Annual Meeting 2013: A Year in Review

Nearly 200 neighbors and stakeholders turned out for the 2013 Annual Meeting to review the accomplishments of the Near Northwest Neighborhood, Inc. (NNN). Neighbors greeted each other over coffee, fruit and pastries.

Kim Geiger called the meeting to order and turned things over to Tim Scott, who recounted some of 2012’s highlights, including Adopt-A-Block, which celebrated its 10-year anniversary, as well as another successful Arts Café and Garden Walk. He noted a few of the general meetings hosted by the NNN, including sessions about property tax appeals. “These events show how truly proud the people of the NNN are of their neighborhood,” he said. Jeff Stanifer talked about the five newly rehabilitated houses completed last year and his pride in this work done through the NNN.

Kathy Schuth (pictured, left) described the launch of the comprehensive Quality of Life Plan. Through this process, the NNN facilitated interviews with more than 130 neighbors. The NNN will convene the neighbors in early May to use the interviews and comments to shape a collective vision for the neighborhood.

Executive director Karen Ainsley talked about the many people and organizations that donate their time, talent and treasure to allow the NNN to be successful.

Kim Barrier and Margaret Porter reviewed the organization’s financial position and introduced the slate of new board members, respectively. To close out the meeting, Kathryn Roos, deputy chief of staff from the mayor’s office, provided a summary of some of the new initiatives being put forward by the administration, including the mayor’s Vacant and Abandoned Task Force.

2012 was another good year for the NNN. Here’s hoping for an even better 2013.

11th Annual Adopt-a-Block Kick-off

The 2013 Adopt-a-Block Kick-Off begins at 8 a.m. on Saturday, April 20, at the NNN office. Getting involved is EASY, FUN and REWARDING. This neighborhood clean-up program encourages neighborhood residents and businesses to work together to beautify the community. By banding together and committing to regular monthly clean-ups, neighbors can take ownership for the appearance and upkeep of their block.

The city’s Department of Code Enforcement and Division of Environmental Services will help by providing trash bags and gloves, assistance with pick-up of debris and trash and will have two trucks and their crews in the neighborhood picking up trash 11:00 am – 3:00 p.m.. Every registered Adopt-a-Block group will have a stake with a flag at their designated refuse site. City crews will collect trash and debris only at flagged locations. Our goal for the day is to dramatically change the appearance of the neighborhood.

Last year, for the first time in the program’s history, we adopted every block. The Environmental Committee wants this year’s Adopt-a-Block to be even better and we need your help! Consider being a block captain and adopting the street in front of your house. If your street is already looking good, you can adopt your alley or another block in the neighborhood that’s in need of a little love and attention.

If you would like to find out more about being a block captain or how you can participate please contact the NNN offices at 232-9182. Together we can make our neighborhood a cleaner place!
GOOD FOOD, GOOD NEIGHBORS AT CHILI SUPPER

By Mary Alice Hardy

Picture this mouth-watering scene: tables lined with tempting pans of chili including pork, beef, chicken and vegetarian; a variety of corn muffins, cornbread and corn pancakes; baskets of corn chips (donated by Applebees on Portage); and a sweet, gooey variety of desserts. It was the annual chili supper sponsored by the NNN, held this year on the last day of winter, March 19, at the Holy Cross School gymnasium. I attended with my two daughters, a son-in-law and my grandson.

It was an informal event interrupted only when NNN Executive Director Karen Ainsley announced the chili prize winners: Kim Barrier won the Meanest Chili Prize with her recipe for Nana’s chili. The Hottest Chili Prize went to Mary Turgi and Miriam Volkmer. The recipient of the Best Vegetarian Chili Prize went to Andrew Grontkowski and the Cottage Grove Special by Mike Hebbeler won the Most Unique Prize. Chili judging sounds like pleasant work.

I talked to a few attendees at nearby tables to see what brought them out. Michael Budzinski, Caris Philips and Lois Jackson were sitting together at one table. Budzinski and Philips were attending for the first time, and both work at Muessel School, Budzinski as principal. Jackson said this was her fifth or sixth supper, and she is a member of the NNN Board. She is also a member of the church across the street from Muessel School, and that’s how she became interested in the NNN.

At another table, I met a group of friends. Linda Wolfe of Cottage Grove Avenue was attending her second chili supper. She said, “I love it. It’s a great chance to see neighbors and say goodbye to winter.” Jess and Janna Hunter were there with their two young daughters, Amarie and Addie. Chili prize winners Turgi and Volkmer of Portage Avenue were part of this group. They are both Holy Cross sisters and have lived in the neighborhood for about seven years. Turgi is also president of the NNN board. Amy Jonason from Lindsey Street was also at this table. It was her first time at the event, and yet she had donated a chicken chili. Finally, there was Elaine Schmucker of Woodward Avenue who was attending for the fifth or sixth time; she likes to taste the different chilies and meet her neighbors.

I didn’t visit every table, but my small sample provided an idea of what a friendly, satisfying event this is. As I looked around for my family, I noticed newcomer Catherine Griffin enjoying a bowl of chili while holding her 8-week-old son Basil and sitting by Basil’s big brother Benedict. I asked her why she had ventured out. She laughed, “Well, I didn’t have to cook. And, it’s a good chance to see your neighbors in this environment. There’s good energy around the neighborhood right now, so I wanted to be here.”
Join us for a summit in May

In early March residents and community stakeholders came together for a “report back” session to share the outcome of more than 130 interviews completed by neighbors and NNN members as part of the Quality of Life Plan being developed by the neighborhood. Interviewees were asked to identify the neighborhood’s strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities and threats. Providing an opportunity to articulate which community issues are most important to them. During the “report back,” residents presented highlights of the information compiled in the interview report.

