UNP Community Affairs Committee Meeting

February 18, 2009 6-7:30 pm
Minneapolis Urban League

Attendees:  Makeda Zulu-Gillespie, Co-Chair, UNP Community Affairs Committee
            Raymond Dehn, Co-Chair, UNP Community Affairs Committee

            Sherrie Pugh Sullivan, Executive Director, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council
            Reverend Jerry McAfee, New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
            Bill English, Co-Chair, African American Leadership Summit/Coalition of Black Churches
            Reverend McLauren, New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
            Reverend Owens, New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
            Tobechi Tobechukwu, Local Photographer
            Irma McClaurin, Executive Director, Urban Research and Outreach Engagement Center
            Kris Nelson, Director of Neighborhood Programs, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
            Geoff Maruyama, FIPSE/UROC Facilitator, Associate Vice President, University of Minnesota
            Martin Adams, FIPSE/UROC Coordinator
            Dick Senese, Associate Dean for Public Engagement, University of Minnesota Extension
            Stephanie Wilkes (recorder)

Updates

Kris Nelson – Northside Seed Grants

Kris made 4 updates:

1) Salem, Inc – Kris expressed that they finally have the project, a needs assessment for a dialysis center in North Minneapolis (which has a high density of a diabetes-affected population), and that currently they are working on research design and IRB approval.

2) Hawthorne neighborhood, in regards to adjustable rate mortgage – Kris said they are working to help identify vulnerable homeowners and intervene before the crisis stage.

3) Northside Seed Grant Workshop – Kris mentioned the upcoming workshop, scheduled for Monday, February 23 from 4-8 pm at the Plymouth Christian Youth Center, and invited anyone still interested to register and attend.

4) UROC funding, 1 year extension of Northside Seed Grants – Kris shared with the group that thanks to UROC’s financial support, the Northside Seed Grant program has been extended for an additional year.

Irma McClaurin asked Kris to give a few more examples of past projects; Kris mentioned:

- Arts for HIV/AIDS awareness education project
- Listening project in the Harrison neighborhood
- Predatory lending in Northside Residents Redevelopment Council neighborhood project (looking at the last 20 years)

Irma McClaurin – UROC Building Renovation

Irma shared the current state of the renovation project on 2001 Plymouth Avenue:

- On January 19, 2009, the firm of Stahl Construction Company in partnership with MN Best took possession of the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement facility

provided information on bidding:

- To date, the ‘design to build’ contracts for the HVAC and electrical have been awarded.
- MN Best will self-perform the contract for painting and tile. As the project progresses, MN Best may perform addition work, if necessary.
Bill English commented on the building renovation, expressing his disappointment with aspects of the project. He shared that the Coalition of Black Churches was one of the first to endorse the project, and was under the impression then that this project would provide black employment, rather than just minority employment. He expressed that if in Maple Grove, a construction team of all whites can happen, then the University should be able to build a construction team comprised of blacks. He said that by not providing the amount of black employment that the Coalition of Black Churches had originally expected, it is making their lives very difficult to continue to support the renovation and the project.

Irma McClaurin replied that all of us understand that commitments were made, and that the project has a budget, so if bids are made that exceed the capacity of that budget, UROC and the University of Minnesota cannot do anything. She shared that for this building renovation project, the University of Minnesota’s usual target of 10 percent was raised to 30 percent, and that UROC is continuing to work with the Office for Business and Community Economic Development to make sure the information gets out to all interested. She said that at this current time, the bids for electric and HVAC were needed to be completed to finish the renovation designs; all other pieces of the renovation project have not yet gone up for bidding. She let the group know that if they can think of any other ways to get information about the bids for the renovation project out, that she welcomes their suggestions.

Bill English suggested that perhaps unreal expectations were set, but that he was very clear about his expectations, and a 30 percent target was not part of his expectations. He said that for a 2 million dollar job, it occurs to him that negotiations are permitted under state law. He reiterated that he is disappointed as a public and vocal endorser of the project from day one, and that if there were going to be barriers, that these barriers should have been discussed more broadly.

Irma McClaurin shared that as a state institution, the University of Minnesota cannot set quotas; instead targets can be set, like the 30 percent target set for the building renovation project.

