

UPDC
Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality
Committee Meeting Minutes

September 20, 2022

Chair: Ellen Fee

Committee Attendance: Jerry Clendenin, Kirsten Fryer, Jenny Keyser

Staff: Leah Timberlake Sullivan, Program Director, Union Park District Council

Assign Note Taker

Jerry Clendenin will take notes and type minutes.

Meeting Agenda

An agenda was sent out in advance of the meeting. No one requested changes to the agenda.

Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam Evaluation

This year's Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam (ICPB&J) was held between noon to 4 p.m. on September 17, Saturday.

Some Overall Impressions of the Event

We had a good turnout for the event. Jenny Keyser noted that 750 dishes of ice cream were served.

There were so many guests that the food truck sold all of the food. The food truck manager was able to telephone for more supplies. Then the food truck sold out a second time!

Jenny Keyser had the impression that the event was warm, informal, and neighborly.

Neighbors shared some heart-warming stories. A man who lives close to the skate board park cleans up graffiti. When he sees graffiti on the skate board park, he goes over to clean it up. People take care of their Merriam Park.

The tables and tents for vendors were set up ahead of time on Saturday. Vendors told Kirsten that they appreciated the advance preparation.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan observed that we could have used more volunteers. The tables and tents were set up on time. However, some other activities did not have enough help. The mural painting project needed more adults to guide the many children taking part.

We discussed ideas for assigning volunteers to certain jobs. The goal would be to get more work done with the available volunteers.

Some Union Park District Council (UPDC) members said that the bicycle racks were not well positioned. People had a difficult time parking their bikes.

Leah proposed that we do a survey of Committee members and Board members to get their impressions of how the ICPB&J went.

Collecting Discarded Items at ICPB&J

We had a plan for collecting items that guests throw away at the Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam event. At the July meeting of the Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee (NSVC), we agreed to name the collection project a “Low Waste Plan.”

Five disposal stations were set up in different locations in Merriam Park. At each station guests sorted items for disposal. The sorting categories included

- Items that can be reused
- Trash to be sent to a landfill
- Waste that can be composted
- Materials that can be recycled

At past events, people discarded materials in the wrong places. For example, some people put items that can be recycled in the barrel for trash.

As of July, the plan was to have volunteer workers at each disposal location. The plan was for volunteers to assist guests to place their items in the correct barrels.

However, the people planning ICPB&J decided that volunteer assistants will not be a good use of people power. We did not have volunteers assisting guests at the disposal stations.

We changed the plan to have better signs on how to place the correct items in the right barrels. The signs included photos of the kind of things that should go in a particular barrel. A picture of a cup was posted with the sign that says to put cups in this barrel.

Committee members at the meeting of September 20 agreed that the sorting plan did not work very well. The event produced more waste than we expected.

For example, Leah Timberlake Sullivan said that people didn't get it that the ice cream spoons were biodegradable. They dropped the spoons in the barrel for trash that should go to a landfill, or they put the spoons in some other incorrect place.

Leah said that at the 2023 ICPB&J it will be good to have volunteers for refuse collection. We need volunteers to have a true low waste plan.

Kirsten Fryer said that we might get help from Ramsey County for refuse collection at the 2023 ICPB&J.

Advertising and Promoting the ICPB&J

Our promotion was effective because hundreds of people attended.

Union Park District Council volunteers and staff worked to advertise the Ice Cream Peanut Butter and Jam (ICPB&J) event.

- The UPDC website had information about the ICPB&J. There was an invitation for everyone to attend.
- There were posts about the ICPB&J on Face Book and other social media platforms.
- Wako ordered 30 lawn signs. Volunteers placed the signs on their properties.

Ellen said that people were interested in new UPDC shirts and merchandise that we sold at the event.

Four Music Acts Performed

Continuous entertainment was provided by:

- Husband Material
- O'Shea Irish Dance
- Irish Music
- Bakermiller Pink

Support From Sponsors and Donors

There were several businesses and other organizations who were sponsors for the ICPB&J. The list was impressive.

One sponsor offered to pay for ice cream served at the event. We kept track of the cost of the ice cream served. Leah or Executive Director Abdulrahman Wako, will send out an invoice to the sponsor to tell the sponsor the cost of the ice cream. The sponsor needs the invoice so that the sponsor can take a tax deduction

We put the logo of each sponsoring organization on T shirts that were made for the event.

We thanked each sponsor in public at the ICPB&J event.

The UPDC is creating similar relationships with several sponsors.

We are sending out notes to thank people and organizations who made donations to support the ICPB&J. These donors were not considered sponsors.

Wako and others do a lot of paper work to maintain relationships with sponsors and donors.

Ideas for the 2023 ICPB&J

For 2022, we did not have any plans about what to do in case of bad weather. Leah said that for 2023 we should have a process for canceling the event in case of bad weather. We have to establish who makes the decision. Leah said that it should be someone at the level of the Union Park District Council Board.

Leah said that it is hard to set a rain date because it is difficult to reschedule music acts and bands.

