

January 2022 EPC Minutes

Only 2 members were in attendance and so the meeting was adjourned. We agreed to attend the next NIC meeting to talk about merging.

Gregg Gridley

UPDC Neighborhood Involvement Committee Meeting
Monday, January 24, 2022 || 7-8:30 p.m.

Attendance

NIC/EPC members: Ellen Fee (chair), Kirsten Fryer, Jenny Keyser. *EPC members:* Gregg Gridley (chair), Carolyn Cahill, Harmony Neal. *Guest:* Catherine Hinz (Executive Director, Lexington-Hamline Community Council). *UPDC Staff:* Leah Timberlake Sullivan (Program Manager) and Abdulrahman Wako (Executive Director).

Introductions and Agenda review

Ellen Fee welcomed the members of the Environment and Parks Committee and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Catherine Hinz announced she was attending as part of her orientation as the new ED at Lex-Ham Community Council.

Merger of NIC and Environment & Parks

Ellen Fee and Gregg Gridley presented the board's recommendation that the two committees merge. The board cited on-going challenges in recruiting committee members, as well as areas of programmatic overlap between NIC and EPC. Gregg further described the low number of applications the EPC had received for its distribution of funds (\$17,000 per year) from the cell tower lease agreement, and the difficulty of conducting community gatherings in parks during the pandemic years.

The general discussion identified opportunities for the two committees to support each other: both groups manage and distribute funds, both work to engage the community, and both consider parks and green spaces to be critical resources that all neighbors should be able to access and enjoy. There was also an acknowledgement that joining forces means twice the projects to undertake. A careful review of the existing work plans of NIC and EPC will help identify what can be accomplished as a merged committee, and what might need to be addressed by sub-committees. Questions remained about the name and structure of the combined committee; however, those in attendance unanimously voted to go forward with the merger.

Action: NIC and EPC approved the merger of their two committees.

Next steps: 1) Confirm that UPDC's by-laws permit the merger without conditions; 2) Review the existing work plans of NIC and EPC to determine a joint plan for 2022.

Midway Peace Park

Wako reported that there are no updates on the Midway Peace Park. The winter weather has slowed the start of weekly clean-up by volunteers (NIC is on the schedule for the 4th week of each month), but the park is in relatively good shape nonetheless. NIC's goal has been to collaborate with Skyline residents in planning and conducting clean-up activities in the park, and to make these into community engagement events with refreshments and opportunities for residents and UPDC volunteers to get to know each other. Wako has identified a Skyline staff member who will help us begin that collaboration, and an initial meeting will take place soon.

Harmony asked about planting more trees in the park, and what park improvement activities beyond clean-up days were possible. Wako clarified that the city mows the grass and empties trash cans, but there are no city resources set aside to improve the park. The Trust for Public Land helped establish the park and might be a resource for park improvements. The conversation turned to ways that EPC and NIC as a combined committee could leverage funding for improvements and community engagement in the Peace Park, possibly through inviting Skyline to make an application to the cell tower fund or the micro-grant program. Conversation ensued about how UPDC can support Skyline residents in pursuing these and other opportunities, including stipends for Skyline residents who serve on UPDC planning efforts, and paid internships for students who live in Skyline and want to work and learn with UPDC.

Action: Wako will meet with Skyline staff member and report back.

Next steps: NIC/EPC committee will develop a joint work plan for the Peace Park clean-up and engagement with Skyline.

Neighborhood Honor Roll

The committee discussed the idea of a Neighborhood Honor Roll celebrating individuals who are making a difference in Union Park communities. Discussion centered on the scope and process for soliciting and sharing responses. Should it be conducted during a particular month or be a rolling monthly feature on UPDC social media? Should we call for nominations or simply invite and accept all responses? How best to collect, review, and keep track of the responses? The nominators/respondents would likely be asked to submit either a form or a short statement that includes: name of person to be honored; their neighborhood (no house addresses); how the honoree is making a difference in the life of the community; assurance that the neighbor being nominated has given permission; photo or image if possible. The committee was inclined to go forward with planning, but mindful of the details that still need to be determined.

Action: NIC/EDC committee members are asked to send further thoughts to Leah, including how to promote and manage the project. And examples of neighbors you hope would be included in an honor roll.

Approach to Crime and Safety

Wako reviewed UPDC's efforts to address crime and public safety: attending briefings by the Western District Police Precinct, working with the Block Ambassador Program, and connecting with efforts at Macalester College and University of St Thomas. Wako asked if NIC would be the committee responsible for housing this work, citing that in the past NIC had public safety as part of its charge. After a brief discussion, the committee members declined, citing its already full work plan. And, members noted that NIC's focus on "community-based public safety"--fostering community by knowing and supporting neighbors--would not fit well with a crime and safety effort.

Agenda items to be carried over

Time ran out to take up the Writing/Storytelling project and Rent Stabilization.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35

Next meeting, February 28, 7-8:30 p.m.