



COMMON GROUND

CONNECTING PEOPLE, PLACES AND ISSUES IN THE TWIN CITIES REGION | WINTER 2013



HIRE MN Celebrates Landmark Stadium Equity Deal

October 3, 2013, was a historic day for the state of Minnesota. Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority Equity Manager Alex Tittle made a major announcement: for the first time ever, the state would contract with community-based organizations to ensure a large-scale development would meet its hiring goals for people of color. That development? The \$975 million Vikings stadium.

This transformative partnership, called the Employment Assistance Firm (EAF), was the brainchild of the HIRE Minnesota coalition as part of the Stadium Equity Plan we advocated for. We know that community-based organizations understand the assets of and the barriers facing communities of color the best, and are best positioned to help the state and the prime contractors achieve their hiring goals. The state invested \$700,000 in the EAF, which is actually a coalition of 17 organizations representing diverse sectors and communities. Prime contractor Mortenson Construction recently committed an additional \$100,000 to strengthen the coalition's efforts.

The EAF is an important step in ensuring the state meets hiring goals for women, people of color and veterans. Those goals have increased significantly since the last time a project of this scale was taken on. Mortenson Construction will be expected to hire 32 percent people of color and 6 percent women. The EAF will be responsible for



MSFA CEO Ted Mondale, Summit Academy OIC students, leaders from the Somali Education and Social Advocacy Center gather on Mall of America Field.

conducting outreach and training to ensure those goals are met, developing relationships with the trades to place trainees, and recruiting a pool of trained workers into

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The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability is a coalition of grassroots organizations that work together to advance racial, economic and environmental justice in economic growth and land development in the Twin Cities region.

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 Community Stabilization Project
 District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
 Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota
 The Family Partnership
 Fresh Energy
 Harrison Neighborhood Association
 HOME Line
 Housing Preservation Project
 Jewish Community Action
 League of Women Voters of Minnesota
 Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers
 Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing
 Minneapolis Urban League
 Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
 Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance
 Native American Community Development Institute
 New American Academy
 Northside Residents Redevelopment Council
 Office for Social Justice, Catholic Charities
 Saint Paul Area Coalition for the Homeless
 Sierra Club, North Star Chapter
 Somali Action Alliance
 Summit Academy OIC
 Transit for Livable Communities
 Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation
 West Side Community Organization
 Women's Environmental Institute

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From the Director's Desk

Reflections on Our 20-year Anniversary

"Density is a four-letter word." That was one of the first lessons I learned back in

1994 as the new coordinator for a coalition called the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, which was then just over a year old.

Alongside our environmental, land-use and transit allies, we were asking the Metropolitan Council to go bold on its regional growth plan and raise overall density goals for the Twin Cities region. We wanted densities that would better serve the transit system, to discourage larger lots in areas that were receiving sewer service, and to redirect investment into the core cities where the majority of low-income communities and communities of color were located at the time.

Alongside our faith-based and social justice allies, we were also calling on the Met Council to link stronger affordable housing goals to the growth plan, to embed them in future policy plans and to find ways to withhold investments from the suburban cities that were actively resisting building more affordable housing options. In the continuing debate about the carrot vs. stick approach, we argued that the carrots the council had to offer local municipalities (grant dollars, transportation spending, sewer lines and transit service) should be

wielded like sticks to get local decision-makers' attention.

We and future generations of Twin Cities residents will greatly benefit from the legacy we are building together right now.

That Met Council, operating under Governor Arne Carlson's administration, did not adopt many of our recommendations. Instead, it allowed overall densities to creep up by a small fraction. It rejected taking a tough stance on cities that were lagging in housing production, preferring an incentives-based approach. It opened up approximately 200,000 acres of developable

land to the metropolitan urban service area available for future sewer service—at the time, the land-mass equivalent to the entire acreage in the state parks system.

What a difference a couple of decades can make.

As the Alliance approaches our 20-year anniversary next year, I'm reminded of just how far we've traveled. When I started with the Alliance, 60 percent of new residential housing permits were for single family-detached units. At the height of the housing boom in 2004,



The Alliance through the years...



that ratio had flipped. For the last decade, high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums have sprouted across the metro area.

