

Neighbors of Belknap Lookout Board Meeting

Monday March 8, 2020

6:30 pm on Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84768261679?pwd=dURQczVTcFlzMCt5Z3FScFh6MkhpZz09>

Need to connect by phone? Dial by your location

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 847 6826 1679

Passcode: 192712

2018-2021 Statements

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.

Agenda

1. Call to order, introductions, and additions to agenda 5
2. Strategic Plan Work Session
 - a. Community Standards 5
 - b. Mission/Vision/Values Discussion & Adoption 20
 - c. Critical Issues Brainstorming 10
3. Board Items
 - a. Approve February Minutes 5
 - b. Vacant position(s) 10
4. Administrative Items
 - a. Project Updates: Trash/Social Worker 5
5. 719 Prospect / Lafayette and Fairbanks Apartments
6. Miscellaneous & Public Comment
7. Adjournment

2021 Board Meeting Schedule, 2nd MONDAY of each month, 6:30 pm, SAME LOG IN ABOVE

Apr 12, 2021 06:30 PM

May 10, 2021 06:30 PM

Jun 14, 2021 06:30 PM

Jul 12, 2021 06:30 PM (may cancel)

Aug 9, 2021 06:30 PM

Sep 13, 2021 06:30 PM

Oct 11, 2021 06:30 PM

Nov 8, 2021 06:30 PM (may not accommodate online if at Coit Elementary)

Dec 13, 2021 06:30 PM

Meeting Details

1. Call to order, introductions, and additions to agenda
2. Strategic Plan Work Session
 - a. Community Standards – how we agreed to work together in our sessions
 - When there is a disagreement acknowledge the other’s viewpoint by restating what you believe they are saying
 - Be considerate
 - No attacks
 - Be constructive
 - Assume good intent
 - Check your privilege
 - Bring to the table the point of view of those who are not represented
 - Allow for leaning/be aware of your own triggers
 - Step away if you need to
 - Lean in if you tend to speak less, lean back if you tend to speak more.
 - b. Mission/Vision/Values Discussion & Adoption

We got off to a great start on strategic planning with two in depth sessions.

Our first session concluded that who we should be advocating for most is Residents as primary with emphasis on low income

Our second session yielded draft mission/vision/values which we aim to revise and finalize tonight:

Mission: To empower residents of the Belknap neighborhood to identify their interests, support their own well being, and enable community growth.

(Dan noted: “enable community growth” sounds somewhat vague to me. Is there a way to clarify what community growth looks like? To better articulate growth, Sondra offers:)

To work alongside residents of the Belknap/Lookout neighborhood to identify and articulate their interests, to support their individual well-being, and to facilitate community health and prosperity. (or “neighborhood” health and prosperity)

Vision: NOBL seeks to lift up the Voices of Neighbors by advocating and capacity building while maintaining accountability as a collaborator for justice

(Robin sought to further clarify: issues that are important to our neighbors / affect our community / members. To include that aspect, Sondra offers:)

NOBL seeks to maintain our accountability as a collaborator for justice by capacity-building and lifting up our neighbors' voices, advocating for issues that affect our community and are important to them.

Elianna wants to play with verb tense:

NOBL is seen as an accountable collaborator for justice, having built capacity and elevated our neighbors' voices so they effectively advocate for the issues they care about that impact our community.

Values (edits here are primarily for verb phrase construction):

Accountable: We are a transparent organization that builds trust through our actions.

Sondra offers: Improving our transparency as an organization and building trust through our actions.

Elianna suggests "earning" trust

Representative: NOBL intentionally lifts up the voices of the traditionally silenced on issues that affect our community and commits to represent the diversity of our neighborhood.

Sondra offers: Intentionally lifting up the voices of the traditionally-silenced on issues that affect our community and commit to represent the diversity of our neighborhood.

Elianna suggests "accurately representing"

Justice: NOBL is committed to social and racial justice and empowers the people that live in our neighborhood.

Sondra offers: Living out our commitment to social and racial justice by working with and on behalf of the people who live in our neighborhood

Elianna realizes: by sharing power with(!)

Community: Increasing the community's mobility, accessibility and resilience, building a sense of connectedness and facilitating meaningful relationships between neighbors.

- c. Critical Issues (brainstorming – we won't make conclusions tonight but will record the initial thoughts members have had for further discussion in our March strategic planning sessions)
 - What programs need expanded?
 - What programs or services need to be removed

- Look at funding sources and stability
 - Staff needs/capacity
3. Board Items
- a. Approve February Minutes (see below)
 - b. Vacant position(s)

Dan would like to nominate Lois Williams (corner of Bradford and Coit) for Jon's seat. The Executive Committee needs to sign off, then the board can vote to put her in either a 1 or 2 year appointment. Lois has been attentive to neighborhood needs around traffic, beautification, and social connections. She participated in the knitting group we tried in 2018. She regularly shares information that can be directed to 311. She organized her exercise group to weed the Lookout Park flower beds this summer.