Reverend Owens asked who the general contractor for the building renovation project was, and shared that from his understanding, in regards to LCAM and targeted minority contractors, that there is an obligation by law to come and check in and let them know about the renovation project as well.

Irma McClaurin responded that a range of people responded to the RFP for the general contractor, and that many factors went into the bid. She let Reverend Owens and the rest of the group know that if they thought it a good idea, that she could certainly talk to the Office of Business and Community Economic Development about setting up a meeting to discuss these concerns.

Reverend McLauren asked if in the RFP specific information on the percentage targets was provided.

Irma McClaurin said that it was required to identify these targets in the budget for subcontracting, and that the RFP is available on the web (and said to contact the Office of Business and Community Economic Development for any questions).
Reverend Jerry McAfee expressed that in reference to the bid notifications waiting to be sent, it is his hope and prayer that the University of Minnesota will monitor all subcontractors to make sure that the goals are being met, and that the shame would be in this community if those goals were not met, for those in the community who have gone to bat for the University because of their support for the project. He also said that since there is still the possibility of bidding, that we should all think about what we can do to help get this information out.

Irma McClaurin shared that any questions about the bidding process should be directed to Sharon Banks at the Office of Business and Community Economic Development, and that if something is missing from the process, if anyone has suggestions, to please share them.

Makeda Zulu-Gillespie expressed that because this is a partnership, we should not just hold the University of Minnesota accountable to regulate, but think of ways we can also work to benefit the project.

Reverend Jerry McAfee shared that that process has already been done; the Coalition of Black Churches worked in collaboration with Mortsenson Construction on the new stadium project.

Irma McClaurin asked that those involved in that collaboration inform us of that process, so we can better understand it and apply aspects of it to this renovation project.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan pointed out that the issue is that the goal, the target of 30 percent, is a minimum, and that to exceed this 30 percent is really the goal. She said that you have to integrate what the community knows what to do with the University system. She asked about working through the real estate department (and Irma McClaurin recommended starting with the Office of Business and Community Economic Development). She also brought up the opportunity for remediation.

Irma McClaurin brought up the asbestos removal that has been performed on the building site.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan pointed out that community contractors could have completed that job, as well as lawn, trash, and snow removal (which she has given information about to the University of Minnesota).

Irma McClaurin clarified that some of those things are covered currently under the University of Minnesota’s facilities management; however, once the building is open, it will be a whole different story - it will not be cost effective for the University of Minnesota to maintain the facility, so all operations (like the lawn, trash and snow removal mentioned) will be contracted out. She also acknowledged that she heard what Sherrie is saying, that the University of Minnesota did not utilize her suggestions; she asked Sherrie to send her the list that she previously sent to the University of Minnesota, so Irma can forward it along to the Office of Business and Community Economic Development.

Raymond Dehn said he sees the whole point of partnership as the community being out and involved, not just holding the university responsible. He sees the UROC building renovation contracting as the most visible example of the partnership work that we are trying to do right now.

Dick Senese expressed that we need to figure out and learn how to be a partner, and that this same dynamic will continue to happen.

Reverend Owens shared that he and Reverence McAfee have seen again and again people coming in to revitalize the community. He said that when you develop something right here in this community, it is important to involve the community, and that they are only asking for a fair share.
Dick Senese shared information about an upcoming business retention and expansion workshop on Wednesday, February 25, which will target people from organizations to help retain and expand businesses.

Makeda Zulu-Gillespie pointed out that North Minneapolis is a lot like the University of Minnesota, in that there are many different neighborhoods and community organizations within the larger community, and that it is hard sometimes to bring them all together around one issue.

Tobechi Tobechukwu suggested that one way to reach out to different pieces of the community is to get them on their turf, try holding meetings at different venues and organizations.

Irma McClaurin expressed that UROC has tried to this in the past and will continue. She also shared that this is a learning process for the University of Minnesota as well, and that they don’t have all of the answers.

To close this meeting’s discussion on the UROC building renovation update, Irma McClaurin identified an action step of getting the Office of Business and Community Economic Development and Stahl /MN Best to hold a workshop (in which the community would also help); she will share with the Office of Business and Community Economic Development.