In the mid-1990s, about 85 percent of our metro population was white. Now nearly one in four residents in our region are people of color, and by 2040 that number is expected to rise to 43 percent of the overall population.

The Met Council is currently debating another regional growth plan, called Thrive MSP 2040. This is the fourth growth plan the agency has considered since the Alliance was founded. The members of the Met Council are grappling with how much growth and development can be supported in the core cities and inner-ring suburbs where existing infrastructure can efficiently absorb it—50 percent of new growth? 60 percent? More?

The Met Council is also working with community-based groups and housing advocates to embed policies that leverage public and private investments to benefit low-income communities of color. Allied council leaders are supporting the Alliance and our partners in engaging community members in a Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA), an effort to foster economic opportunity in low-wealth neighborhoods. This process should allow communities to define for themselves what opportunity looks like. The Met Council is explicitly talking about racial disparities and equitable development strategies, which would have been unimaginable in 1994.

Today, light rail trains, commuter train service and bus rapid transit lines are running throughout the region. The Hiawatha line broke its 20-year ridership projections in its third year of operation. The Central Corridor LRT, now called the Green Line, opens next year but has already induced hundreds of millions of dollars in residential and commercial development projects. Transit-

oriented development is no longer an exotic term; all along our commercial corridors mixed-use structures are being constructed.

Twenty years ago, there was no statewide or regional understanding of our racial employment disparities, nor any plans to tie workforce development strategies to public works projects. Now, because of the tremendous work of the Alliance and our partners in the HIRE Minnesota coalition, public agencies are making better progress at meeting their hiring goals for women and people of color.

To be clear, there is still more to do. The Alliance and our allies will press on next year with a visionary plan to rapidly build out our region's transit system and give an additional 500,000 workers better access to employment opportunities. And one of the most promising movements we've seen is the growing number of neighborhood and community-based groups embracing the economic development and community benefit opportunities represented by current and future transitway projects – claiming their rightful place on advisory committees, embedding equitable development elements into land-use plans and persuading local officials to apply a racial equity lens to project planning and decision-making.

The coalition members that have led the Alliance can be rightfully proud of our accomplishments, and the work of my fellow staff members has been recognized as a national model for regional coalition organizing and advocacy. We and future generations of Twin Cities residents will greatly benefit from the legacy we are building together right now.

Russ Adams



Alliance Joins Cross-sector Campaign for Transportation Funding

In 2013, the Alliance was a member of the Transit for a Stronger Economy campaign, which sought a ¼-cent increase in the metro-area sales tax to accelerate the build-out of our region's transit system. The funding would have allowed our region to construct all planned transitways—including light rail, bus rapid transit and streetcar lines—in 15 to 20 years instead of 30 or 40 years.

In an effort to overcome opposition to a transit-only funding package, the coalition aligned with Progress in Motion (PIM) near the end of the session. PIM is a coalition of road, highway and bridge interests that worked with us to propose a comprehensive transportation-funding bill. Neither bill passed, but the partnerships that we built set the stage for a strengthened approach in the 2014 session.

Transit for a Stronger Economy and PIM are now joining forces to create MoveMN, a coalition that for the first time unites transit, bike, pedestrian, road, highway, bridge, community, business and labor advocates to build support for comprehensive transportation funding in our state. MoveMN is the logical evolutionary step of these coalitions' individual efforts to secure more transportation funding, and a strategic attempt to improve both the legislative strategy and public will-building that needs to happen to pass a bill that would build-out the region's transit system, expand transit in Greater Minnesota, and provide safe, accessible bicycling and walking.

The Alliance will play a lead role at the campaign's

strategy table, working closely to connect traditional transit and road advocates with community-based organizations that are representative of people of color and low-income people. We will convene and strengthen the network of these groups that met regularly earlier this year to successfully pass equity language during the 2013 session. With the help of a key ally, bill author Sen. Bobby Joe Champion, the coalition passed language that gives public agencies the authority to contract with community-based organizations to conduct community engagement on future transitways. It also gives agencies the authority to contract with community-based employment assistance agencies to help meet hiring goals, as is being done on the Vikings stadium.

