

UPDC

Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes

August 16, 2022

Chair: Ellen Fee

Committee Attendance: Jerry Clendenin, Kirsten Fryer, Harmony Neal

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

Assign Note Taker

Jerry Clendenin will take notes and type minutes.

Meeting Agenda

Members attended the meeting in person at Midway Peace Park. The meeting was out of doors, so we decided that a face-to-face meeting will be a low-risk event for spreading Covid.

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

Update on Preparations for Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam Event

This year's Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam will be noon to 4 p.m. on September 17, Saturday.

Changes to the Plan for Collecting Discarded Items

We have 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, we agreed to change the name of the collection project from "Zero-Waste Plan" to "Low Waste Plan." Wako said that people working on the Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam event determined that producing zero waste is an impossible goal.

The plan is to have 5 disposal stations in different locations in Merriam Park. At each station guests can sort items for disposal. The sorting categories include

- 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 put disposable 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 will not have volunteers assisting guests at disposal stations.

Now the plan is to have better signs on how to place the correct items in the right barrels. The signs will include photos of the kind of things that should go in a particular barrel. A picture of a cup will go with the sign that says to put cups in this barrel.

Advertising and Promoting the ICPB&J

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

The UPDC website has information about the ICPB&J. There is an invitation for everyone to attend.

There are posts about the ICPB&J on Face Book and other social media platforms.

Wako said that we have ordered 30 lawn signs. We need volunteers to place the signs on their properties.

Support From Sponsors and Donors

There are some businesses and other organizations who are sponsors for the ICPB&J.

One sponsor has offered to pay for ice cream served at the event. We have to keep track of the cost of the ice cream served. Leah or Wako will send out an invoice to the sponsor to tell the sponsor the cost of the ice cream. We need send out an invoice so that the sponsor can take a tax deduction

We will put the logo of the sponsoring organization on T shirts made up for the event. We will thank the sponsor in public at the ICPB&J event.

The UPDC is creating similar relationships with several sponsors.

We will also send out notes to thank people and organizations who make donations to support the ICPB&J. These donors are not considered sponsors.

Wako and others need to do quite a bit of paper work to maintain relationships with sponsors and donors.

Plans for the NSVC Table

We worked on several ideas for the Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality Committee (NSVC) table at the Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam event.

Ellen Fee will encourage other UPDC committees to set up tables.

A Union Park Map

We are preparing to display a map of the Union Park area at the NSVC table. We will provide color coded pins. We will invite each guest to put in a pin that locates their own home.

A Survey

We will provide materials for responding to a survey at the NSVC table. The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department is doing the survey about what citizens think about our parks.

No to a No-Mow Event for Now

Jerry Clendenin brought up the idea of making the No-Mow Area a kind of extra-large display object. His idea was to do the fall maintenance event on September 10. The tenth is one week before the ICPB&J on September 17. The idea was to have the No-Mow Area cleaned up as much as possible. Then we would place a sign on the NSVC table. The sign will encourage people to take a short walk to view the No-Mow Area.

Wako did not like the idea. Doing the maintenance event on September 10 would add a lot of work to Wako and others when they are busy preparing for the ICPB&J.

We rejected the idea of doing the No-Mow maintenance on September 10.

Instead of doing the maintenance on September 10, we will invite people to volunteer for the No-Mow maintenance event in October. There will be information on how to volunteer at the NSVC table.

Bubble Blowing for Kids

We plan to have a fun activity for kids. We will have equipment and supplies so that kids can make bubbles.

We will also have a machine that makes bubbles.

Harmony Neal said that she can bring the equipment and supplies for making bubbles.

We will set aside an area for children and the machine to float bubbles in the air.

Educating Guest About the Cell Tower Fund

We will have 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 can also explain how to submit a form by electronic means.

We can explain that funds for improvement come from rents that communication companies pay. They pay to have their equipment on a tower in Merriam Park.

Micro-grant Display

We will have a display on the Union Park Micro-grant program. We will ask one or more Micro-grant recipients talk about what they are doing.

One of the Micro-grants went for a little free natural history library. This will be like a little free library for books, except that it will contain interesting stones and fossils. It will be on Hague Avenue. At the NSVC Table we plan to display some of the national history library items.

Making Buttons

Kristen Fryer and Harmony Neal will work on setting up a way to make buttons that commemorate the UPDC and the ICPB&J event.

Kirsten and Harmony will work on getting a machine for making buttons. They are confident that they can borrow one. The Parks & Recreation Department can provide a machine.

Kristen and Harmony will work on a design and art work for the buttons.

Follow Up on Micro-grant Projects

Leah reported that funds have been distributed for five Micro-grant projects. The recipients for these five projects put in applications for Micro-grants by May 15.

May 15 was the due date for the “first round” of applications.