The report consisted of the findings from the interviews and will be used to inform those who participate in the upcoming “Quality of Life Planning Summit.” The summit will provide residents and stakeholders an opportunity to come together to build consensus around a common vision for the future of the neighborhood. The vision and the plan itself will be created by the people who live and work in the near northwest and who are committed to making it a great place to live, work and play.

From this summit, working groups will be established to develop action plans around topics critical to neighborhood quality of life. Finally, Indiana Association for Community Economic Development will compile the plans of the working groups and draft a comprehensive Near Northwest Neighborhood Quality of Life Plan which we will celebrate with a public showcasing of the plan for neighbors, city and county government, funders and other stakeholders.

As you can see, at every step of the way, there is plenty of room — and need — for involvement. The entire process depends on each one of us making our own contribution to building a strong, healthy, vibrant community.

Come join us for the Quality of Life Summit on Saturday, May 11 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Charles Martin Youth Center. If you have questions about the process or would like a copy of the interview report, call Karen Ainsley at 232-9182 or e-mail at nnndirector@sbcglobal.net.

We heard you!

In the interview report that was compiled as part of the Quality of Life Planning process, residents offered that they believe grant opportunities for improving the neighborhood quality of life should be identified and shared. One topic mentioned was home improvement. The NNN came across a program offered by 1st Source Bank called the Neighborhood Impact Program (NIP) that will provide rehab measures for health & safety, energy efficiency upgrades, or accessibility improvements!

NIP will provide rehab measures for either health & safety issues (replace HVAC, new water heater and new roofs), energy efficiency upgrades (new energy efficient thermo pane windows, insulated primary doors, storm doors, etc.) or accessibility improvements (handicap stools, upgrading bathrooms with low-lip showers, ramps, etc.). NIP will provide up to $10,000 when 1st Source has a first lien position on the property or a 3:1 match if the household is receiving matching funds from a local government home improvement program. Otherwise up to $7,500 is available. The funds are provided by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis (FHLB), channeled through 1st Source Bank.

NIP funds are considered a “no payment-no interest” loan for five years. NIP provides rehabilitation assistance to qualified homeowners on a first come, first serve basis.

Household income levels cannot exceed 80 percent of the area median income. Homeowner must provide proof of homeowner’s insurance, payment of taxes, and provide proof of ownership. Homeowner must be willing to sign a five-year real estate retention agreement stating they will remain in the house for the five-year period and maintain homeowners insurance. Homeowner must contribute a minimum of $500 of their personal funds for repair and have or open a 1st Source Bank checking account.

To take advantage of this program, call Solomon Anderson at 1st Source Portage banking center at 271-3130.
In mid-February, Mayor Pete Buttigieg announced the launch of the first phase of a 311 customer service phone line for the City of South Bend. Not all City departments and divisions will be transferred to the new 311 line. The first three divisions to roll into 311 include Water Works, Solid Waste and the Street Department. In the coming weeks and months, the city will incorporate more departments, divisions, and services. It is important for residents and businesses to understand the distinction and rollout of the service.

**What is 311?**

311 is a simple, three-digit phone number that residents, businesses and visitors can use to get non-emergency information about City of South Bend services or programs, or to make a request for service.

**Who can call 311?**

Anyone within the city limits of South Bend can call 311 free of charge. However, regular pay phone and cellular phone charges still apply.

**What are the hours of operation?**

311 customer service representatives are available to answer questions or fill a service request for the three divisions included in the first phase in the rollout during the week, Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

**What information is available on the Web?**

The city activated www.southbendin.gov/311 to help residents and businesses learn more about 311.

Service requests can also be activated online 24/7 using the above link.

311 is a key step forward in creating a smarter government better able to serve the community, ensuring that the answer to neighbors’ questions will be readily available at a central customer service line.

The issue of vacant and abandoned properties has long been a major concern for neighbors in South Bend. The economic shocks of past decades, combined with population shifts and changes in the housing market, have combined to leave communities like ours with more homes than families can fill and many teetering on the brink between demolition and rehabilitation.

Mayor Pete Buttigieg convened the Vacant and Abandoned Properties Task Force, a group of city and county officials, private sector practitioners, and neighborhood advocates to form a working group to impact this issue. The group was formed to look at both analyzing the dimensions of South Bend’s problem and assessing the elements of a comprehensive solution.

The Task Force developed a report that presents strategies to reach out to those most affected by vacant properties nuisances and to guide policy decisions going forward. The report has four focus areas: understanding of the past and present situation, focusing on elimination of abandoned house nuisances, pursuing land banking and developing resources and reuse options. The final report, which was released in late February, can be obtained at http://ci.south-bend.in.us/sites/default/files/files/Code_FinalVATF_Report_2_red.pdf. The report works to direct the city’s coordination internally and externally to address the problems described in the report, using the tools the task force identified.

In addition to the release of the report, the mayor took the opportunity to challenge the community to address 1,000 vacant and abandoned homes in 1,000 days, starting right away. While this will not be an easy task, through a combination of rehabilitation, demolition, receivership and other means, the mayor feels South Bend can do this. The challenge was addressed to the entire community — not just the government — and he hopes the work of the task force will be a rallying point for this collective push forward.