A primary power-building strategy within the campaign will be to foster new relationships in a way that hasn't happened before. One of our first goals will be to build stronger ties between labor allies, transit advocates and community-based groups to discuss our mutual self-interest in building out our regional transit system. The Alliance will help facilitate discussions that will quantify the

economic development, job creation and community benefits potential that a robust system would yield at a local level. The important lesson, we believe, will be that our goals are well aligned—investment in transit creates jobs, improves mobility for the available labor force and revitalizes communities, all of which are good for everyone.

Although it may sound simple, this level of sophisticated partnership hasn't been accomplished before in Minnesota in a coordinated campaign. We're breaking new ground and, hopefully, setting the stage to fund a shared vision for our regional prosperity.



Twin Cities leaders gathered at the MoveMN launch event

Labor's Interest in a Progressive Transportation Bill

By Greg LeRoy, executive director for Good Jobs First

For the last 14 years, Good Jobs First has argued that suburban sprawl is a broadly anti-union phenomenon. We also hold that smart growth, done right, can be very pro-labor.

More Work for the Building Trades

One of the basic principles of past national transportation funding campaigns is “fix it first” when it comes to infrastructure. That is, instead of building new rights of way, more dollars are steered to repairing and rebuilding existing roads, schools and bridges. As Good Jobs First proved in our 2003 study *The Jobs Are Back in Town*, “fix it first” means more work-hours per thousand dollars spent because no funds are needed for land acquisition, engineering or other costs associated with new roads. And thanks to the Recovery Act’s jobs data at www.recovery.gov, we also know now that transit construction is substantially more labor-intensive than road-building. Transit can also directly benefit the Building Trades’ overall union share, or density, because it stimulates private construction in urbanized areas with more unionized contractors.

We are already seeing this in the Twin Cities, where projects like the Green Line and St. Paul’s Union Depot are stimulating a surge in construction around transit stations. Those are places where the Building Trades have higher private-sector job density. Indeed, light rail corridors have been a bright spot for Twin Cities construction workers, which suffered very high unemployment rates in the Great Recession.

Strengthening Unionized Employers

Unionized workplaces are disproportionately located in central cities and inner-ring suburbs, where transit service is best and roads most need repair. By making sure that Minnesota’s funding streams are fair to transit and good on “fix it first,” we can strengthen unionized employers, from hospitals and hotels to factories and grocery stores. Top-grade infrastructure means companies are efficient and productive and that employees, clients and customers lose less time to congestion.

More Good Jobs in Transit

Because America’s transit systems have been chronically underfunded, our transit workforce is especially “grey.” So by expanding transit service, we’ll not only create jobs for new drivers, operators and mechanics to cover the new service; we’ll also replace retiring baby boomers. That means lots of steady, family-wage jobs with benefits. Good news for our economy!



Construction workforce students called for more state transit investment at a Transit for a Stronger Economy press conference earlier this year.

Urban Density is Good for Union Density

Our findings make it clear: unions are urban institutions and union jobs are stronger when they stay in urban areas. We find this is true across the board in manufacturing, hospitality, health care and building services.

Conversely, as jobs thin out geographically, they de-unionize. Think about all those sprawling office parks, industrial parks and entertainment venues located on distant suburban fringes. They are often built, cleaned and maintained non-union, are not accessible by public transit, and tend to be full of non-union jobs.

The Climate Is On Our Side

By advocating for transit, we are promoting transportation and construction projects that will help Minnesota save energy and reduce air pollution. It’s another example of how the emerging “green economy” is going to help Minnesota’s economy recover and stay stronger.

The good news for Minnesota is that a unified transportation campaign is emerging, called *Move MN*. On September 27, 130 advocates, union representatives, and business and philanthropic leaders gathered to discuss how transit and road interests could cooperate to pass a large funding bill in the 2014 legislative session. Several representatives from the Building Trades, transit and public employee unions pledged their full support for a major push for new investments in our transit and roadway systems. It’s the first step, and a smart move. More transit means more good jobs all around!

Greenway Development on the Horizon in North Minneapolis?

