

General Meeting Minutes
University Neighborhood Council
Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Call to Order and Attendance With Missoula's City website down and pandemic rules in effect, Colin Woodrow hosted the meeting via ZOOM. Darcy Caron called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM. Rick Caron explained that someone had taken one of the University District's sandwich boards from the Hellgate High School area. Darcy asked anyone finding the board to please contact a member of the leadership team.

Darcy invited members of the leadership team to say a few words as she introduced each.

Colin Woodrow, new director of Missoula Neighborhoods, introduced himself by describing previous experience with local government, service organizations, and a background in community planning. Dori Gilels described the privilege and pleasure of serving on neighborhood leadership teams. Jennifer Copley, secretary, briefly mentioned team efforts to improve the neighborhood. Bryce Rowe, introduced as Treasurer, greeted those in attendance. Rick Caron described organizing University athletes to shovel and rake for neighborhood elders and working for lowered speed limits near the University. Jordan Lyons spoke of his new role as the Missoula County housing specialist and introduced ASUM Neighborhood Ambassadors Chloe Loeffelholz, Anna Potter, and Carly Byrne.

Community members in attendance with names posted via ZOOM included Craig Stahlberg, Hila Tzipora, Silas Teasdale, Brad Cederberg, Diane K. Taylor, Eugene Schmitz, Nancy Schmitz, Carol Sager, and Daniel Webb.

Small Group Discussions and Comments Dori Gilels invited attendees to get to know one another by breaking into three small groups. She asked each to report on (1) what they like best about the University District, and (2) what they would like to change.

For five minutes, members joined small group discussions. When the groups reconvened, attendees described shared appreciation for the accessibility, beauty, and sense of community in the University District. They said they were glad to live so near the University and to walk easily around the neighborhood. One attendee described how the shoveling volunteers had helped a friend.

Some attendees worried about traffic safety issues created by poor lighting and drivers ignoring the 25 miles per hour speed limit. They suggested stricter law enforcement might be needed. Others expressed concerns about environmental and safety issues at Bark Park as well as the need for equitable housing and affordable living within the district. Parking remains an issue for some.

Report from Office of Neighborhoods Colin Woodrow said the City Council is determined to improve Neighborhood Councils and the connections of neighborhoods to city government. The Council, through the Office of Neighborhoods, hopes to empower diverse neighborhoods to identify issues and create solutions. To that end, the city of Missoula hired a consulting firm

to assess the Missoula Neighborhoods program. The consulting firm heard from citizens with a variety of years of experience on neighborhood leadership teams, the Community Forum, and the City Council.

The study found that Missoulians do not understand why Neighborhood Councils exist, what they can do, and how citizens may get involved. In order to increase interest, the study concluded that Neighborhood Councils must increase both community engagement and diversity of representation on leadership teams. With the exception of the University District, few renters and young people serve on Neighborhood Councils. In addition, the use of Robert's Rules of Order and recorded, open public may stand as barriers to involvement.

As one step in building a more inclusive and engaging neighborhood system, the study recommended disseminating a community survey to all neighborhoods and mounting a communications campaign to educate the public. The study suggested adding additional Community Forum Council positions to ensure that under-represented residents will be implicitly included. It encouraged reframing the Neighborhood Council vision statement to allow shared efforts among city residents, city government, nonprofit partners, local businesses, and developers.

The city should, said the study, create toolkits and bylaws that will support desired changes. It should develop streamlined communications among members of the City Council, Community Forum, Neighborhood Councils, and residents, placing strong emphasis on diversity and increased participation among all subgroups.

To support these ends, says Colin, his office would like to sponsor block parties, tree planting parties, and better online communication. Boise, Idaho, said Colin, might provide a model from which Missoula can learn.

Report from UM Ambassadors Anna Potter, who works for the ASUM Renter Center, explains that her office informs students about laws governing rentals and providing protections for renters. Her office also works to facilitate good student relationships with Missoula neighbors and to represent student interests on Neighborhood Councils. To learn of upcoming University events, Chloe Loeffelholz reminded attendees to check out the University website <https://grizhub.umt.edu>. She urged donations to the ASUM student Food Pantry and announced that ASUM will sponsor spring neighborhood cleanups. Residents will be invited to join students in this effort. In addition, residents may contact ASUM if there are concerns involving university students.

Jordan Lyons, former director of ASUM, thanked Anna and Chloe for their service to ASUM throughout college careers which end with spring graduation. He noted that our Treasurer, Bryce Rowe, also once served as a Neighborhood Ambassador. Darcy mentioned that she recently saw Neighborhood Ambassadors at work cleaning trails and the riverfront. She reminded attendees that anyone with issues involving student renters may can contact ASUM Ambassadors for assistance.

New Members for University District Leadership Team Colin mentioned that we are seeking additional members for the University District leadership team, inviting those in attendance to apply for one of three open positions. Rick added words of encouragement, saying members could find a real sense of achievement in reaching goals to benefit the neighborhood. Heather Harp explained that Neighborhood Councils are a good training ground for future leaders!