Kirsten Fryer suggested that we create a document like a “decision tree” to guide how to make the decision to cancel.

A related topic is how to provide shelter in case of a sudden bad weather event. We discussed how many people will fit in the gym at the Merriam Park Community Center. Also, the bands and music groups perform outside and there is no cover in case of rain.

We discussed ideas for introducing the Union Park District Council and introducing individual members of the UPDC.

One idea is to hand out cards that describe the UPDC and Union Park activities. The cards might also have information on how to attend a UPDC meeting and on how to join the UPDC. We considered the idea of publish a zoom link on the cards.

We also discussed the idea of name tags. The tags could identify members of the UPDC Board or members of UPDC committees.

We discussed the idea of getting table covers with maps of the UPDC area.

We discussed ideas for doing a survey of guest at the 2023 ICPB&J. The survey will be to determine what neighbors want for key goals for the UPDC.

Jenny Keyser suggested an idea to use beans or jelly beans for voting on goals. There will be a clear glass jar next to a statement of a possible goal. A citizen can place a bean in the jar if they are interested in that goal. There will be several jars corresponding to several possible goals.

Response to the NSVC Table at the ICPB&J

We had a table for the Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality Committee (NSVC) at the Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam event. There were several activities at and near the table.

A Union Park Map

We displayed a map of the Union Park area at the NSVC table. We provided color coded pins. We invited each guest to put in a pin that locates their own home.

Several guests responded to the map. Many of them identified as residents of Merriam Park. They did not seem to know that Merriam Parks is part of Union Park.

We had an opportunity to display the area served by the Union Park District Council and describe what the UPDC does.

The map idea worked well as a way to build community engagement.

Bubble Blowing for Kids

We had a fun activity for kids. We had equipment and supplies for kids to make bubbles. We also had a machine that made bubbles. We had an area set aside for children and the machine to float bubbles in the air.

The bubble making activity was a big hit!

Harmony Neal brought the equipment and supplies for making bubbles.

Painting a Mural

The outline of the mural was drawn by noted Saint Paul artist Jennifer Soriano.

The mural was something like a paint-by-numbers kit. Kids and adult painted the colors in the outline.

The project was popular, especially with children

Leah said that many adults dropped off their children at the mural painting site. Then the parents left. She said that we need to do something so that next year we have a better ratio of adults to kids.

The mural is like a cloth tapestry. At present time it is in Leah's house. We did not discuss a permanent place to display it.

Educating Guest About the Cell Tower Fund

We had paper copies of Cell Tower Fund applications at the NSVC table.

The form is designed to allow any citizen in the Union Park Area to request funding for park improvements and other park projects and events. We had people available to explain the Cell Tower Fund program.

There was not a lot of interest in the application process.

No Buttons

Kristen Fryer and Harmony Neal worked on setting up a way to make buttons that commemorate the Union Park District Council and the ICPB&J event.

Kirsten and Harmony worked on getting a machine for making buttons. They planned to borrow one from the Parks & Recreation Department.

Unfortunately, the Parks & Recreation machine was broken down. We could not make buttons.

The Midway Peace Park Event

We decided on the final plans for the event that we call “Midway Peace Park Fall Fun.”

The date is October 8, Saturday, from 12 noon to 4 p.m. Midway Peace Park Opened on June 16, 2021, so that on October 8 we can celebrate that the park has been opened for more than a year.

We have received the official permit from the Parks & Recreation Department. We also have received approval from the insurance company that provides coverage for the event.

At the event, guests will enjoy free food and tea. A food truck will serve sambusas. The sambusa is a pastry with a filling of vegetables or meat. The sambusa comes from Asia and Africa.

We will have “bouncy houses” and other Inflatables for kids. The inflatables are like huge rubber balloons with fantastic designs. The inflatables are big, they are colorful, and they are filled with air so that kids can bounce on them.

A Need for Volunteers

The subject of the inflatables brought up a discussion about volunteers. Leah said that we need one volunteer at each inflatable. Each inflatable has a fan that pumps in air to hold up the balloon. Often kids will pull the plug attached to the fan. They want to see if the inflatable will collapse. We need an adult to prevent the kids of deflating the inflatable.

We will have signs that tell the kids to remove their shoes before they get on an inflatable. Removing shoes protects the inflatable rubber from damage. An adult volunteer will encourage the kids to remove shoes.

The inflatable rental company does not send a staff person.

Funding the Event

The funds will come from the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund. The Union Park District Council has approved funds of \$3,000. The spending plan includes \$500 for inflatables and \$1,500 for food costs. We expect to spend \$300 on promotional materials. We may not need to spend all of the \$3,000.

We planned an event for 500 guests.

Community Engagement

For community engagement, we are focusing on Skyline Tower and on Gordon Parks High School.

We are engaging with groups at Skyline Tower. Jenny Keyser said that there are several groups with different interests.