In 2011, a volunteer community group named Twin Cities Greenways (TCG) began to imagine what it would look like to convert Irving Avenue in North Minneapolis into a greenway virtually free of motorized traffic. The greenway they envisioned would provide a safe pathway for bicyclists and pedestrians, allowing users to move through North Minneapolis with connections to trails, other parkways, the river and northern suburbs. It would also serve as a linear parkway, providing a host of amenities to residents living nearby, including pocket parks, green space, community gardens, tot lots and picnic areas. Partnering with the Community Design Group and Bike Walk Twin Cities, a program of Transit for Livable Communities, they set out to engage residents in discussions about the possibility.

In the initial engagement process, TCG and its partners connected with 200 participants, most of whom were white homeowners. Although many of those people expressed interest in the project, more needed to be done to make sure that the voices of renters and people of color were heard in the process. Lead volunteers of the project and the city of Minneapolis reached out to the Alliance for support and ideas regarding community outreach and engagement.

"The Alliance believes that it is important for the greenway to reflect the community's vision and for residents to be an equal partner in all phases of the project," says Alliance Executive Director Russ Adams. "As one resident expressed, it feels like the same old story of a decision being made somewhere in downtown Minneapolis and then those who are living on the Northside are told about it. In order for the project to be successful, it has to be what the community wants."

The Alliance immediately connected with neighborhood-based organizations such as the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC), the Folwell Neighborhood Association and the Jordan Area Community Council, to explore how the project's community engagement efforts could be strengthened to reflect the full input of the community. Project partners were also able to secure a grant to conduct a feasibility study and support robust community engagement activities during the planning and construction phases of the project.



BEFORE



AFTER

These before and after renderings created by the city of Minneapolis show the vision for the greenway.

"For residents to be engaged, we need a broader base of partners to do the engagement work," says Kenya McKnight, north Minneapolis resident, Bush Fellow and Alliance board member. "We have to get creative about the engagement methods and create a narrative about what people want and need through that process."

Residents have expressed concerns about losing their on-street parking and about the potential for increased property values to lead to higher taxes. Adams says that it will be critical for project organizers to think about how to mitigate gentrification and displacement impacts. Strategies coalition partners are discussing include land bank-



“This greenway is about supporting the healthy living movement that we are promoting for Northside residents.” – Anthony Taylor, Major Taylor Bike Club

ing and affordable housing creation along the route to prevent resident displacement.

To that end, NRRC Executive Director Ishmael Israel is monitoring the project to ensure that decisions are consistently made in the interest of the broader community. “We have to look at the overall cost of this project to North Minneapolis residents,” Israel says.

Indeed, many community leaders see the project in broader terms than just a right-of-way for cyclists moving through the northside. Anthony Taylor, a volunteer with the Major Taylor Bike Club which has deep ties to the

African American community in North Minneapolis, thinks the project is more than just a bike path. “This greenway is about supporting the healthy living movement that we are promoting for Northside residents,” he said. Taylor believes the greenway will encourage people to get outdoors, step out of their cars and get some exercise. And that benefits everyone.

To learn more about the greenway project visit <http://bit.ly/1241HhE>.

HIRE MINNESOTA

HIRE Minnesota, continued from page 1

the project. If the goals are met, this work could secure up to \$80 million in wages for people of color based on job-creation projections.

“We are committed to having the people of Minnesota build the ‘People’s Stadium’,” said Louis King, president of Summit Academy OIC and founder of HIRE Minnesota. “We applaud the Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority for supporting this process.”

While the creation of the EAF is groundbreaking in itself, HIRE Minnesota believes that hiring outcomes will be most improved because of the strong, long-term relationships we are building between community-based groups and other organizations within the construction workforce system. Historically, community groups have received information about hiring performance after a project is completed, when there was no hope of influencing a better outcome. HIRE Minnesota’s goal within this new dynamic is to place women and people of color in construction careers that are operating in a cohesive system, where there’s understanding and accountability among all the responsible parties. This change could allow progress made on the Vikings project to live beyond the stadium, creating a more diverse workforce for future public infrastructure projects in the region.

“The EAF is a groundbreaking collaboration,” said Avi Viswanathan, HIRE Minnesota campaign director. “After years of watching state-funded projects fail to meet hiring goals, the EAF partners came together with a positive vision to increase the number of people of color, women and veterans in the workforce. We’re proud to be part of this coalition, which has stuck together and kept fighting until we got the needed investment in our communities.”

