

**Blackstone Neighborhood Association**

**General Membership Meeting Minutes**

**January 25, 2022 6:00 pm**

**Via Zoom**

**Attendees: 15 total**

Mark Maser, president, called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

The meeting opened with pleasant, neighborly chatter.

Mark Maser noted changes to the agenda, reported that the City Councilman Danny Begley had just texted that he would be unable to attend, and introduced two guests—Dan Dolezal and Steven Sykes.

**Guest Reports:**

Dan Dolezal of Ally Pointer architectural firm presented on the new digital sign that will be affixed to the north facing colonnade of the WOWT Studios, the two-story addition to the Blackstone Plaza tower. The sign will be 50 by 4 feet and be inset. The TV station will be broadcasting live from the new studios in May. Bob recommended that the sign also have artistic images and not just text. Jim Farho reported that the old studios will be demolished, and the site developed.

Steven Sykes with Skylark LLC gave an updated on the Block 38 project. Construction bids came in much higher than anticipation, so they are delaying their TIF request and need to revisit financials and project design. It is likely they will add a story to the building in order to make it bankable. The current design is 5 stories and 2 levels of garage below grade. There could be changes in materials as well. He will return to us with new design updates when they have them.

Minutes of the previous general meeting were approved unanimously.

**Financial Report:** Curt reviewed our end-of-year financial report. Our current bank balance is $5,416.74. And the report was approved unanimously.

**Beautification:** Rhonda discussed when she’ll start organizing planter of the flowerpots in the Spring. And Sebastian Cich reported that there will be another organized trash pick-up in the Spring.

**Neighborhood Construction Developments**:

517 and 531 South 38 Ave-have both sold to the same LLC. Ownership change at Montessori School – Arizona Company. And the Bowling Alley has opened at 38th & Farnam.

Curt will check on timeline for street reopenings at 38th street and 38th avenue and Leavenworth.

Scott reported on developments at the church related to a capital campaign and will bring more details to the group at a later time.

**Membership**: Membership for 2022 is $20. Please send in your dues to Curt.

**Promotion:** A new email newsletter had been sent out. Thanks to Theresa Gleason for working on this. It will be every other month. February 5 is the deadline for submissions to the next one.

**Preservation & Tour:**

Mark Maser reported on the historic home tour which will be called “Historic Blackstone Revealed” and will be held October 8 and 9. Included in full below are the goals and purpose:

The Blackstone Neighborhood Association plans to accomplish several goals with this fundraising project – raising awareness, promotes neighbor participation and encourage Blackstone business community partnering.

But paramount is our need to raise needed funds. These funds will used to promote preservation efforts in our boundaries.

Purpose:

Under our logo you will see our decades old tag line:

Protection. Preservation. Pride.

For the last 30 years our association has engaged in many efforts to preserve our neighborhood’s heritage.

Our most successful efforts have been our Historic Home Tours. These events have brought over 20,000 visitors to our homes and our neighborhood.

In October we are excited to expand on our past events to offer the Historic Blackstone Revealed. The weekend event will give ticket holders the opportunity to tour a curated list of private homes and businesses in Blackstone’s historic district. Each attendee will receive a guidebook sharing the history of the neighborhood and each property on tour. In addition, we will offer overnight packages, intimate dining opportunities and a preview gala as part of the outstanding weekend.

The Blackstone Neighborhood Association will use the tour proceeds to support historic preservation work in the neighborhood. The planned project would be working with neighborhood residents and supporters to identify a priority property list that could be in danger of being demolished or significantly altered in the future. Once identified, proceeds from the tour would pay the professional fees to protect the properties by locally landmarking them. These landmark designations will provide valuable protections that are currently not in place. And will help in our discussions with developers and with the City of Omaha, as we advocate for historic preservation in our neighborhood.

Among the plans will be a lunch with Mary Creighton Maxwell who grew up in the neighborhood and a patron party.

**Social**: If you would like to serve as Chair of this committee, please reach out to Mark.

**Networking:**  Cathy reported that there has been no new MNA meeting since October, but she gave an overview of the organization. There are seventeen neighborhood associations included.

**BID Report:** Jim Farho gave an overview of the BID. It is a 9-member board appointed by the mayor and the city council including both businesses and residents. They receive a tax assessment and have a $100,000 a year budget.

Safety is their current key project, after the pedestrian death last fall. Jim gave an update on the streetscape project and reported that Councilman Begley was instrumental in working behind the scenes with the city to make changes. There are new signs on the street and on poles. There will soon be a digital sign showing speeds, which the city will also track. The lights are now timed instead of push button, which will slow traffic. In the spring the city will install bollards to designate parking areas and a central turn lane. The BID has to pay for the design work and the city will install. There will be islands added at the intersections to better accommodate pedestrian crossings.

They have also placed 7 new trash cans in the business district.

Second Saturdays are a special night in the business district and starting this spring the block between 39th and 40th will be closed on those nights for a street fair.

Jim expects a big announcement soon about Mutual of Omaha moving downtown and the streetcar project advancing (which ended up being in the news that very night).

Currently the BID’s alleyway project is on hold as they work on pedestrian safety.

Mark commented, “Our neighborhood changes by the minute.”

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at **7:34 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

**Scott Jones**

Secretary, Blackstone Neighborhood Association