

**Steering Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday, August 20, 2009 at 11:00 am -1:00 pm**  
**MLK Leadership Academy - Media Center**  
**645 Logan St. S.E. 49506**

Voting Steering Committee Members Present

1. Sgt Elliott Bargas - Grand Rapids Police Department
2. Captain Eric Payne - Grand Rapids Police Department
3. Ray Tromp - Baxter Neighborhood Association: Resident
4. Pamela Benjamin - Eastown Community Association: Resident
5. Kathryn Caliendo - East Hills Council of Neighbors
6. Scott Vogel - Madison Avenue Neighborhood Association: Bus. Rep.
7. Marian Barrera-Young - Baxter Neighborhood Association
8. Kathy Lett – City of Grand Rapids (alternate for Haris Alibasic)

Voting Members Absent:

1. Stacy Stout - Baxter Neighborhood Association, Resident
2. Sandra Latham - Southeast East End Neighborhood Association
3. Tim Doyle - Kent County Prosecutor's Office
4. Mike Yasenchak - Drug Enforcement Administration
5. Haris Alibasic - City of Grand Rapids (sent alternate – Kathy Lett)
6. Kaye Hooker - U.S. Attorney's Office

Non-Voting Regular Attendees and Guests Present

1. Kristine Jaros - Central City Weed and Seed Site Director
2. Dr. Debra Ross - Grand Valley State University
3. Aaron Stevens - Grand Rapids Police Department Community Officer
4. Deputy Chief James Farris - Grand Rapids Police Department
5. Enid Gaddis - Arbor Circle
6. Erica Hooser - Lighthouse Communities
7. George Young - Baxter Neighborhood Association
8. Ben Crockett - Building Bridges
9. Edward Aziz -PeaceMakers
10. Kevyn Milton - CVF - Eastown Resident

**I. Call To Order/Introductions**

The meeting was called to order at 11:06 am by Chairperson Pamela Benjamin. Members introduced themselves. A quorum was present.

**II. Approval of Agenda**

Kathryn Caliendo made the motion to pass the agenda and Scott Vogel made a second. The motion was passed and the agenda was approved.

**III. Approval of July 23, 2009 Minutes.**

The motion to approve the minutes of July 23 was made by Scott Vogel and seconded by Kathryn Caliendo. The motion to approve the minutes was passed.

**IV. Discussion - Graduating: The Future of Our Weed and Seed Site**

1. As directed by Chairperson Pamela Benjamin: all those present in the meeting were to line up silently, and, using hand signals only; to format the line in order of the birth-date of each individual, according to the month and the date of birth. A straight line was to be formed, chronologically according to the calendar. Once the line was formed, participants shared their month/day combination to see how we did (ok, but not great!). Exercise was intended to show the difficulties of communication (listening to instructions, following instructions and working with others). After the line was silently formed, the participants returned to their seats.

2. Chairperson Pamela Benjamin produced the four-part SWOT flip-chart. The divisions were labeled strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as forces which function within organizations.

3. Then Chairperson Pamela Benjamin instructed those attending the meeting to count out by fours. Each group assembled by number and was assigned a specific piece of the organizational SWOT.

4. All participants within each group then identified issues within its assigned category.

5. Each group designated a person to present the findings to all participants in the meeting. These findings were then written on the flip-chart according to the category assigned. Following each presentation, the whole group then added any information that

might be needed.

6. At this point, the chairperson consolidated the original four groups into two larger groups: one labeled “Threats” and the other labeled “Weaknesses”. The groups worked on ways to deal with those Threats and Weaknesses. A spokesperson from each group reported the findings and results of their discussion. The complete SWOT analysis is below:

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police Dept</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Site Coordinator</li> <li>• Program Creativity</li> <li>• GVSU as fiduciary</li> <li>• Community Organization involved</li> <li>• Youth engagement</li> </ul>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding lost</li> <li>• Loose association</li> <li>• New people/high turnover</li> <li>• Dependent on staff</li> <li>• Paid staff needed</li> <li>• Lack of community involvement (residents, businesses)</li> </ul>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue Services</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Expand area</li> <li>• Reduce crime</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Bring more \$ to community</li> </ul>	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2009 funding in question</li> <li>• Lack of plan</li> <li>• Lack of overall \$</li> <li>• No sustainability</li> <li>• No local example of sustained site</li> <li>• Community understanding</li> <li>• Silos and competition</li> <li>• Politics of collaboration</li> </ul>