Geoff Maruyama – FIPSE/UROC

Geoff Maruyama and Martin Adams gave updates on the 3 workgroups (Out of School Time, Healthy Foods, and Youth Entrepreneurship):

Geoff Maruyama:

1) Out of School Time – All in the workgroups are working on their own to address the issue, and are finding challenges like only getting in contact with youth workers, and not finding many avenues to promote professional development. The goal in response to this is to try to link the community youth with more professional development opportunities.

2) Healthy Foods – This workgroup’s goal is to try to increase the availability of fruits and vegetables, access to these healthy foods, and to help change consumption patterns in North Minneapolis. Currently they are working with NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center and Blue Cross Blue Shield toward this effort. There have also been conversations with the local public schools, about increasing the amount of food served to the students that is grown and bought locally; the schools have been willing to put healthier foods on the menu, but due to the large volume of food needed, buying from small, local vendors is currently not cost-effective.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan asked if anyone had talked about the community gardens this summer, and mentioned a number of them (one on 12th and Morgan, one on 14th and James, another on Girard).

Geoff Maruyama shared that 3 local schools are starting gardens as part of after school programs – the goal of these is to integrate science learning into the gardening process.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan recommended that they talk to the Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota, which is located in the Minneapolis Urban League. They are currently working to be able to teach composting. Sherrie also brought up the issue of the large number of contaminated brownfields along Plymouth Avenue.

Martin Adams:
3) Youth Entrepreneurship – Currently Urban 4H is collaborating with the Carlson School of Management on a program to provide training in youth entrepreneurship; this summer they will be working with Kwanzaa Lutheran Church and in the fall, Alternatives. The information from this program will not only be helpful in other pilots, but also to provide information for others who would like to start similar programming; there is an interest in continuing the efforts from these pilots. A part of this pilot project is to work on evaluation, and to identify some common practices.

Geoff Maruyama shared that Craig Taylor from the Office of Business and Community Economic Development has also been working on Youth Entrepreneurship, with Grover Jones at Northside Economic Opportunity Network.

Geoff Maruyama also shared that the real purpose of this project is to build not only educational skills in youth, but also interpersonal and financial literacy skills.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan expressed agreement that these issues are really critical, and that the partnership with the Carlson School of Management is crucial, since many community programs are not as nationally recognized as the Carlson School is, but they have valuable information to be shared all the same. She talked about the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) money, which is an asset that some parts of the community might be able to leverage toward this project. She pointed out the importance of a forestry component to the University of Minnesota’s work on the Northside; Dick Senese said he would talk to Jennifer Skuza about that.

Geoff Maruyama pointed out that there are a lot of organizations on the Northside looking for support.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan mentioned the CURA Northside Seed Grants, and the addition of professors supervising the graduate students working with the community organizations on these grants – and the value added by integrating the professors into the projects.

Raymond Dehn also pointed out that involving the professors is good for the professors, and helps create research that can be good for all involved.

Dick Senese asked about the NRP money, and how to find a way to connect this money to people and projects that will benefit the community best. He expressed that all have to make an extra effort, and when we do that is where the real work is going to happen.

Martin Adams shared that he has come to recognize that the conversations and connections before a project or collaboration are just as important as the actual project; he pointed out the importance of project planning groups meeting throughout to keep that momentum going.

Dick Senese also pointed out the value in going to groups that are already meeting, and mentioned the Northside Neighborhood Alliance, what he feels is an underutilized link. He talked about relational networks, which we need to get to as well as institutional networks.

Sherrie Pugh Sullivan said she thinks this is because of the “percolating up” effect – many community organizations have not yet realized that they can reach up to the University of Minnesota, and Irma McClaurin as UROC Executive Director can help be the link for this (which she says is exactly what happened with the Center for Early Education and Development).
Dick Senese talked about thinking about how we can make that “door,” the door between the Northside community and the University of Minnesota, look like something you not only see, but feel you can knock on, and go in, and feel comfortable doing so.

Closing

Raymond Dehn closed the meeting by giving out an assignment:

Start to move the brainstorm forward – pick 3 or 4 bullets from the January meeting, and think of ways you can build on them, give them more form and structure, then begin to move them forward.