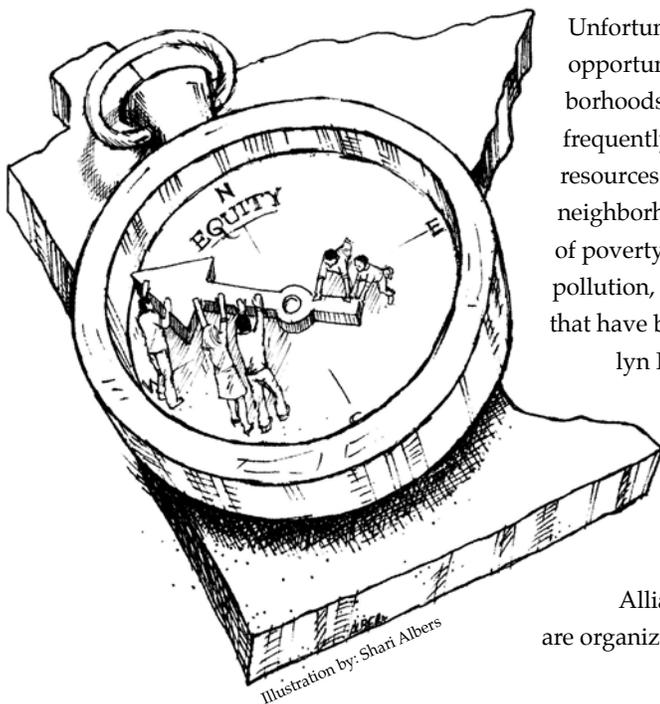


Creating Equitable Opportunities in the Twin Cities region

In a recent article about his theory of “targeted universalism,” racial justice scholar John A. Powell described a web of opportunity in America, saying, “Only if we address all of the mutually reinforcing constraints on opportunity can we expect real progress in any one factor.”

While community members and policymakers alike have long acknowledged this to be true, there are very few instances of public decision-making that take cross-issue and cross-geography factors into account to create better outcomes for people and communities. Too often, we have devised affordable housing, transit and health care policy separately, as though the way those decisions play out in real life do not affect one another. Even regional policy, which works across geographies, has historically taken on one issue at a time.

As more and more data emerges about how a variety of issues reinforce one another in our lives, more creative processes are being devised to bring communities and policymakers together to make better decisions and create opportunity. Surprisingly, the federal government has demonstrated leadership in this arena, creating the cross-agency Partnership for Sustainable Communities and requiring grantees of that program to assemble what are known as Fair Housing and Equity Assessments (FHEAs). FHEAs are an attempt to ensure regions across the country are investing in the creation of “geographies of opportunity”: places where a person’s zip code does not predict poor educational, economic or health outcomes. The FHEA, which is being led by the Metropolitan Council in the Twin Cities region, is one of the first tools that has asked leaders to talk explicitly about the role of race in our historic and present-day regional decision-making.



Unfortunately, many communities in the Twin Cities region cannot access the opportunities that contribute significantly to health and well-being. In neighborhoods that are home to a majority of low-income people of color, health is frequently compromised by community members’ lack of access to important resources like housing, jobs, bank loans, health care and more. Nationwide, these neighborhoods, defined by the federal government as racially concentrated areas of poverty (RCAPs), experience higher crime rates, lower walkability scores, more pollution, poorer performing schools, and a host of other disparities. The RCAPs that have been identified in our region include parts of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, North Minneapolis, Central/South Minneapolis, Richfield, and Central/East St. Paul. The FHEA provides an opportunity to align policymaking across issues to ensure these and all communities in our region have access to resources.

More comprehensive policymaking is great, but low-income people and people of color must be positioned as leaders in that process. The Alliance and our partner the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) are organizing leaders from a variety of community-based organizations to work

What factors impact the health of our neighborhoods and our region?