Discussion with City Council Members Jordan introduced City Council members Gwen Jones and Heather Harp. (Jesse Ramos, honeymooning, was not in attendance, and Amber Sherill, at another meeting, sent word that she would try to join late.)

Gwen Jones pointed out successes in earlier efforts to reconfigure 5th and 6th Street for safer bicycle traffic. She pointed out that changes to the Higgins Avenue Bridge, soon to be Bear Tracks Bridge, will necessitate improvements to bike and pedestrian flow in the Hip Strip area south of the bridge. The Montana Department of Transportation must be involved in the changes. In February, Aaron Wilson, Missoula Infrastructure & Mobility Planning Manager, requested proposals for a study. This spring his office hopes to contract with a firm to explore what can be done to make the Hip Strip area more efficient and safer, avoiding the serious accidents we have seen in this area. Missoula Parking Commissioner, Tiffany Brander, will work with Aaron Wilson's office to address parking issues in the area. Heather says she will need community support as she pushes for these improvements.

Heather Harp explained that the city last surveyed citizens in 2018 . Then residents listed as top concerns lack of affordable housing, high property taxes, infrastructure, traffic, and homelessness. Heather then called on attendees to describe their concerns in 2021.

- a. Rick Caron urged Missoula, in light of changing environmental circumstances, to move more quickly to provide both better bicycle access and adequate charging stations for evolving motor vehicles.
- b. Daniel Webb said he supports practices of reuse and repurposing, including in existing housing.
- c. Brad Cederburg feels we need to make it easier for people to build additional housing, perhaps by modifying regulations.
- d. Bryce Rowe said Missoula must avoid overextending itself and pay attention to the aging infrastructure of old pipes. (Our city, attendees noted, was 138 years old on March 8.)
- e. Eugene Schmitz spoke of concerns about how accessory housing units might impact parking and growth in neighborhoods. He spoke about sidewalk degradation in some areas and the need for better curb accessibility in others.
- f. Silas Teasdale expressed concern about unleashed dogs chasing deer. He said Missoula may need to enforce leash laws for dogs. He also said that it is hard to find jobs and housing in this area, explaining that some young people like himself cannot afford to stay in Missoula.
- g. Jennifer Copley, expressing appreciation for Bark Park and its history as a family gathering place, urged the city to explore both issues of multiple usage, dog safety, (one dog in the park was killed by another this winter) and environmental consequences

of the substantial amounts of animal waste washed into the river with each spring runoff.

- h. Rick Caron reminded attendees that animal waste left by pet owners washes into the river, not only in spring, but with every rainfall, year-round. Rick also urged stronger police enforcement and presence in the University District where speeding endangers pedestrians in the Maurice Avenue area.
- i. Jordan Lyons reminded attendees that traffic fatalities are up, though driving is down, explaining that uncontrolled intersections remain a problem for people in the neighborhood.

Heather Harp responded that the city is seeking ways to control traffic issues. The cost of traffic-taming circles is high, Heather said, so reducing speed limits to 20 miles per hour in some areas may be a more economical way to slow traffic, reduce accidents, and limit injuries.

Public Comment Bryce, acting as timer for the meeting, called for public comment.

- a. Rick asked for a show of hands to learn if everyone was aware that the Bark Park was in our Neighborhood. About half raised their hands.
- b. Responding to a question, Darcy said that the Next Door app is a good way to get to know what is going on around Missoula.
- c. Colin said that the Missoula's list serve makes city websites available to all residents.
- d. Dori Gilels says she is running for the City Council and urged those with interest to contact her.
- e. Jordan said that Missoula Parks and Rec are doing ecology work on riverbanks. Engage Missoula seeks citizen comment on their preferences for that effort. Jordan posted the website where citizens can express their opinions.
https://www.engagemissoula.com/clark-fork-river-restoration-access-project/survey_tools/clark-fork-river-restoration
- f. Dori Gilels said an organization in Bozeman educates dog owners about responsible dog ownership, suggesting Missoula could learn some strategies from them.
- g. Silas Teasdale asked who is in charge of cleaning up trash along the river. Rick answered that it is the city, for the most part. Because of the lack of city staff, added Heather Harp, the Clark Fork Coalition does an annual cleanup along the river.
- h. Silas suggested that each Neighborhood Council should create a Facebook presence as a better way to help residents stay in touch with the neighborhood councils.
- i. Friends of Grant Creek, said Colin, may provide a model. At the end of April, perhaps on Earth Day, he added, the city will organize neighborhood cleanups. Small grants are available to help fund efforts that may include picking up furniture left in alleys or animal waste at the dog park.

Adjournment Dori thanked the leadership team and Colin for all their efforts. She extended thanks to City Council members, Heather Harp and Gwen Jones, and to all in attendance. The meeting adjourned at 7:40.