Options for addressing threats and weaknesses:

<p><u>Threats:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply for funding / other grants</li> <li>• Continue planning meetings to choose our direction</li> <li>• Lack of vision from local residents</li> <li>• Offer a table for resident discussion</li> <li>• Offer an opportunity for all problems to be addressed</li> <li>• Empower residents</li> <li>• Educate residents about W&amp;S and resources – marketing</li> <li>• Find out whether residents want a graduated site.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting organizations together (eg. Domestic violence (who is actually doing it, collaboration)</li> <li>• Expanding boundaries</li> <li>• Expanding collaboration with GVSU – grant writing using students, faculty, staff and other foundations.</li> </ul>
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This next step in this process will be occur when the Community Meeting is held and the public has its input into the future for Central City Weed and Seed. This process and its success is dependent upon public understanding, public input, and community acceptance.

**V. National Night Out Raffle Drawing Results**

Kristine Jaros provided the survey slips and those present each drew a name out of the envelope selecting the winners of the raffle.

The following eleven names are the raffle winners and the gifts were to be delivered by Kristine Jaros and Officer Aaron Stevens following the Steering Committee meeting:

1. Mark Bast
2. Moncheri Virgins
3. Ronald DeVree
4. Donna Cnemen
5. A. Simms
6. Dominique P.
7. Karrassa Criper (no longer living there - kept prize in office)
8. Georgine Bello
9. Donette Meyers Wagar
10. Lisa Gloege
11. Kristi Bast

It was noted that the following organizations/individuals donated the raffle prizes: Baxter Community Center / Target Stores, Arbor

Circle/ Enid Gaddis, GVSU, GRPD, and Weed & Seed.

#### **VI. Announcements, Up-Dates, and Public Comment**

There was a lengthy discussion related to the time, day, and location of future meetings of the Weed and Seed Central City Steering Committee.

If the meetings were to be held at noon at MLK Academy, all participants would have to be back-ground checked as per Grand Rapids Public Schools policy. If the meeting are scheduled for evening, these checks would not be required. The principal of MLK Academy indicated that if the meetings were to be held on the premises, an announcement would be included in their school publications.

Baxter Community Center was suggested as an alternate site for meetings. Currently plans for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Baxter Services occupy the available meetings areas during the daytime. Evening meetings at this site may also require a rental fee. Wealthy Theatre Annex is a possible site, but there is a rental fee levied on all meetings. KC agreed to speak to Wealthy Theatre about use of the building at no cost.

Churches in the area are available, as well. There was a sentiment expressed that a "more neutral site is needed." It was noted that churches allow space free of charge. All members agreed that the meetings should be within the Weed and Seed area, and that more community participation should be encouraged.

A concomitant question emerged related to the role of community participation with the Steering Committee meetings. To encourage community participation, a role would need to be assigned for a participant to be active. Some kind of dialogue needs to address directly the improvement of community participation. The related question of the size of the Steering Committee, thus implying the extension of the voting representation, was also discussed. Adding members would create a new shape of the board. This is a major question for the future. Another near-future issue is that of the Weed and Seed boundaries which may be allowed to be extended though the Graduated Site status. The size of the board would be impacted by a growth in geographical area. Youth involvement; its role and power, its significance to teens, and its attractiveness as a magnet for involvement of youth are emerging, demanding issues which need to be resolved in the very near-future.

The consensus of the Steering Committee indicated that evening or night meetings will work better for most of the present and projected future members of Weed and Seed Steering Committee. The selection of any particular time for a night meeting will prove to be challenging.

