

Upper Harbor Terminal Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #11

Meeting Minutes

06.18.20

Community Advisory Committee (CAC) General Meeting:

Introduction/ Updates (Kate)

After a brief introduction Denise Nelson and Ethan Neerdaels shared a presentation and a film which provided thoughts and perspectives about the Upper Harbor Terminal site, the park project, as well as the Mississippi River, Dakota history, and context.

Presentation was followed by a film. Film is found at the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTSEGaWdo5w>

Note: UHT board shown in the film was a draft version, the current version can be found in one of the draft concept sets of PDF files (link below):

<http://upperharbormpls.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/UHT-Park-Concept-Boards-FINAL.pdf>

Questions and Comments

Question and comments were mostly with Denise and Ethan (Dakota presenters) unless otherwise indicated.

Q. Will we be able to access this powerpoint at a later time? I'd like to get a hold of the Victor Douville quote.

- a. We will make the presentation available as a PDF, just be sure to credit the people we have credited in the presentation, like Victor Douville if you use his quote.

Q. I've been in MN all my life, along with 6 generations of my family. I grew up in the parks: Lake Nokomis, Harriet, which is my favorite lake, Calhoun, Como, the Falls. I really appreciate hearing all of this, because often we don't know. We see the park as it is today. When I joined this CAC, as a black woman, it was because I wanted to connect the people here to the River. People do not know the water. Like you said, it brings health, it brings wealth, it brings awareness, and a lot of people don't go to the water. One of my desires and goals was to educate Black people about the river,

and how beautiful it is. And we don't want to get any more gentrified. We need an opportunity to explore and enjoy it.

You said you didn't like the concepts and that is kind of where we were going. But how can we work together to actually honor the Dakota people. Do we have architecture like tipis, and stories? How do we honor that history, and bring it back? But then how can I bring in my Black brothers and sisters, our other relatives, to see this river and to participate in it in a modern day way? Most parks do have a place to picnic and barbeque. Black people like to barbeque, they like to have parties, and gather together as families. So is there some way we can bring those two together?

- a. I think we can absolutely. Things like barbeques and families coming together is what the space should be for. Not a place for adding value for white property owners. I'd like to see the river as a space for connecting communities rather than a divider. And I think the way the city has set this up, it's very compartmentalized. And I think telling this history to all Minnesotans will help create a sense of community. We are all looking for a place to build community and I think it has to start in Indigenous communities. I was telling Kate before the meeting that there is a great book about this man named Joseph Godfrey). He was a runaway slave from Henry Sibley. They don't talk about this down at the Historical Society when you go see Sibley's house. He was the only Black participant in the war of 1812. People ask if he fought as an American, but he fought as a Dakota. People are surprised, they ask "Well he was Black. How could he be a Dakota?". Because we didn't have race. He saw free people, he was welcomed into the community, and he saw the oppression of the Wašiču. Which is our word for the colonial system, and it means "take the fat". Because they kill the buffalo and only take the fat and waste everything else and let it rot. The way that communities have always accepted people; I think we need to return to these age old traditions. Where it is about building these communities. We can look to these partnerships that all communities have had. Whether it is the American Indian Movement and Black Lives Matter or just kids in school. I think it will start with educating about the history of this place. We need to look at a real history of Minnesota and quit lying about the theft of land. The first governor had slaves. They aren't telling the truth in these schools so we need to start educating the adults and the youth. When we do that I think we can start talking about healing this river. We aren't opposed to creating spaces for families to use, but I am personally opposed to big business getting bigger. I'd like to see the people control the place. So think there is a lot of community dialogue that still needs to happen. If this place had a spot for people to come together. We like to cook out too, but one of the things that hinders us is we are often given tickets or arrested for harvesting our medicines in the parks. We'd like to see Indigenous plant medicines growing again instead of buckthorn and perennial flowers that look just good. We need to restore to be as natural as we can so we can get our medicine from the earth. This isn't the first time there has been serious disease all across this Mn territory. Before we had knowledge of how to heal ourselves through the

