**Neighbors of Belknap Lookout Board Meeting**

**Monday October 12, 2020**

**Zoom**

**6:30 pm**

**Mission**: To advocate for and enhance the quality of life in the Belknap community.

**Vision**: To be a vibrant, diverse and desirable place to live in Grand Rapids.

**Public Space Goals**: Improving access down Belknap hill; Hastings Connector & Linear Park;   
Better Pedestrian Connections.

**Add’l Priorities**: Social Connections; Active in the Neighborhood; Voices Heard in Local Gov’t.

1. Call to order and additions to agenda
2. Approval of September minutes and financials
3. Discussion on Development Committee composition
4. Discussion on Long Term Financial Picture, Preliminary Pivot Needs
5. Miscellaneous & Public Comment
6. Adjournment

**2020 Board Meeting Schedule, 2nd MONDAY of each month, 6:30 pm**

No Meeting November 9 – Request your ballot by Oct 23; Return ASAP; Counted Nov 9

December 14 (Old board/new board discussion)

**Other NOBL Activities you may choose to attend this month:**

**Wednesday October 14** - [Clear Vegetation at 545 College](https://www.facebook.com/events/723250201739801) - 5:30 pm. Help clear vegetation on the top of the hill north of 545 College before it slopes down to the railroad tracks. Bring your own mask and gloves, and do your best to maintain 6 foot distance from volunteers from other households.  
  
**Wednesday October 21**- [Social Distanced Picnic](https://www.facebook.com/events/334644747437235/?acontext=%7B%22action_history%22%3A%5b%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%2C%22mechanism%22%3A%22page_admin_bar%22%2C%22extra_data%22%3A%22%7B%5C%22page_id%5C%22%3A754605901379779%7D%22%7D%2C%7B%22surface%22%3A%22events_admin_tool%22%2C%22mechanism%22%3A%22events_admin_tool%22%2C%22extra_data%22%3A%22%5b%5d%22%7D%5d%2C%22has_source%22%3Atrue%7D) - 6 pm at Coit Park across from Newberry Place- As always, determine what risk level you are comfortable with and determine what safety precautions you will use. Once again please bring your own food and maintain a 6 foot distance between families.  
  
**Wednesday October 28** - [Master Plan Discussion (Chapters 10-12)](https://www.facebook.com/events/2769372736677340/) - 6:30 pm. We want YOU to define what Grand Rapids should look like in 20 years. Read ([online](https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Directory/Programs-and-Initiatives/Master-Plan/Full-Plan) or contact us for a hard copy), reflect, and recommend: How should the next process happen; what areas of inquiry should be the same, different?  
Join us at [http://meet.google.com/uni-wiek-oij](https://meet.google.com/uni-wiek-oij?fbclid=IwAR1NLQ1ll6VxwQ0ALKVcgofcnROkrH9A1usEhdvwVhicHEzUX03y1iAoHDQ). Can't make it? Contact us for alternatives.

* Please see last week’s mass email for other community input opportunities!

Neighbors of Belknap Lookout Board Meeting Minutes

**Monday, September 14, 2020**

**Video Conference via Zoom**

**Members Present:** Loren Sturrus (President) Robin Benton Loretta Klimaszewski Dean Rosendall Kara Harrison Gates Dan Miller (Recorder) Jonathan Swets

**Members Absent:** Amy Gautraud Brian Bremer

**Staff Present:** Elianna Bootzin

**Guests Present:** Cassidy Cvanciger (representing State Farm Insurance)

Chris Swank (representing GVSU)

