is available on the UPDC website. Look for the heading “Resources” near the top of the page. Click on “Resources” and then on the drop-down menu item “Barricade Rental.”

Renter must post a deposit of \$80 with the UPDC. The deposit is refunded when the barricades are returned.

Lisa Nelson and Kirsten Fryer can assist citizens who want to create a play street or set up a street for a block party.



# Review of No-Mow Work and Plans for Events

## The June 10 Event

Jerry Clendenin reported on an event at the No-Mow Area of Merriam Park. We did some maintenance work on Saturday, June 10.

Jerry sent e-mail to all NSVC members to invite them to the event. The e-mail stated why it's useful to maintain the No-Mow Area to improve Merriam Park.

Four people came out. Good weather and a convenient time encouraged people to volunteer.

Jerry said that "we have got Ragweed on the run" by using some basic science. He studied the book Common Backyard Weeds of the Upper Midwest. The book says that Ragweed is an annual plant. Ragweed creates flowers in the early and middle summer. After the flowers appear, the Ragweed pollinates. The Ragweed forms seeds after pollination. The seeds fall to the ground so that the next generation of Ragweed will appear in the following year.

In part of the No-Mow Area, we have pulled all of the Ragweed plants that appear to be close to flowering. We have prevented Ragweed from flowering and pollinating. Without pollinating, the Ragweed will not create seeds. In time, no more Ragweed!

A plant called Black Medick is moving in places near Merriam Lane where the Ragweed was pulled out. Jerry Clendenin thinks that Black Medick is a much nicer looking than Ragweed. The Black Medick moves us toward the goal that Jerry proposes for the No-Mow Area:

**The goal is to see that every plant in the No-Mow Area is an attractive, nice-looking plant.**

Jerry discussed this goal at the June 10 event. He passed around the book Common Backyard Weeds. The book has pictures of Black Medick and other plants. The book

served as a guide for what plants we should pull and which plants we should leave in place.

Jenny Keyser said she enjoyed looking at the book.

She also commented that people who were walking by Merriam Park were interested in the maintenance activity.

The people working on June 10 pulled the Ragweed and then simply dropped the weeds on the ground. There were no seeds attached to the Ragweed plants, therefore there was no danger of spreading the weeds.

The Ragweed plants will break down and release nitrogen to the soil. This is recommended by garden experts. The nitrogen is an important natural fertilizer. If we haul the Ragweed to a dump, we haul away the nitrogen.

## **Plans for the July 22 Event**

The next No-Mow maintenance event is scheduled for July 22, Saturday.

Jerry Clendenin said that the No-Mow event is an opportunity to attract new members to the Union Park District Council. At past No-Mow maintenance events, people who live near Merriam Park came out to do volunteer work. These were people who were not members of the UPDC.

Jerry said that we can provide a motivation for people who are not UPDC members to volunteer. Maintaining Merriam Park makes the neighborhood a more desirable place to live.

NSVC members present discussed how to attract new volunteers to work on the No-Mow project.

We discussed the idea of placing signs in the No-Mow area and near to Merriam Park. However, the Parks & Rec Department may not want signs in Merriam Park. Also, private land owners may not want signs. We rejected the idea of putting up signs.

Instead of outdoor signs, we decided to put some messages on Facebook and other social media outlets.

We will also put some messages on the Union Park District Council Newsletter and we will attempt to post some messages in the MyVillager newspaper.

### **Flyers to Attract New Volunteers**

Flyers have attracted new people to past No-Mow clean up events. Several NSVC members supported the idea of placing flyers. Therefore, we will place flyers at houses near Merriam Park

Leah will print the flyers.

Jerry suggested covering a small area near to Merriam Park. He will send an e-mail to Leah to suggest the area for coverage.

Jerry also has a way to estimate the number of flyers that we need. He will suggest a number of flyers so that we control costs. He can also estimate the time need to deliver the flyers.

Barb Deming has been planning for the July 22 event. She said that the July 22 event will be like the event of June 10. The main goal is to pull out pull Ragweed. Pulling Ragweed will encourage Black Medick to move in to some areas. We can also pull thistles.

We plan to pull out vines that are growing up to threaten trees.

### **Goals for the September 23 Event**

Barb Deming has also been planning the September 23 No-Mow maintenance event. The September event will be substantially different from the June and July events.

Barb Deming will contact Mary Henke-Haney at Parks & Recreation. Barb is asking for Parks & Rec employees to cut down small “weed trees” before September 23. Then volunteers from Union Park District Council will remove the brush.

NSVC volunteers will also pull out weeds as appropriate.

# Adjourn

We adjourned at 8:41 p.m.