

CapitolRiver Council Meeting Minutes

April 27, 2021, Board of Directors Meeting (rescheduled from April 20)

Attendees: Shevek McKee, Tiffany Brace, Merritt Clapp-Smith, Sandra Erickson, Tom Erickson, Jon Fure, John Ganey, Peg Ganey, Jess Grams, Bill Huepenbecker, Lee Knutson, Lee Ann Labore, Crystal Meriwether, Olga Nichols, Julie Printz, Jay Severance, Tati Terfa, Will Travis, Helen Wagner.

Board membership update: Tati Terfa is appointed to represent George Latimer Central Library, replacing Kathleen Conger.

- I. Chair Shevek McKee called the meeting to order after the conclusion of the special meeting to consider proposed changes to the CRC Bylaws.
- II. Motion by John Ganey, seconded by Crystal Meriwether, to adopt the agenda. Motion passed.
- III. Motion by Will Travis, seconded by John Ganey, to approve the March 16, 2021 board meeting minutes. Motion passed.

Information Items

- IV. Introduction / Update / Q&A with RADIUS Health. (RADIUS Health does outreach work and has offices in the TPT building.) Staff from RADIUS Health were not available to attend the meeting, so the group discussed their observations about people who are experiencing homelessness. Olga Nichols, who works at Safe Space emergency shelter, said if someone asks for help, people can help refer the person to a shelter, such as Safe Space, Higher Ground, or Freedom House. You can either call the Saint Paul Police non-emergency number, or call or email a shelter directly. The number for Safe Space is 651-266-4483. The number for Higher Ground is (651) 647-2330. Ask the person for their name, and then when you call the staff at the shelter will have a bed for the person. A board member asked about things to donate. Ms. Nichols said Safe Space is managed by Model Cities, and they will take donations of clothing, soap, shampoo, and other hygiene items. Masks may also be donated. They do not accept clothing for babies, so clothing should be sized youth to adult. (More information: <https://www.modelcities.org/model-cities-st-paul/safe-space-shelter/>). Tati Terfa suggested contacting the Ramsey County Response Team: Feel free to call Adult Crisis Response Line (651-266-7900) and/or Children's Crisis Response Line (651-266-7878) when you notice someone who appears to be having a mental health crisis (adults and/or children) in the downtown and surrounding areas. The Adult and Children's Mobile Crisis Response Team is available 24/7 and answers all calls.
- V. Residential Improvement District study: Merritt Clapp-Smith, a downtown resident and principal for Moxie Urban Consulting, presented information about her work on a proposed district that would be similar to the Business Improvement District for residential buildings. She is a city planner by profession and a consultant. She has been hired by the trustees of the Lowertown Future Fund to assess the feasibility of creating such a district. The district would assess properties and use the money to invest in things that the participating residents and building owners and managers. She asked what people would like to see changed if such a district could be established. A board member said artists have made the neighborhood great. Most artists rent, and asked if renters would be able to provide feedback about the types of services that would be offered and the amount of money that would be raised, or would that feedback only be considered if it comes from property owners? Ms. Clapp-Smith said she would address that in her report and final recommendations, and she agreed that it should be an organization by and for residents, and not just property owners. The decisions about how much money to raise and what to spend it on would be made by a governing board, and so one approach could be to make sure that there is a diverse group of people who serve on the board, in terms of age, income, and whether they rent or own property.

- VI. Student worker internship wrap-up: Jon Fure said Aliya Mohamed was hired through the City's Right Track program in the summer of 2020, and she will be leaving CRC at the end of April and will be working for 3M. He encouraged attendees to participate in the Right Track program if their workplace might have the ability to hire one or more student workers, and he encouraged board members to continue hiring a summer intern in the future.
- VII. Board Member Recruiting Update. Board members briefly discussed the need to recruit prospective board members before the June 15 Annual Meeting.

Public Realm Committee Resolutions

- VIII. Wacouta Commons Flower Bed Resolution Draft

Motion by Crystal Meriwether, seconded by Will Travis, to approve the following resolution:

The CapitolRiver Council enthusiastically supports the plan for the Wacouta Commons fountain to be converted into a flower bed. We understand that this is a measure to make safe use of the malfunctioning fountain as part of a long-term plan to eventually renovate the area entirely with a splash pad in partnership with the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy. The CRC thrives on our relationships with other organizations in our community and believes that some of the best investments the city can make are those supporting hard-working community volunteer efforts. Motion passed.

- IX. Public Bathrooms Concern Resolution Draft:

Motion by Will Travis, seconded by John Ganey, to approve the following motion, as edited:

The CapitolRiver Council Public Realm Committee has identified the lack of public bathroom facilities downtown as a growing concern. We've determined that the small number of publicly owned bathrooms is supplemented by low-barrier private restrooms (restaurants & retail), but a growing number of these public and private bathrooms have been closing or increasing restrictions for access. Reports of public defecation have noticeably increased as well. The COVID pandemic has certainly exacerbated the situation, but the increase is partially an acceleration of what was already a growing issue in our neighborhood. We understand that the solutions may be complex and costly, but the current cost being paid (loss of vitality, dignity, and livability and increased public health concern) is steadily growing and it would be prudent to address before the scales tip.

We would like to engage in an effort with the city, county, Met Council, Saint Paul Downtown Alliance, Lowertown Future Fund, Department of Health, and any other relevant organizations to find innovative solutions and funding for this issue. We've discussed the potential of directing some of the new federal infrastructure stimulus funds towards this issue. Please reply to discuss the financials and logistics of this concern. We'd like to progress on this issue for discussion at our August 5th Public Realm meeting. Motion passed. The resolution will be sent to Council Member Rebecca Noecker, Mayor's office staff, and other contacts.

The meeting adjourned