

University Neighborhood Partnership
Meeting Minutes
May 18, 2009

Members Present:

- Institutional Representatives: Scott Blair (ESF), Barbara Karper (LeMoyne), Beth Rougeux (SU), Sharon Sherman (Syracuse City – for Fernando Ortiz)
- Neighborhood/ Resident Representatives: Barbara Humphrey (WENA/ Westcott – East), Joe Russo (SEUNA/ Westcott – West), Mark Strodel (Sherman Park), Patrick Pfohl (Colvin), Norman Roth (Barry Park)
- Investor/ Property Owners: Hugh Gregg (Westcott – East), Paul Walsh (Westcott-West)
- Students: None
- Other: David Mankiewicz, Executive Director - Downtown Committee, Christina Merchant, Professor – SU, Amy Heim - student from Chris' class

Members Absent:

- Giselle Guadalupe (Student Rep – ESF), Alex (LeMoyne), Win Thurlow (Institutional Rep-Upstate), Student Reps

Guest Expert, Dave Mankiewicz re: Establishing a BID:

Do we need a BID?

DM:

Every model of a BID that he knows of is a business district. These are geographical districts. The Syracuse Downtown Committee established theirs in the '70s, but now have a NYS enabling act. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are established where a geographical area wants more services than the City normally supply. The following illustrate some of the different types:

- Construct an improvement, set up BID, pay off the capital project, BID goes away
- Operation and maintenance of capital projects.

Maintenance of downtown Syracuse: cut grass, shovel sidewalks, remove graffiti, and trash removal. In intensely used areas, the City doesn't provide enough service.

All: *What are we trying to do and why?*

In our situation, primarily residential and to "help property owners" maintain plowing of their property in light of the liability (property owner's) if someone slips and falls...could be sued.

DM:

Crouse- Marshall BID has a \$75,000 budget. Boundary line drawn...all within, pay assessment.

Must have a Board representing owners, tenants, and reps from City. Owners put together a budget, services needed, recommendations of priorities. Once budget is developed, assessment appears on taxpayers' bill as a "special assessment" charge. Everybody has to pay, is billed by the City, and there can be a lien against property for non-payment. Tax is assessed against all, including not-for-profits...and state/federal and active church properties do not pay.

BIDs eliminate “free rider” problem. Assessments are set based upon benefit owner receives. Example: snow plow contract with all properties running plow in front. Only beneficiaries, not ones unaffected by benefit. Only those assessed are to benefit, tied in with how much they benefit.

Crouse- Marshall BID: a formula developed, which can be changed, from the following data: tax pay or tax exempt; square footage; higher level of benefit in certain areas (central geographic location versus on the fringe). State has approved *ad valerium* where cents/assessed value can be used. Can pilot assessment and benefit in a portion of the “District.”

The process: Establish a BID...draw the geographic boundary. City will hold hearing, notifying all property owners, at which they can object and comment for 30 days after. For a BID to pass it must receive approval from 51% of property owners within the assessed district. Have to pay substantial legal fees (pro bono?) and mailing costs. Neighborhood organizations could contribute.

Need to “sell” to property owners. No members may have more than one-third representation on the Board. In Crouse-Marshall BID case, 75K budgeted as follows: 40K on personal to do trash removal...winter snow plow sidewalks...take care of plants...repair or replacement of street lights +; 20K security (part-time retired police officers); and small marketing amount. Budget is monitored by Exec Dir Downtown Committee through a cooperative agreement a small administrative fee is paid to the Downtown Committee. Crouse-Marshall has developed a reserve over time. .

How much is charged per linear foot? Uncertain of that figure

Original submission needs to include all that you are going to try to do within the BID. Can change assessment without engagement process. Mayor and City Council have to look at it.

Security: retired police officers from Syracuse Police Dept. Serious crime, Syracuse PD responds. Mostly deal with shoplifting, panhandling...and provide a “presence” through walking patrol officers. Usually straight time pay.

What entity takes on responsibility for initiating? Form an organization either 501(c) (3) non-promotion or 501 (c) (4) promotion. This group (UNP) could be the Board as a not-for-profit. Don’t have to be an organization to advocate for it...ask City to start the process.

The Plan: draw geographical boundary; determine what services; create realistic budget. John Gamage, Assessment Commissioner for City of Syracuse, can use a computer program he has to work a formula with us. Could have a “corridor” or special assessment area within a geographic boundary.

Key question: asking the City Corporate Counsel whether Article 19 envisions both residential and commercial districts or just commercial. Hugh Gregg recommends writing to NYS Attorney General for an opinion. Some discussion of whether there could be a hybrid mix of residential and commercial.

Liability: Perspective should be “we assist the homeowner to meet their obligations but cannot replace that responsibility.” Rochester has language and they carry liability insurance. Hugh noted that liability insurance is relatively cheap.

Summary of Key Elements and Sequence of establishing a BID:

- 1) Inquire re: whether residential and business BID can be developed...ask the State
- 2) Engagement of homeowners and property owners
- 3) Form the organization, the BID...tax exempt 501 (c) (3) ? – apply for grants. Open meeting law followed, minutes developed
- 4) Assessment – assessor – implement
- 5) Liability insurance
- 6) Someone to monitor, like Dave's organization
- 7) Hire subcontractor
- 8) Measure and evaluate results
- 9) Develop more resources

UNP Work Plan for keeping it going over the summer:

- 1) State Attorney General letter: Hugh Gregg will do right away
- 2) Write up the proposal: the statement of the problem; the 3 possible choices (pro and con)...some sense of process and costs : Barbara H, Beth R, Paul W will draft by end of June, 2009
- 3) Circulate and edit draft proposal: all with comments to initial team BY July 17th
- 4) Incorporate edits and recirculate by end of July: drafting team (Note: Patrick is key to circulating to Westcott business owners and get some buy-in)
- 5) Next UNP meeting: **August 17th 5:30 pm** at Westcott Day Hab. Main agenda item will be to activate the proposal. Discussion of having homeowner and association member meetings to discuss and having support for conducting such meetings. “Civic engagement” resources from Maxwell offered, including design and facilitation ideas.