1. Loren called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.
2. Cassidy (State Farm Agent) explained that she is seeking office space at the Gateway building at 215 Hastings, NE. She asked for support from NOBL for her request for a special land use permit. The Board voted to write a letter of support to the Planning Commission. Elianna will draft the letter and circulate to officers for approval.
3. The Board discussed the August Financial Reports and Minutes.
   1. Elianna summarized the Financials Reports, and noted a recent reimbursement.
   2. Loren elaborated that Terry Morris has gone over the budgeted amount for the Highland Park clean up, but he is doing a terrific job which the City Parks Department should be doing.
   3. Elianna shared details of the Parks Department’s recent operational challenges.
   4. Elianna will prepare a communication to various related parties (City [Parks, Mayor], Railroad, etc.) to request stronger support, including information about the volume of discarded needles.
   5. **The Board approved the Minutes and Financials Reports.**
4. The Board received a brief update about the Coit Square project.
   1. Kara reported that the Development Committee will meet on Wednesday to consider changes made to the project in response to suggestions from the last Development Committee meeting. The project consists of three-story brick courtyard style apartment building with 52 affordable one- and two-bedrooms units. It will be located on Coit Street directly opposite Coit School. The affordability of the units will be ensured by deed restrictions for 45 years. Applicants for the units will have to provide income information and affordability will defined as a rental for people making 30-80% of the area median income. The property will be managed by KMG Prestige Inc. of Mount Pleasant.
   2. Loren asked that KMG provide information about affordable properties it is already managing so that the Board can evaluate the quality of its management. He asked if all of the units would be priced affordably.
   3. Can the development provide mixed housing (various incomes)? The State definition of “affordable” is for people making up to 80% of the area median income.
   4. Is there a racial impact study? MSHDA will order a market study based on HUD evaluation of income and Fair Market Rate for this area.
   5. Is market rate an adequate surrogate for racial inequality? 57% of residents in the Belknap Lookout Neighborhood qualify for below market rate housing. Attracting new residents who have jobs should reduce the crime rate.
   6. Are the GVSU low income apartments being built? The project is still waiting on financing from the State (low income housing tax credit). Decision expected Nov.
   7. Can NOBL pressure the State to approve the project? No (standardized).
5. The Board discussed the annual meeting.
   1. Elianna requested a motion to approve the verbiage from the August meeting clarifying how the election of new Board members would be conducted in light of the need to meet remotely. **Approval was motioned and passed:**

In order to ensure compliance with the NOBL bylaws, the following is proposed to be accepted as an official amendment if needed at the September 2020 board meeting, having been shared the month prior in accordance with revision requirements.   
  
Part IV A is understood to include the options of a mail in ballot and/or virtual meeting. Part C is understood to include a deadline of sixty (60) days notice for individuals interested in serving on the Board to notify the nominating committee in the event of the mail in and virtual meeting options. Similarly, should the committee propose a slate of candidates for a mail in ballot, space will be provided for write in candidates at a minimum, or they may indicate all candidates with their selections emphasized.

* 1. In order to ensure both a secret ballot and collection of neighbors’ contact information, neighbors will be prompted by the mailed annual meeting invitation postcard to request a ballot by email or phone. No ballots will be sent pre-emptively.
  2. We will announce the winners in the written publication that will be distributed after the usual meeting date to the people who requested ballots. We assigned articles for various neighborhood news and announcements, 40th anniversary/accomplishments, and info on other upcoming public meetings.

1. Loretta will describe the Feral Cat project.
2. Jon will write a paragraph on the Community Garden.
3. Elianna will ask Amy to write about the trash cans.
4. Dean will write something about the project to put lights on the stairways.
5. Loren will cover the aspiration of expanding access to high speed internet. Robin noted that some media companies have unused bandwidth which they could provide at little or no cost.
6. Robin will write about the Racial Equity committee with potential inclusion of the Grand Rapids Institute for African American Health. The Governor has identified racism as a “public health crisis” so linking with their work would be beneficial. He submitted a response to the City’s RFP for equity training.
7. Dan will announce the winning candidates after the elections. Candidates thus far include Ayanfe who works for New City Neighbors, Ashley, and Chris. Dean may run again. Chris is willing to step aside for a Coit Church rep.
8. The Board discussed ways to provide more housing for low income residents.
   1. Robin would like to see NOBL promote “tiny houses” for poor people and people of color. He noted that they can qualify for VHA funding. A small house built on the southeast side of Grand Rapids sold for $140,000. Ironically, it was purchased by someone from outside the community.
   2. Dean said that much could be done to alleviate the shortage of affordable housing if developers were permitted to place manufactured homes and trailers. Unfortunately, the City building codes are too strict. They require a permanent foundation for every home built in the City and they require a high “R rating” for insulation which makes it impossible to make use of most manufactured homes and trailers.
   3. Elianna suggested that we could bring that issue up in the master plan discussion.
   4. Kara noted that tiny houses are not economically practical, they are very costly on a square foot basis. The Coit project by contrast is much more affordable because a large apartment building makes use of economies of scale.
9. The Board discussed progress in developing the neighborhood’s public spaces.
   1. Loretta will connect with Jon then follow up with Elianna about whether to pursue a tree minigrant to Friends of Grand Rapids Parks. (She would like to see “unusual” trees such as sour cherry trees. Loren suggested they consider Paw Paws.)
10. The Board approved the FY2020 budget for the PILOT allocation without discussion.
11. The Board opened the meeting to public comment and miscellaneous topics.
    1. Loretta said that the owner of the plating company would like a sign for the Feral Cat program. He cares for several cats which he makes sure have been spayed. The City recently paved the alley where the cats stay and he wants to alert drivers to their presence. Loretta noted that NOBL provides him with cat food.
    2. Regarding public safety and recent shootings, ideas raised include neighborhood watch signs (the City is reluctant to put up more signs due to maintenance issues but Silent Observer clings might be available); cameras on the NOBL building, at the Community Garden and in the dumping area at More and North; and Cure Violence (an approach using public health methods). Robin noted we did not receive our promised Pitch Night funds. Elianna will follow up.
    3. Robin wants to “defund” the police meaning he would like to see some of their budget redirected to community-based services that would address the roots of the violence. He also noted that a neighbor on his block has fired his gun at people several times but the police have not responded to Robin’s complaints about it.
    4. Loretta said she wants to “demilitarize” the police. The City budget requires that a minimum of 32% go to the Police. Currently they receive 39% of the budget. She would like to see their funding reduced to the lower level.
    5. “If we got some of that money from the City, what would we do with it?” Jobs for people in the neighborhood.
    6. Robin recalled that Akbar of C3 Industries promised to hire as many as 25 local residents at a living wage to work in his marijuana dispensary but his project was blocked due to the youth program at the Griffins Ice Rink across the street. He also noted that the demographics of the Belknap Lookout neighborhood is changing as rising housing prices are driving out people of color. The key he said is to help them become homeowners.
    7. Loren noted that GVSU cannot prohibit students from moving into their new affordable housing but NOBL could make sure that neighbors are apprised of the opportunity to apply for affordable housing. We can also advertise jobs which come with free college tuition.
    8. Robin said he has some of the items posted on the Racial Equity website.
    9. Loretta suggested that lots of poor people don’t know how to apply for those opportunities. She had help filling out forms to get into college when she was young, and many people today need the same sort of assistance. The City’s Our Community’s Children department offers this kind of help through the T2C Studio at GRPL. We will promote their current options as well as the new Essential Workers Free College Education program people can apply for.
12. Loren adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Daniel Miller

