

DRAFT

Saint Anthony Park Community Council Environment Committee Meeting Minutes

September 22, 2021

Members present: Michael Russelle, Betty Wheeler, Lisa Habeck, Manu Junemann, Rennie Gaither, Stephen Mastey

Guest: John Boyt (SAP resident and English teacher at Johnson Aerospace and Engineering HS)

Introductions and Land Acknowledgement (Lisa)

After changing name spelling to correct Rennie and to add a last name to Liz Hixson, a motion was made by Stephen to approve the minutes from August, 2021. Rennie seconded, and there was unanimous approval.

Michael informed the committee that Gordon Murdock had resigned from the Environment Committee. No vote necessary for a resignation.

Michael also informed the committee that 2 proposals had been submitted to the SAP Community Foundation, one to secure funds for Chimney Swift habitat and the other for funding to increase the amount available to pay an artist for Public Art in the new park. Awaiting the decision of the Foundation.

Chimney Swift Update: John Boyt

John provided a history of Chimney Swift habitat in the neighborhood and his involvement. There was a tower built by an Eagle Scout on Larpenteur, but John has not seen Swifts there lately. There was a chimney at SAP Elementary that had very active Swifts (The Audubon Society even came to count them) but now the chimney is gone due to renovation at school.

Pre-Covid (2019) John was actively working with the principal, Dr. Karen Duke, parents and architect, John Seppanen to rebuild towers on Scudder and Como, by the school. Terra Firma said it would cost ≈ \$20,000 to build these towers as pictured. (Beautiful renderings by Seppanen) The St. Paul Public Schools facilities personnel presented many issues and seemed unwilling to allow a chimney swift tower to be built at the SAP Elementary School, at that time. John had all but given up, then read the article in the Bugle and was excited to see a resurgence of enthusiasm for the birds. Stephen Mastey said he has a neighbor, a recently retired professor, who would be a great resource for this project. He is a woodworker and bird enthusiast. The hope is to also get the science teachers on board for this project.

Previously, we discussed asking students from nearby schools, such as Avalon or Jennings, to help build the Chimney Swift Tower(s) the Foundation grant would fund. The new park could be a possible site and/or SAP Elementary per the drawings of John Seppanen.

Street Painting:

On Seal Street, adjacent to the newly installed sidewalk between Seal and Carleton - St Anthony Park residents are invited to participate in a community public art event on October 2nd with local artist, Kada Goalen (Rain date Oct 3 or 9) An AARP grant has provided funding for this. There is a link on the Council's website to sign up for shifts to participate.

PK Property Services: They have not replied to the letter from the SAPCC about excess salt near the West Kasota Pond. Now we will pursue a letter with DNR wetland code. Stephen will provide the code number for wetland protection.

Union Flats: Manu reports severe sanitation issues (clogged garbage chutes and trash on the grounds), dead trees, thefts, lack of mirrors to see street traffic when coming out of the parking garage. She has spoken with the management and they assure her a new maintenance tech is being hired, but has not seen evidence of action. Michael had taken our recommendation of a letter to the Executive Board about the lack of tree care at the site, but the Equity Committee and Board decided that a stronger letter is needed. In addition to sending it to Dominion, the letter will be sent to MN Dept of Health, City officials, and District Police.

New Park: We now have a planting plan and schedule for the park. Partially represented the ecotones we requested, but not as extensive as Stephen recommended.

Michael has heard there is more money for art, \$5100. This is still a small amount for public art. Liz Hixson will send the scope of proposal. The city will not have a say in the choice of artist; that is done by another City agency. Betty has compiled a list of Native American artists (about 200). We hope there is adequate recognition of Native Americans at the park, in addition to recognition of the Red River Oxcart Trail, RR, etc. If it takes too long for us to acquire additional funding for the public artist, we may need to consider applying it to the Wabash Ave Trail (Phase 2).

100 Tree Initiative:

October 9th is planting day. (Rennie has another planting conflict and will not be able to come). No rain date proposed. Some of the trees in the gravel beds died, as the weather was too hot. Bailey Nurseries will replace dead trees! Ben Shardlow had sent an email with a draft map and an updated inventory of the trees and their conditions. He is looking for feedback on defining appropriate trees for each site. Those trees that are alive but sustained significant damage can be planted at the Kasota Wetland complex and they should provide considerable benefits there. Stephen advised that the West Pond would likely have the best success for several reasons: it would not interfere with future restoration, that area is not part of the DNR, it has a steep denuded slope and trees would be helpful to prevent further erosion.

The plan is to get the trees and soak them in water for a couple of days then plant on the 10th or 11th. Rennie suggested using hydrogel for roots and making sure 5 gallons of water is available for each tree. Perhaps holes can be dug in advance at Kasota Pond. Michael will talk to Mike Smith, Leader of Scout Troop 17, to see if Scouts want to help plant. Manu will photograph the event if available.

There was a suggestion to offer the damaged trees for free to neighbors, but Michael expressed reticence. Giving partially dead trees to neighbors may not have a successful outcome.

2495 Kasota Avenue:

Michael provided a history of the site and some of the Committee's involvement with past efforts to develop it.

Now there is a proposal for a 64 unit 4-story housing development with 35 indoor parking stalls and 34 on a surface lot. This could be for student housing. At the Board meeting, Paul Abdo, the developer, said they did some borings and is not aware of the habitat effects. They do not appear interested in the fact there is no sidewalk. Abdo said he feels all of Kasota Ave will be developed into student housing. Stormwater management was a problem with the previous potential developers and we are not sure if Abdo has resolved it. Michael feels this could be an unhealthy place to live with dust, metals, the RR, vehicle emissions, etc. Manu commented that even very expensive apartments are being built right off of highways. Unless the developer needs to apply for variances, the SAPCC has no say.

Urban Agriculture in Ramsey County:

Twin Cities Community Agricultural Land Trust is working with Ramsey County residents to learn about their experiences with urban farms. What is their knowledge regarding urban agriculture? What revisions on codes are needed? Anywhere one lives or works in the community they are dealing with land ownership and land use issues. Looking for people to participate. Julia W is the contact for this.

Lastly, Manu wondered if anyone on the committee had noticed the burning smell the Saturday before (9/18) She called the fire Dept to Dominion, but by the time they arrived the smell had abated. Stephen showed the tire retreading business across from the Urban Growler and surmised the smell came from there. Michael suggested Manu could research air quality permits on the MPCA website to see if that business has one.