place and today we live in a state of fear. Rather than state of being and power because of our disconnection from this land base. As Dakota people, one of the things our elders always share is that we are connected to the river, like with an umbilical cord. And so when a Dakota person is born we put the umbilical cord in a turtle or lizard bag and it's a way their spirit is protected. And when people don't know where they are from they say they are looking for their belly button. We see a lot of Americans, whether they are Euro-American, African American, Asian American, and even some Native people, looking for their purpose in life. Their purpose in this place, because it has been stolen and discarded. And so how can we connect back to our land base. Its all of our land base now. All of us call this community home. So how do we base this on wodaŋlota, which is peace. Or everything in balance.

Q. Vice Chair: Peace. Thank you for the presentation. I just want to paraphrase what you said to make sure you have an understanding. I'm paraphrasing based on what Ethan as a person in sharing, not necessarily representing the whole Dakota nation. What I hear you saying is that the resources that the City and the Park Board are using, the money, would be better spent in restoring the river and the land and the people. Does that feel an accurate, succinct representation of how you feel about this project?

- a. Absolutely, yes. Exactly what you are saying.
- a. I see it as a tripod. Our cultures and communities are connected to the land. They are connected through the language that we use. People get all up in arms about Indigenous place names and restoring them, but the reality is that everyone in Minnesota uses Indigenous place names. Everyone speaks Dakota, just really bad. There are thousands of place names, Wayzata is actually Waziya, Chaska is Chaske. Waconia is another example. It's not like we are asking people do to much, but when we use that language it creates a sense of kinship. There is no hierarchy or supremacy in the Dakota language, so it forces people to be relatives. It changes how you interact with all of life. I didn't grow up speaking Dakota. I learned it in college. Through the language I have been able to become a better relative. I was able to grow and change. I'm still learning but these are the little baby steps that we have to take. Because it has to be us, the community; it has to be grassroots. I don't think the Park Board is going to heal hundreds of years of oppression in communities. But it can accelerate that healing by providing resources where they are needed, by directing them.

Q. I've taken the Sacred Sites tour sponsored by the Mn Council of Churches a couple of times. Jim Bear Jacobs leads a tour to Coldwater Springs, the encampment in Fort Snelling State Park, and to the Indian Burial Grounds on Pilot Knob. I found it very moving and if people are interested, I posted a link on Chat so you can follow up and sign up for a tour if you want. I found it very moving.

There are a number of springs that still exist in the Wirth and Glenwood area. I made good use of those springs a number of years ago when I needed to bury a sacred bundle. The power of those springs was so great that I was able to find mud in February when the ground was frozen solid. If you want to find out more, you can contact me, or I can get your contact information.

Sacred Site:

<https://www.mnchurches.org/what-we-do/healing-minnesota-stories>

Q. Thank you for the amazing presentation. I just keep building bit by bit on the amazing knowledge that you share with our community. Beyond being amazed, how specifically can we support this?