Missy's second consecutive unexcused absence would actually be today. If she does not make the meeting or send a notification, then she is also off the board. If she does attend and someone feels it is in the organization's best interest to remove her from the board, based on the bylaws the procedure is to make a motion now and allow her to mount a defense in April before the question can be called. It would need 7 votes to pass.

Other names can be brought forward for vetting by the Executive Committee if desired.

4. Administrative Items
- a. Project Updates: Trash/Social Worker

Trash cans: We still have 11 cans we have arranged to be placed around the neighborhood being tended by volunteers (we've had a hard time determining whether/which of the City's contracted entities might have taken over the one by the new shelter at Leonard and College). Elianna submitted comment to both MobileGR and the Rapid encouraging those entities to take up greater responsibility around cleanliness of bus stops including trash removal. They were receptive to the value to the community but it seems unlikely to gain sufficient traction financially for the next fiscal year.

Social Worker: Based on reports received through March 4, the social worker has completed 10 of 60 outreach calls and 3 of 24 sessions with neighbors. We have also provided postcard outreach for this project directly to residents of the 600 block of Coit. We are also attempting to collect contact information for Creston Plaza residents in conjunction with a hard copy, postage paid version of the activity survey for strategic planning. Those contacts will be referred to her as well.

5. 719 Prospect / Lafayette and Fairbanks Apartments (7:30 pm)
- The Development Committee has seen this project three times and at its March meeting recommended the project for support by the NOBL board with the various notes made that evening.

November notes: <https://www.belknaplookout.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/November.docx>

February notes: <https://www.belknaplookout.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/feb-notes.docx>

March notes: <https://www.belknaplookout.org/march/>

As highlighted in hard copy outreach to nearby residents, the project includes:

- 2,000-5,000 square feet retail/commercial
- Up to 156 residential units (75% 1 bed, 12% 2 bed, 13% 3 bed)
- 100-130 underground parking spaces, 15-30 above grade
- Outdoor seating, patio/grill, outdoor pergola, bike racks

Particularly relevant to the next step of completing their purchase of 719 Prospect from the State Land Bank with our approval, RJM has agreed to write 4 affordable units (including at least one 2 bedroom unit) for a period of at least 15 years into the deed like they are doing across from the office with the Housing Commission.

They will also need Planning Commission approval, and plan to request that the City vacate the alley partway up Lafayette.

We received a neighbor communication regarding the alley specifically:

“My name is Jean Jilote. My husband, Gerardo and I, own and live with our family at 714 Lafayette Ave Ne and have since 1995. Last night at the development meeting we saw the plans for the development around our home for the first time. We are concerned about the plans for the alley along the south side of our home. As we understand, the city is going to be asked to vacate the alley for the development. The alley is the only way to access our driveway. Even if we get half of the width of the alley we will not have enough room to drive a vehicle to get to our driveway. We are asking that before you approve this development you consider this and help us fix this problem while as a neighborhood we still can. Gerardo and I would ask that either we be able to possess the entire width of the alley that runs the full length of our property or the alley not be vacated by the city.

“Thank you for this consideration and your willingness to serve on the NOBL board.”

RJM and its architect responded to the March Development Committee requests to ensure access to the Jilote’s property is maintained by noting adjustments on the presentation. Those changes should be reflected in what you see this evening.

6. Miscellaneous & Public Comment
7. Adjournment

Neighbors of Belknap Lookout Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 8, 2021, Zoom Meeting

Members Present: Kara Harrison Gates (Chair) Robin Benton Loren Sturuss
Dan Miller (Secretary) Ellie Walborn-Henry (Vice Chair)
Ayanfe Jamison

Members Absent: Missy Brown Amy Gautraud

Staff Present: Elianna Bootzin (Executive Director)

Guests Present: Ryan Kilpatrick (Housing Next) Chris Swank (GVSU)
Dana Knight Jean Jilote

1. Kara called the meeting to order at 6:39 pm.
2. Kara and Ellie outlined the Strategic Planning Meetings (see NOBL Board Materials for rationale and overview of the planning process)
 - a. Kara: Strategic Planning will allow NOBL to be proactive instead of just reactive.
 - b. Dan: We will practice using “five finger voting” to assess agreement.
 - c. Robin: We should look at the Sociocracy model to reach decisions afterwards.
 - d. Elianna will send out a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) survey prior to the meetings to help focus the discussion of NOBL’s objectives.
 - e. Ellie: When we have clarified NOBL’s values and mission, we will evaluate NOBL current or prospective programs according to whether they are consistent with NOBL’s mission and whether they make a financial contribution to the organization. The Strategic Plan will employ SMART (Strategic, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time Limited) Goals to evaluate the success of projects each year.
 - f. The Board agreed to hold the Strategic Planning meetings on February 20 and 21 from 1 to 3:30pm and March 20 and 21 from 1 to 3:30pm.
3. Ryan offered an overview of the housing issues confronting Grand Rapids.
 - a. He was contracted by both the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County to quantify the deficit—not enough units and not enough affordably priced units—for renters and homeowners.
 - b. The City needs 5340 additional rental units and 3548 additional homeowner units to supply the demand expected by 2025.
 - c. Certain parts of the City are seeing a rise in prices above what many residents can pay. Half of current renters in the City spend more than 30% of their income for housing and 19% of current owners spend more than 30%. In the County 18% of renters spend more than 30% on housing and more than 40% of homeowners spend more than 40%.
 - d. The City would like community input before making zoning changes to the Master Plan to address the housing shortage and the price increases.
 - e. Newcomers to the City are able to pay higher prices than current residents which means they get the available rental and homeowner units in preference to current residents.