**Meeting Information:**

1. **Approval of September minutes and financials** – Notes on financials: Although the affordable housing unit shows a profit, it’s probably time to contextualize that the mortgage payment is applied against liability and so the program is in fact cash flow negative. We are on the downhill slope though and should finish paying off next year. We have finished spending down our Census grant, received 2019, and are similarly spending down on the PILOT funds received that year which together drive the apparent loss on Neighborhood Leadership. We will put the “unspecified” wage and tax expenses in the appropriate categories at year end.
2. **Discussion on Development Committee composition** – We’ve been lucky to have several newly or re-engaged residents join the Development Committee over this spring and summer. These circumstances led the group to a snap decision to expand the committee; it previously had a defined number of members. It’s my impression that many committee members feel we’ve mis-stepped by doing so as the larger size is challenging. The entire committee has been alerted to this discussion. Loren and Elianna would like the board’s assistance in determining next steps.

In general, it sounds like there’s support to reduce the number of members overall (to 9, likely) and to reduce the number of board members who sit on it (opinions vary on whether the limit should be 1, 2 or 3). One idea to determine who continues would be those willing to take the MSU Extension Citizen Planner course (self paced, online, paid by NOBL). Another idea raised was to consider geographic targets (a lot of participants live on Fairview). It’s been pointed out that we need to continue to consider the influence of [apparent] conflicts of interest as well.

Alan Otis has submitted the following for your consideration as well:

There is an 800 pound gorilla in the room that few seem willing to acknowledge. That gorilla is that there is a group of resident capitalists who appear to have substantial influence on the NOBL board.

These resident capitalists previously had control of the Development Committee. They have over time lost that control. It is not for a lack of trying, as new members who can be assumed loyal to a developer, in particular, have been added, creating an ‘arms race’. As a result, I expect that developer is deeply involved in the effort to reformat the committee.

Regardless of the weakness of the NOBL board approved conflict of interest policy, the board needs to be very careful that there is neither a conflict of interest, nor the appearance of one, in its processes.

One means to avoid conflicts of interest is to have a committed spirit of democracy in the process. That means broader neighborhood involvement...beyond the NOBL board. Therefore, it makes sense there only be 1 NOBL board member on the Development Committee, acting as a liaison to the NOBL board (I am told this is how the Development Committee was first configured). This will also help negate the possibility of a quid pro quo amongst the resident capitalists on the Development Committee.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it makes sense, then, for that one NOBL board member on the Development Committee not be one of the resident capitalists. This would further protect against attempts to control the process for any one’s economic gain.

**Would the board like to codify any of these suggestions to ensure the Development Committee effectively fulfills its purpose of recommending appropriate projects to the board for consideration of support for their public hearings? Seek more information or recommend a process to reach a conclusion? What is a reasonable timeline for implementation?**

1. **Discussion on Long Term Financial Picture, Preliminary Pivot Needs** – Robin and Elianna have started thinking ahead a little bit to the strategic planning conversation we should all have together next year. Today we’d like to introduce a piece of the puzzle related to opportunities and threats, two components of the acronym SWOT analaysis.