The next Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 24, 2009 with the time and site to be announced. The following meeting is planned for Thursday, October 22, 2009.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ray Tromp  
Secretary

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711 Fuller Avenue S.E.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

*(copy of letter sent to U.S.Rep and U.S. Senators from Michigan)*

District of Columbia 20510+

Dear (Mr. D. Kurosky)

I am a resident of the Baxter Neighborhood which is one of the target areas of Grand Rapids Central City Weed and Seed. I have lived here for almost ten years. When I moved in, this area was a declining part of the city. Crime was the highest here for the entire city of Grand Rapids. Houses were in terrible repair, chainlink fences and vacant houses boarded up for years littered the landscape Worst of all was the business area. Party shop s and bars dominated the neighborhood. A check-cashing place and a rental store were therefore logical conditions in the area. People feared to come outside and drugs sales were open and frequent. In fact, the area was known for being a drug mall. Besides the drug trade, other illegal goods and services were openly available. The majority of the neighbors were upset, as it seemed like they had lost the neighborhood. There emerged a lot of discussion which described the derelict conditions, but not much regarding what to actually do about it to reduce it significantly. A lot of negative feeling related to the law-enforcing agencies, as they did a lot of arresting, but nothing changed, it was a bottomless pit, a lost cause.

Then the area heard about a program financed by the government called Weed and Seed, offered through the Department of Justice, to effectively reduce crime in areas like this. A Steering Committee was formed and the application was completed. The Central City application was approved and the program progressed. Grand Valley State University is the fiduciary agency for the current Weed and Seed Steering Committee. Other agencies and partners joined in to help reduce crime, and improve the area so that residents could enjoy a quality of life able to raise and nurture a more healthy environment for all. As the area slowly and consistently improved, many actions were taken on a broad scale to generate a lot of positive activity: businesses returned and grew, housing stock got the lead out and were put back within the housing code, and people returned to use the business area where they again felt safe. People again came to relocate in the better housing, and the neighborhood looked alive instead of dying.

At the present time, the funding for such turn-around is being reduced to a level that can no longer promote saving such

neighborhoods. In fact the Department of Justice funding for Weed and Seed has is in danger of losing the power to affect such changes. As FY 2009 had a 25 million dollar budget, and the President requested that this remain the same for FY2010, it looks like it could suffer a reduction in the necessary amount down to 15 million which is a only 60% of that needed. A 40% cut is out-of-proportion for this effective program.

If the budget is being cut for Weed and Seed, it will not be an efficient measure, as crime will return, businesses will suffer, property values will deteriorate, and the cycle will repeat itself, losing the benefits of the current revival.

Not only will this have such an effect on us locally, every program of this nature nation-wide will suffer the same effects. It is proven that Weed and Seed programs reduce crime in the area served, even as it rises nation-wide. Other statistical evident shows similar gains in respective areas, I am sure you are aware of these facts, already.

As a taxpayer and a resident in a Weed and Seed area, to cut down the FY 2010 budget is a negative way to save money. Such a move will costs more than it can save. It took money to save this part of town following the 1960's "white-flight" and it will need the same support now in providing a healthy environment for all, no matter who chooses to live here. Weed and Seed is a proven asset.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,  
Raymond R. Tromp

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September 9, 2009

*Dear Kristine Jaros/Central Weed & Seed,*

*On behalf of National Church of the African People of Love, I would like to thank you for your very generous donation. Your contribution made it possible for us to supply our "Neighborhood Back 2 School Bash" held September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009.*

*Since its inception in July 2007, The National Church of the African People of Love has been finding ways to uplift the Southeast side of Grand Rapids. In just this year we have been able to assist a number of residents, in various manners. This is only possible because of thoughtful contributions from people like you.*

*In 2010, we plan to broaden the NCAPL'S horizons and begin working with even more organizations and business within the Southeast Community. As you know, the cost of trying to support the needs of the community and running NCAPL Headquarters does not go away. We hope for your continued support in the future.*

*No goods or services of any value were or will be transferred to you in connection with this donation. Please keep this written acknowledgment of your donation for your tax records.*

*Once again thank you for your generous donation.*

*Dominique McCoy, First Lady*

*Dominique McCoy*

[Dominique africanpeopleoflove@live.com](mailto:Dominique_africanpeopleoflove@live.com)