- Access to **quality housing**
- Access to **jobs** (especially at the entry level)
- Access to multi-modal **transportation options**
- **Bank/loan presence or absence**
- Design of the **built environment**, such as transit ways, sidewalks, street lights, paved streets, pedestrian and bike pathways, and greenways
- Access to **a thriving local economy**, including vibrant commercial corridors, retail and entrepreneurial opportunities
- Access to **social services**
- **Safety**
- **School quality**
- Access to **parks, green space and recreational opportunities**
- Access to **libraries and affordable high-speed broadband**
- Access to **health care**

ORGANIZER ROUNDTABLE: Challenging White Privilege

White Privilege refers to the unearned benefits white people enjoy simply because of the color of their skin. While this privilege comes at the expense of people of color, white people cannot maintain this system of privilege without compromising their humanity and the well-being of our region.

At two Organizer Roundtables this fall, the Alliance gathered organizers to discuss how we can challenge this construct at both the individual and organizational levels. Several themes emerged, which elevated some principles that can help organizers to challenge this systemic injustice.

White privilege is dehumanizing: Ned Moore, a community organizer with the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing, shared how white privilege negatively impacts everyone. "Privilege corrupts; it's a corrupting force in our minds, body and soul," he said. "If our liberation is bound together, we all have something at stake which calls us to a process of personal transformation."

Racism and white privilege are often covert: David Nicholson, program officer for the Headwaters Foundation for Justice, described how racism in Minnesota often operates covertly. "It's covert racism because it's not talked about, it's internalized," he said. "Our job is to make overt what is covert through healing and love. It's about being uncomfortable and awkward."

The need for recognizing one's own privilege: Barb Rose, a partner with Side by Side Associates, spoke to the need for people to recognize and own their privilege. "As a white woman, I struggle with white privilege because I am a part of the dominant culture," she said. "For me, it means that I have to be up front and center about it and intentionally build relationships with others who are different than me."

"As a biracial person, I carry a lot of privilege," said Sasha Houston-Brown, an organizer with the Native American Community Development Institute. "As organizers, it's important that we all have this analysis. People often approach community organizing without acknowledging their privilege. They come in asking to be the voice for the community instead of being an ally and checking their privilege at the door."

The importance of racial analysis at organizational level:

Beth Newkirk, executive director of the Organizing Apprenticeship Project, described how her organization began to apply a racial analysis to its work. "We often received positive responses about the training itself but hit the wall in the outcomes," Newkirk explained. "White trainees got on a job path where they fit in and were developed. Trainees of color also got jobs, but they were really bad jobs where they were often marginalized... We knew their experiences had to do with their race. The question was what we would do about it and how do we change?"

OAP responded by completing a strategic plan to analyze what the organization could do to prepare their trainees to make a difference in the field. They brought in the Applied Research Center, a racial justice think tank, to help them consider how to evolve their organization and challenge the systems that perpetuated racial injustice.

To learn more about the Alliance's Organizer Roundtables, please visit <http://bit.ly/1gTtNjC>.



through the FHEA process to create spaces for residents to define the causes of spatially experienced disparities in our region. Together, we are working to ensure the lived experience and knowledge of low-income people of color informs the regional analysis of the policies, practices and resource allocations that have contributed to the disparities they experience in our region and help define solutions to reduce those disparities.

Regional policymakers have been receptive, engaging our network by asking questions such as: Where do you think new affordable housing should be built? How can transit best serve your community? What do you believe drives segregation in your

community? What should be done to bring or connect additional opportunities to your neighborhood? More effort is needed to proactively engage broad and diverse leadership in these discussions, but this is one of the most comprehensive efforts our region has ever undertaken to involve low-income people of color in the decisions that affect their lives.

Eliminating disparities is good for everyone in our region. Racial and economic equity are critical contributors to the economic and social health of the region as a whole. We believe this project is a stepping stone to creating a regional vision that will lead to prosperity for all residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area.



The Alliance Welcomes NEW MEMBERS



ACER

African Career, Education & Resource, Inc. (ACER) is a member-driven organization committed to bridging the information, education and resource gaps in African immigrant communities in Brooklyn Park. Since its inception in 2008, ACER has worked to ensure that African immigrants are aware of the opportunities to access employment, transit, education, health care and other pivotal resources in the community.