Approved Grants

The first-round Micro-grants that were approved include:

- Two community gardens.
- A garden to grow tulip bulbs.
- A garden on a traffic round-about at Shields Avenue and Wheeler Street.
- A little free natural history library. This will be like a little free library for books, except that it will contain interesting stones and fossils. It will be on Hague Avenue.

Leah will follow up by asking recipients to send us pictures from their projects. She would also like the little free natural history library to put up an exhibit.

Now that the first-round grants are funded, proposals submitted after May 15 will be considered on a “rolling basis.” For 2022 the last day to submit request for Micro-grants is September 1.

The Union Park District Council (UPDC) Micro-grant Program provides funds for small projects that bring residents together through activities in their community. Other goals for the Micro-grant program are described on the UPDC website.

A Midway Peace Park Event

We decided that it is getting too late in year for an ice cream social. So, we decided to change the planned event to one that features hot cider and other warm food items. We will redesign the event to be a fall fest.

The planned date is October 15, Saturday.

We can get help from the St. Paul Parks & Recreation Department for the Midway Peace Park event. Parks & Recreation has a City-wide service. The service is like bringing a portable recreation center to the event. We can organize different activities using equipment and supplies from the City-wide service.

Ellen Fee made a motion to provide \$3,000 to fund the Midway Peace Park fall event. Harmony Neal seconded motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The funds will come from the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund.

The Union Park District Council must approve the funding.

An Event at Aldine Park

We also began planning an event for Aldine Park. We are thinking about the afternoon or evening before Halloween. The day before Halloween is Saturday, October 30.

We discussed the idea of having a blue grass band at the Aldine event.

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.

No-Mow Beautification Plan

The No-Mow Area is in the south west corner of Merriam Park. The No-Mow Area was established in 2012. 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. Most of the maintenance work is pulling out weeds. We do two maintenance events each year. One is in summer and one is in the fall.

Limited Change to No-Mow

At the August 16 meeting, we discussed possible changes to the No-Mow Area.

Jerry Clendenin said that any changes have to be acceptable to the Parks & Recreation Department. Our usual contact is Mary Henke-Haney. As he understands it, she has said that we can plant anything that we want--as long as it is Fescue Grass. In other words, we are very limited in the changes that we can make.

He understands that the Parks & Recreation Department would like the No-Mow Area to be a "savannah" with Oak Trees and Fescue Grass. Unfortunately, many ugly plants that we call weeds have moved in. The area is far from a perfect savannah.

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.

Signs of Progress: Ugly Weeds Disappear

With this goal, volunteers can see that we are making progress. We can see the progress as ugly plants (weeds) disappear. Seeing progress motivates volunteers to keep going.

Some signs of progress so far:

- We have removed almost all of the Purslane, an ugly weed
- We have pulled many Canada Thistles. Very few Thistles are visible.
- We have removed Horse Tail weeds. None are visible.

We are making progress against Common Ragweed. Jerry is working to remove Common Ragweed from an area close to Merriam Lane. He is not waiting for the next fall maintenance event. Volunteers at the October event can continue with the work that he has started.

Signs of Progress: More Nice Plants Appear

Jerry Clendenin is planting Fescue Grass in places where he has removed Ragweed. Fescue Grass is a nice-looking plant.

Besides planting grass, there are other tactics that we can use. We can allow some wild plants that are nice-looking plants to grow, at least for now.

There is Tall Goldenrod in the No-Mow Area. Many people consider Tall Goldenrod to be a nice-looking plant. They plant Goldenrod in their home gardens. Plants compete

for space and resources. Where the Goldenrod is growing, other ugly plants (weeds) will not grow. The Goldenrod can “hold the fort” against invading ugly weeds.

Signs of Progress: Larger Areas Covered with Nice Plants

Volunteers can also see progress when more of the No-Mow area is occupied by nice-looking plants. We can see a march to victory square foot by square foot.

As more and more square feet are cleared of ugly weeds, the entire No-Mow Area looks better.

Suggested Activities for the Fall Maintenance Event

At the August 16 meeting, we set a tentative date for the fall maintenance event. We plan to do maintenance on October 8.

To prepare for the fall maintenance event, we can use flyers to find new people to volunteer. It is a way to recruit members for Union Park District Council.

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

There are a few tasks that we might do at the maintenance event.

- Remove Ragweed from the area near Merriam Lane.
- 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.

I suggest that we view and consider Riverbank Grape vines. Many vines are growing. The vines are not bad looking. However, the vines are overrunning some areas of the No-Mow Area. I suggest that we thin out the Grape Vines.

We can ask the Parks & Recreation Department if they want to cut down “weed trees.” If they cut down weed trees, volunteers will remove the brush. This activity usually requires a truck or some vehicle to haul away the brush.

Other Updates/Ideas

Broken Basketball Hoops

The basketball hoops are broken at both Aldine Park and also at Merriam Park. Saint Paul Parks & Recreation is over burdened with repair work. We decided to discuss when to request repairs at a later meeting.

Motion to Adjourn

We adjourned at 8:30 p.m.