First, we are going to have the opportunity to think outside our usual box. At this point we just want to reiterate that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars have focused our programming on public safety and neighborhood leadership (which often means code compliance but also encompasses the activities of the development committee). As identified in our last strategic planning process, we are also working towards improving access down Belknap hill; Hastings Connector & Linear Park; and better pedestrian connections. Finally, the engagement opportunities we choose tend to promote social connections; being active in the Neighborhood; and having voices heard in local government.

But there could be a very big threat coming. We are at risk of losing our CDBG funds (which is our largest source of operating dollars) as the neighborhood gentrifies and no longer qualifies as majority low income. This demographic shift is likely to register after either the 2020 or 2030 Census. In terms of calendar cycles, we are likely to know around January of the year the change takes effect (when we would normally apply for our next grant round) and have until the end of June to complete the prior contract. Afterwards, based on our unrestricted funds, I estimate we would have 3-4 months to drastically reduce expenses (reduce/eliminate staff) and increase income (derive additional revenue from the main floor of our building). The former involves determining what activities/expenses must be retained; I believe we can table this aspect for now.

Changing the **use of the building** is more complicated. When it was donated to us, Bob Roosenberg stipulated in the deed that it must be used for a public benefit. The goal today is to prepare to contact him to learn what is acceptable. An open ended question is certainly possible. We could simply list some categories. But if we have particular uses in mind it might be beneficial to ask about them specifically. **Which approach does the board prefer? If the latter, shall we brainstorm, rule out any that aren’t feasible, flag others for further research, and ask about both the research list and the easy to implement list?**

Alternatively, we can use this likely upcoming major shift as an opportunity to seek alternate funding sources and actually grow. As a teaser, Elianna can imagine a possible 5 person team – a policy person/city liaison, a financial person, a handyperson, a people person (likely social worker) and an executive director. Robin similarly sees fleshing out the Racial Equity team with a three intern structure – one each for grants, research, and providing open hours.

As a first step, we should include a fundraising message in our annual “meeting”. If we are successful with our request to the Nonprofit Technical Assistance Fund for the Undoing Racism Workshop, it will be to raise the remaining dollars for that training. If not, **what would you find most motivating: capacity building, start funds for Racial Equity, paying off the mortgage for the minisplit or something else?**

**Regular Report Contents (crime map not available, site down):**

**Public Safety:** More shots have been fired near Lookout Park. Elianna is planning a meet and greet with community officers for later this month.

**Development:** The SLU application has been submitted for State Farm and Elianna has provided our letter of support. The Development Committee does not recommend the project on the 600 block of Coit to the board. The Master Plan discussion was fruitful; you’re welcome to attend the next (4th Wed). Third Coast finally got LIHTC funding for the mixed-income apartments behind Finkelstein Hall!

**Parking lot:** 712 North, office signage, the trash can at L&L, bike trail.

**Previous action items updates:**

* Annual “Meeting” postcard is printing; should drop Oct 14. Ballot requests due 23rd.
* Elianna has sent Belknap hill text to engineering for review for 2 pg fundraising letter.
* Tree minigrant would be in spring; waiting on FGRP response on fruit trees.
* The City/County public wifi is probably going in Belknap Park .
* Elianna is working on drafting the Highland Park letter; she was able to meet with the Homeless Outreach Team which should help.
* Elianna has ordered security cameras for the office, the garden and 712 North.

**Other organization updates:**

* Elianna attended a meeting with GRPD Deputy Chief Kiddle and has asked to participate in the team implementing the transition to neighborhood based policing.
* Dumpster Day was a bit lower attended but still quite popular. Thanks Dan for helping!
* Leadership for the Racial Equity Committee is beginning discussions to resume work.
* Reported CDBG metrics:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Public Safety** | **Goal** | **Q1** | **Leadership** | **Goal** | **Q1** |
| Home Safety Training | 92 | 100 | Leadership Training | 43 | 22 |
| # Feeling Safer | 69 | 4 | # Increased Knowledge | 32 | 3 |
| # Improvements | 4 | 0 | # Joined Board/Committee | 15 | 4 |
| Public Safety Training | 60 | 0 | # Improved Nhood | 185 | 89 |
| #Safety Installed | 1 | 0 | Owners Contacted | 35 | 2 |
| Safety Issues ID’ed | 4 | 1 | # Owners Self-Compliant | 15 | 1 |
| # Issues Resolved | 4 | 1 |  |  |  |

**Other City Info:**

* Bike Share rpt - see [North Quarter CID packet](http://grandrapidscitymi.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=4391) from Sept