f. His organization wants to promote home ownership among people of color. He would like neighborhood organizations to build popular support for that project and provide guidance to developers and hold them accountable to fulfill those goals.

g. How can we support more homes?

- 1) Preserve existing homes by making sure owners—especially people of color—have access to capital to maintain and upgrade properties or replace them with more and more affordable housing units.
- 2) Create “Gap Financing” to enable developers to build more affordable units. Require all developers who take advantage of tax breaks and subsidies to provide some affordable housing in their projects.
- 3) Allow more housing in every neighborhood in consultation with neighborhood associations so people already there won’t be forced to move for lack of housing options.
- 4) Prioritize large developments along transportation corridors to provide access to services and avoid demolition of existing housing.
- 5) More housing in “high opportunity neighborhoods” such as Belknap Lookout.
- 6) Create opportunities for “wealth creation” not just through home ownership but through investment opportunities so local residents benefit from rising property values.
- 7) Promote access to capital for small, local, minority owned businesses.
- 8) Encourage the City to locate infrastructure improvements in targeted neighborhoods.

h. Discussion followed:

Robin: Has your organization or the City incorporated a racial impact study into the Master Plan or Zoning decisions?

Ryan made a note of the strategy and mentioned the City’s affordable housing fund. We need local input to see how receptive neighborhoods are to low income housing.

Robin: Will HUD & CDBG funding change under the new administration in Washington?

Ryan: The City is responsible to distribute CDBG funds from HUD. The proposed Stimulus Package will probably contain additional money to finance repairs to low income housing. The Housing Choice Voucher Program is designed to assist low income renters so they do not pay more than 30% of their income for housing.

Ellie: Families with Vouchers spend lots of time looking for available rentals. Can you help us to get “disaggregated data” about racial and ethnic disparities in rentals?

Ryan: Yes, we work with the Calvin University Social Research Center and the GVSU Johnson Center (thanks to WK Kellogg funding) to acquire data about localities. If NOBL has specific questions he can ask his partners to access appropriate data sets.

Robin: He wants to foreground neighborhood input, not just outsiders’ advice.

Ellie: How do ensure accountability to the neighborhood?

Ryan: Amplify GR has a community development agreement with the affected neighborhoods that might serve as a model. Ryan agrees that we should avoid a “top down model” where the project leaders just “check off boxes.”

Loren: The key issue is establishing a fund that developers can access so that they can allow current residents to stay. What have other cities done well or badly that we can learn from?

Ryan: In California and the East Coast the “solution” was just to build as much new housing as the market demanded. But the result was that most new housing was for high income buyers since they dominated the market. But in GR, 60% of jobs earn less than \$20/hour which doesn’t create a sustainable market for new housing since building costs are currently so high. We need to find a way to promote “Socially Responsible Development” that provides affordable housing where the rate of return to developers is low.

Robin: What about building multiple “Tiny Homes” on single properties like Seeds of Promise is doing in southeast GR?

Ryan: That could be one solution if that’s what the Belknap Lookout neighborhood wants. They work well with Community Land Trusts and Cooperative Communities.

Elianna: And something we can advocate for in the City’s master plan process this summer. What kind of relationship is Ryan looking for going forward?

Ryan: Learning what our goals are and how I can facilitate them going forward. (Data requests especially.)

4. The Board approved a motion to send a letter to the City Commission asking them to align GR with the Governor’s declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis.

5. The Board approved the Minutes of the January 11 meeting and the CDBG application for the coming year.

6. Elianna presented and the board approved a six month budget, noting:

a. Elianna: Housing repair notices will go out to neighbors where there are obvious structural problems that need attention.

b. An accountant will do a pro-bono preparation of the NOBL 990 due in May.

7. Miscellaneous & Public Comment: Chris: GVSU is putting up barrels in the vacant lot north of the Finkelstein Center to stop parking there in preparation for the construction of affordable housing there. He does not know when the construction will begin.

8. The meeting adjourned at 8:15.

Respectfully submitted, Daniel Miller, NOBL Board Secretary

Regular Report Contents

Public Safety - www.crimemapping.com last 4 weeks:

Development: The Development Committee is planning to write a letter expressing its disappointment in recent hearings to the Planning Commission and elected officials. It will finalize the letter next month as well as have Ryan Kilpatrick come speak.