Jenny talked about a sewing club at Skyline. We can invite someone from the Sewing Club at Skyline to put on a display or demonstration at the Midway Peace Park event.

During the event, we might talk about how to apply for a micro-grant for the sewing club. Jenny noted that men at Skyline are also learning to sew.

Besides the sewing club, Leah will find other contacts at Skyline Tower.

Leah will request that three groups set up tables.

- The Trust for Public Lands
- Friends of Midway Peace Park
- The Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee

Ellen began a discussion about inviting the UPDC Transportation Committee to have a table at the Midway Peace Park event. An item of great interest is a survey about safety and security on Green Line trains. The survey is being done by the Transportation Committee.

We will see if other groups are interested in setting up tables. The Midway YMCA and the Capitol Watershed District are two groups that may be interested.

Leah noted that groups of men have social gatherings at Midway Peace Park. This is not very common at other venues.

Some Things That We Can Still Do

Leah and Wako will plan out how to position the food truck and the inflatables. The food truck must be in the parking lot so that it is on a firm foundation.

They will also plan out positioning the tables.

Leah is looking at bathroom options.

Leah said that it will be desirable to organize an arts project. She is thinking of something that kids can do while they wait to climb on an inflatable bouncy house.

We discussed that we still should work out a way to communicate that the event was organized by Union Park District Council.

No Mow Beautification Plan

The No Mow Area is in the south west corner of Merriam Park. The area has not been mowed since 2012. Most of the area has Fescue Grass that is allowed to grow naturally. Volunteers from the Union Park District Council help to maintain the area. We do two maintenance events each year. One is in summer and one is in the fall.

Setting a Date for the Fall Maintenance Event

We have planned a fall maintenance event. However, we planned for a date of October 8. Unfortunately, the proposed date of October 8 conflicts with the date for the Midway Peace Park Fall Fun event.

Jerry Clendenin is working with Barb Deming and the Parks & Recreation Department to set another date.

To prepare for the fall maintenance event, Jerry Clendenin wants to distribute flyers to find people to volunteer. It is also a way to recruit new members for the Union Park District Council.

We can encourage participation in an outdoor event which has a low risk for spreading Covid.

A Goal for Volunteers

Jerry Clendenin proposed a goal for the volunteer maintenance work.

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

The goal is a long run goal. It is an aesthetic goal.

We can advance toward the goal at the fall maintenance event. There are a few tasks that we might do:

- Remove Ragweed from an area which is close to the top of the wooden steps.

- Plant grass seeds in areas where we have removed Ragweed.
- Thin out some of the Tall Goldenrod.
- Remove some other weeds.

We will ask the Parks & Recreation Department if they want to cut down “weed trees.” Weed trees are small trees that start growing in an area where we want only grass to grow. If the City workers cut down the weed trees, volunteers will remove the brush. This activity usually requires a truck or some vehicle to haul away the brush.

Signs of Progress: Ugly Weeds Disappear

We can point to the area near Merriam Lane as an example of what we can accomplish. The area close to Merriam Lane looks much better than it looked in July. We are making progress against Common Ragweed. Volunteers have removed Common Ragweed from the area close to Merriam Lane. We planted grass where the Ragweed was removed.

Volunteers have also removed some “weed trees” near Merriam Lane.

We planted Fescue Grass in places where we removed Ragweed and weed trees. Fescue Grass is a nice-looking plant.

A Sign for the No Mow Area

At previous meetings, we discussed creating a sign for the No Mow Area. Ellen said that she is interested in a sign.

The sign that we have discussed would identify the No Mow Area. It would also say that UPDC volunteers maintain the No Mow Area.

Jerry Clendenin and Barb Deming will continue to work on a sign.

Ellen said that funding from the Cell Tower Fund is a possibility.

Other Updates/Ideas

An Event at Aldine Park

We are planning an event for Aldine Park. We were thinking about a date of Saturday, October 30.

However, Jerry Clendenin said that weather can be bad on October 30. Also, he said that it is too much work to do the Aldine event in addition to ICPB&J and the Midway Peace Park event in a two-month period.

We decided to change the date. We will not have the Aldine event on October 30. We decided to do the Aldine event in the spring of 2023.

Ellen said that it is desirable to have one event per month for each of the four warmer months in 2023. We discussed the idea of having four events in 2023: the Desnoyer Park Picnic, Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam, an event at Midway Peace Park, and an event at Aldine Park.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan suggested that we set up a petting zoo at the Aldine event.

Jerry Clendenin suggested that we can set up a horse shoe throwing tournament. He has seen people playing horse shoes at Aldine Park.

Awesome Foundation

Leah brought up the topic of the Awesome Foundation. The foundation's web site says that it provides grants for the arts, education, and social outreach. The site says that

“We love projects that are solving problems and bringing joy to people in Saint Paul.”

Leah is thinking about working with the UPDC Board and applying for a grant from the Foundation. She is thinking of something that benefits the elderly. Another idea is an arts project.

Motion to Adjourn

We adjourned at 8:30 p.m.