ACER initially formed a relationship with the Alliance through the Corridors of Opportunity initiative. "We decided to join because we love the Alliance and everything they stand for," says Denise Butler, ACER's outreach coordinator. "Their leadership, work ethic and intentionality in forming cross-cultural relationships with organizations and communities is something that we find valuable and of great importance."

ACER outreach coordinator Denise Butler

NRRC



NRRC staff Kathy Dekrey, organizer, Ishmael Israel, executive director and Terra Mayfield, office manager

Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC) is a citizen-participation organization founded in 1969 that represents residents of the Near North and Willard Hay neighborhoods of Minneapolis. NRRC exists to position its residents, a majority of whom are African American, as the primary agents for improving the community's social, economic and livability conditions.

For the last several years, NRRC has been working with the Alliance to bring resident voices to decision-making tables. "The Alliance has been instrumental in building NRRC's capacity to lead resident engagement and establish engagement best practices, and is a vital partner in negotiating community benefits agreements with developers," says Executive Director Ishmael Israel. "A formal partnership with the Alliance was a natural next step. We are happy to be a part of a larger movement focused on bettering the lives of city residents."

WSCO



WSCO staff Mason Wells, community organizer, Christine Shyne, executive director, and Eleonore Wesserle, food justice project

The West Side Community Organization (WSCO) is a neighborhood-based organization working from the grassroots to make the community better for all residents. The West Side is situated along the Mississippi River across from downtown St. Paul. Today, it is home to a diverse population of white, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino residents.

Building relationships was key to WSCO's decision to join the Alliance. "We started to get involved with Alliance through Corridors of Opportunity. As our staff and board became more acquainted with the organization, we realized that the Alliance aligned with our mission and vision," says WSCO Community Organizer Mason Wells. "We also saw the Alliance's commitment to racial equity and knew that it would be instrumental in our work moving forward."



The Alliance Welcomes NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Asad Aliweyd

Asad Aliweyd is the executive director of New American Academy (NAA), a nonprofit dedicated to promoting education, cultural awareness and economic opportunity for East African immigrants in Eden Prairie. Asad moved from Somalia to the United States in 1995. After earning his bachelor's degree in mathematics from Metro State University, Asad taught math at Eden Prairie High School. During his years as a teacher, he noticed that the Somali students were struggling, so he started a parent group to help improve outcomes for Somali students. NAA was born from that group. The organization soon expanded its reach as Asad realized that the problems facing his community were bigger than the achievement gap; African immigrants in his area largely lacked access to employment, transportation, health care, education and affordable housing. He became involved with the Alliance when he began organizing around the Southwest LRT and the potential benefits its development could bring. "I am the kind of person who deeply cares about community," says Aliweyd. "I like the people to get what they need, it's what drives me the most."



Jim Erkel

Jim Erkel helped to establish and directs the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy's (MCEA) Land Use and Transportation program. Before coming to MCEA, he served as the director of land protection for the Minnesota chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Prior to that, he was a senior attorney practicing energy and environmental law for a corporation in Los Angeles, California. Erkel and MCEA were key players alongside the Alliance and our partners in the Stops for Us coalition, which secured three missing stops in low-income communities of color along the Central Corridor LRT. Jim celebrated his 15th anniversary at MCEA this year, where he works on issues of growth management, and particularly on the environmental effects of Minnesota's settlement patterns, and the interaction between land use and transportation. "I see this work as meaningful and important because it helps my neighbors and everyone else that lives in the region," says Erkel. "We will all do better if we all do better."



Kenya McKnight

Kenya McKnight joined the Alliance's board as an at-large member in March. Throughout her career, Kenya has demonstrated a deep commitment to North Minneapolis. From 2005 - 2008, she worked at Harvest Preparatory School, which helped her understand the education challenges facing communities of color. While working at Harvest Prep, she participated in the Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation's Careership program, which helped her learn about the intersection of community, economic development and politics. Kenya then worked at NEON for five years, focusing on business development in North Minneapolis. She was also heavily involved in the Northside Community Reinvestment Coalition, a group of organizations committed to giving residents fair access to housing and to foreclosure prevention. Kenya is a member of the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Advisory Board and was recently named a Bush Fellow.





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