- a. That is a great question. I am by no means a leader, but I think one way you can support this is to contribute resources to the communities we are talking about. Sometimes it's a little vague, but as I mentioned, the Dakota language is critically endangered with one first language speaker left. Once Carrie's passes it's all second language learners. She is in her eighties or nineties and lives in Upper Sioux. Our language, or very tongue, is being still taken from us by these policies. That first removal order in 1862 directly resulted in our language almost going extinct. There are language efforts you could contribute to. Even in programs like Migizi that work with Native youth on the Southside and Northside, there is a lot of community groups. But the first and foremost thing you can do is be a relative. Be out there in the places and build your own connections or relationship to the spaces. That is one of the first steps because we often drive by or walk through these parks. But we can express that gratitude to the river and live it out. I don't know exactly how to do this. Until Minnesotans are ready to honor the treaties and acknowledge what treaties are, we cannot move forward. This is all stolen land and they want to divvy the loot. But there is enough to go around for everyone. It's not about having more or less for anyone group, it's about being related. So there are a multitude of things. Our communities have been pauperized. We weren't always oppressed and made to be poor. We used to drink gold out of the Black Hills Rivers. But they mined everything. So really, it's getting back to intergenerational wealth for all people that is based on the land. It's not based on a capitalist economy. We have to get back to getting local foods. We can't be reliant on all of the things in our food systems. We can't be reliant on the government to fix problems in our community. We can't be reliant on schools because they are not teaching us how to stop police and people from oppressing us while harvesting medicines. Or sitting out on our own land when we look at the encampment of Native people along Hiawatha and the continued ones today. How can you be homeless in your own homeland? There are a lot of systemic things we have to dismantle. It starts with looking at treaties. Otherwise we are just addressing

symptoms, putting band aids on things and calling it a day. But until we can have a real look at treaties and treaty law, there will be no health to be found for anyone.

Q. I'll rephrase because you started to answer it. From what I understand, it sounds like you are not necessarily a fan of the current city development plan, but that there are a lot of things that Robin was talking about that you would in favor of doing. Bringing families together, growing things in the parks, like Native medicines, maybe some other things in the three plans that you looked at that would also be beneficial. But we need more community engagement to get to that. Am I understanding that correctly?

- a. I think so. I would also like to see a moratorium in trapping animals in their own habitats. Many of our animal relatives are under attack for damming the river or simply existing. I think also an intense removal on invasive species, like the starling. It attacks native woodpeckers and their eggs and displaces them from their homes. Very much like what happened to Dakota people here. But I'd also like to see the medicines planted in such a way is sustainable. When you go to Coldwater Springs, it looks like it's a farm. It doesn't look like it's being restored using natural techniques like burning or using different ways of planting. I think we have to examine and be wary of any systems that we create for developing an area. Need more engagement, but also community building. Because we are in different communities, but really it should be one oyate, one group of people. We can be talking about Minneapolis residents or Minnesotans. We have to realize we are all in the same canoe. When people are standing on the side shouting, they are not helping. They need to get in the canoe and paddle or else shut up. It's time for that. There has been so much divisiveness over the land, but we are all in the same canoe that is sinking. Are we going to fix it or argue?

Q. So, Ethan and Denise, would you be a part of helping to reach out to the tribes and engage them? You have been hired by the Park Board now?

- a. Maybe. We can discuss it, but we make no promises. We are not Park Board employees and have no affiliation.
- a. (Kate) Denise and Ethan have been hired by the Park Board to help with this project so far, but are not employees of the agency. Sorry if I gave that impression; I didn't mean to.

Q. CAC Vice Chair: That leads to my question. So, have or are the presenters being compensated for this sharing of knowledge and wisdom? We are not just taking from people?

- a. Correct, presenters have been compensated.

Q. I am just really happy to hear the desires of the Dakota people are in alignment with some of the feelings and thoughts and emotions that I have had as an environmental justice organizer, which is what I am called. Also, as a Mom, I have recognized how disconnected and exploited earth in general is, or as you said Turtle Island. I just want to honor my commitment to our people and to this earth and our animals and water. So I am excited to see where these conversations can go. Beyond Park Board panning and collaboration with other organizations. This group of folks, even online now, can be the start of action because a lot of times we have a lot of meetings, but I agree we have to tell these stories and be honest and talk about decolonization. We really have got to tell the truth. Sometimes I do environmental justice tours and start around Spirit island because I thought it was important to tell the story about where we should go back to and where we begin. We need to remind people of exploitation that settlers and have done and then bring together how our community was created into this pot of undesirables as well. And then we continue to be harmed throughout the land. I am committed and I hope everyone else is not just moved and touched, but are moved to do something more than just come to these meetings. And moved to do something more beyond their organizations. When we talk about these places, I am so down for naming everything back to what it was, or at least to honor the ancestors of this land. I don't think Upper Harbor Terminal is a good name. It's never felt good to describe it. I think we should talk about transforming more of the consciousness that you talk about. Bring people back to the language, restore the land. Tell people about the history of these colonizers that are oppressive, and their names are everywhere. I also hope you use me as a resource in the neighborhood. I live in North and I'm excited to help in any way. Thank you.

