

**Little Bohemia Neighborhood Association
(Virtual) Meeting notes, March 2, 2021**

Meeting via ZOOM, 7:00 PM

Co-chaired by Brittney and Mike

Introductions! 18 participants, including guest speakers.

Commander Mollie Brodt from SPPD - Neighborhood Update and Questions. There've been a few more calls from Freedom House on the very coldest days. SPPD is working with them. Jury selection for the Chauvin trial begins on March 8. There will be protests and demonstrations. Officers will be out to protect individuals and freedom of speech. Destructive and violent behavior will not be tolerated. Critical infrastructure (hospitals, city buildings, etc.) will be protected. Several law-enforcement agencies are collaborating. Citizens are encouraged to stay vigilant, update security plans, report suspicious actions. Watch out for one another. Check the SPPD Twitter feed (@:sppd.mn) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/sppdmn>) for the latest news and updates.

Deputy Mayor Tincher - City's Response to Housing Crisis. Jaime Tincher and Darren Tobolt presented a slide show about the problem and current approaches to solutions. Jaime updated us on homeless encampments that have been closed and cleared, and noted that occupants have been offered city services (caseworkers, housing, outreach, etc.). Covid-19 pushed numbers of homeless people way up: we went from approximately 30-50 people living outside to a high of approximately 350 or so. Jaime described shelter spaces, medical responses, 'the hotel program,' quarantine spaces, and the loss of some public and shelter spaces with the coronavirus pandemic. Day spaces were particularly hard to find.

The former Bethesda Hospital is now housing 70 individuals, and it will go up to 100. These include couples that wish to stay together (some of them LGBTQ). Temporary shelters have been found and made available on Harriet Island and elsewhere. Indoor housing is available for people who want it. City staff are reaching out to provide transportation, medical services, nursing, de-escalation, referrals, and respite care. Residents of such housing have been prioritized for Covid vaccinations. The former fire station on West 7th is now being used for shelter.

Winter brought new challenges and problems as people increasingly used propane for heating (leading to more frequent fire calls). The City will continue to offer indoor housing, and close homeless encampments (some people will not move indoors until their encampments are closed). Our homeless citizens include men, women, children, and couples. The goal is to "make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring." Ramsey County needs more affordable housing units. Encampments are not an effective strategy: permanent housing is.

LBNA Gardening Coordination and Long-term Events for the 2021 Planting Season (Jen G.). Phase III of the planting project was set back last year because of Covid. We'll do that this year. The plan is to do the planting this coming fall, on at least two separate occasions, in small groups. We still need someone to take over the maintenance, and establish procedures for caring for the plants we've already sown. Some volunteer plots are flourishing; some are not, as their caretakers have moved away. Jen is prepared to take part in shared responsibilities, including MnDOT planning, but she does not have the bandwidth to do it all herself. Multiple volunteers

would be ideal. A meeting of various local gardening groups is tentatively suggested for late March, to share ideas and resources as well as coordinating between these groups. Unite our efforts! Jen will share more information with Brittney and Mike when she has it.

Darren asks about invasive burdock (*Arctium minus*) and buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*): what's happening with this along the Little Bohemia Trail? He's prepared to join a group to deal with the problem. Jen will discuss. Several other people are also concerned and would like to participate in taking these invasive plants out, especially on the steep hillside beside the bike path, from Duke Street to Saint Clair. Judy has been caring for the apple trees we planted, and would like to be on the 'burdock/buckthorn chopping posse' list. Tom has cleaned and is storing the tree-watering bags against future needs.'

We may work to schedule a separate 'neighborhood gardening' meeting for those who are interested. **If you are interested in being a part of the Neighborhood Gardening Team please contact us at info@littlebohemiastpaul.org**

Burger King 244 Grand Ave, St Paul, MN 55102 - What do we envision for this space? Emily Northey from the West 7th Federation joins us for this discussion. Repurpose the building? Redevelop it? Can we get height restrictions? (We absolutely do *NOT* want a high-rise apartment building.) How about making it part of the park - that is, greenspace? MnDOT owns some of the parking lot and existing greenspace, while Burger King owns other parts. It's a strangely-plotted area and ownership of the property is not always clear.

Mike reached out to Rebecca Noecker, our City Council member, and the City was not (then) aware it had closed. The City knows now!

We don't want another development like the Bonfe's site. Another restaurant (Thai?) would be great. Underground parking is not an option, and developers need to know that. There was some frustration expressed at the City's willingness to grant parking variances in order to add to the tax base. What plans, if any, does the City have? Mike and Brittney will check and see. Marit is concerned that it may be left vacant for a long time, with all the challenges that brings: unshoveled sidewalks, sketchy people loitering, etc. Do we need to focus some attention on reporting ('excessive consumption of services') on this site to the City? Commander Brodt encourages us to call the City's 'nuisance' number, 266-8989, and report problems.

Emily suggests that we talk to City employees (not just Councilmember Noecker, but the permitting people, economic development and planning, etc.) and the property owners about our concerns. Don't stay quiet. Also, we should put something positive up on the LBNA web site about what we want to see, so that if some developer is doing a casual search, they might find that another restaurant would be popular and easy (and a multi-story apartment building would be unpopular and difficult).

In passing, Emily noted that the other West 7th BK site (at 35E) is *not* currently for sale.

Housing update. 47 Douglas: redevelopment plans, responding to the RFP, are being accepted now. Three proposals have been received to date. Brittney talked to Joe at the City, and it's not

clear how long it'll be until we know more. Tom has heard that Historic St. Paul, which has put in one of those proposals, expects to hear the status of their proposal by the end of March 2021. Emily notes that a local group is looking for a spot on behalf of Allina Health where people who have been prescribed gardening as therapy might cultivate. They need access to soil, also water. How about the bike path? How about the field along Western Avenue behind Journeys School? (The current school staff are receptive, but the St. Paul Public Schools would have to sign off on it.) They might get metered water from the School? A school food garden? Sarah has heard that perhaps someone is considering some Salvation Army property on Forbes for a community garden.

Current problem properties/safety concerns. Things are pretty quiet right now, thankfully.

Remember to call 266-8989, and report nuisance properties to the City!

The next LBNA business meeting will be May 4, 2021, via ZOOM. Send agenda ideas to info@littlebohemiastpaul.org.

If you find glaring errors in these notes, please send corrections to dwsisk@gmail.com.