- a. Woipida. Thank you.

C. CAC Vice chair: I hope that out of this presentation that the Park Board and City will take a step back with everything that has happened here in the last few weeks across the country and across the world and take a look at itself. Whiteness is really required to take a look at itself and how it is impacted the health of human beings through white supremacy. Because everything you presented is really about humanity. And that is what we need more of in my opinion.

- a. Maybe I could share a quick story that ties this all in. I also do some tours with the Humanities Center. I call them Places of Power now, instead of Sacred Sites. You can check them out online, but they are another opportunities in addition to the tours by Jim Bear Baker. These stories are usually told in the winter, but we are all very backwards and living in a time where everything is messed up. So, I'll tell it in the summer on a hot day. When people hear these stories, they often call them children's stories. But these are the stories of life and you hear them a different way throughout your life, wherever you happen to be.

Story of the Spider, a Trickster named Octomi.

Q. CAC Chair. That was an amazing story. Sounds real and sounds like today. I think what I like about meeting you and hearing this story is that many people are struggling with identity. I agree, don't call it Upper Harbor Terminal. Start with an original name – what the Dakota people called it. I learned a lot from hearing you today. I feel inspired, and also want to come into action. Everyone shares these struggles. With Black people it's good to hear stories by other oppressed people; it brings us together. I would like to see these groups come together at the river. The medicine plant idea is wonderful, it would be an educational spot by the river and people from the schools and all over could come together and talk about what they do. I like the idea of a community gathering spot inside the center of the earth, as you called it.

I have a question about tipis. So were tipis at the UHT?

- a. Yes, they were nearby before they had children drag that Stevens House to its current location. The village was on Hennepin and that is where Stevens put his home. In 1848 he had all the school children move that home from Hennepin to Minnehaha Falls. Minnehaha Falls they have that fake etymology, calling it Laughing Waters. But it's really Mni Ĥaĥá, with that guttural sound (not ha ha like laughing). Ĥaĥá describes the curling of the water. So they have created these false narratives about the Longfellow House and the Song of Hiawatha. They've even named a lake after it. What does Hiawatha have to do with this place? It is a romanticized story by a settler author. We have to remove the myths that have been perpetrated. There is all this myth making and people accept it as history of this place when really it has no connection. I think there was a lot of Dakota bark homes all the way down from Rice or Shingle Creek to the Falls. We didn't just live in tipis we also have these bark homes, called the titanka. They were burned in the 1850s. You can still find archaeological records up north by Mille Lacs and other places. Unfortunately, in Minneapolis there has been so much destruction that you won't find archaeological record. If you search with the state records you can confirm this. A lot of the times they won't accept our oral history as fact, but it's easy to confirm using science.

Q. So would you want to have tipis and the history in this area?

C. I think it should be way more than just tipis. This can't be rushed.

C. I agree and I am not saying it should be rushed. But that could be something that is visible and in addition to just plants.

- a. I think it would be cool to implement Indigenous architecture. You can go to other places like South Dakota. Rather than implement Indigenous architecture they use Indians as a tourist trap to draw people to Rapid City and Sioux Falls. It's like "hey come look at the Indians. Come look at these people in the past". But instead this could be a place of storytelling. Maybe we create a hard-sided tipi using renewable resources. Maybe a

concrete hemp structure. We don't want to use rebar and all this industrial crap. It defeats the purpose of the home, but we can look at it to understand why these homes were shaped the way they were. People look at tipis like they were inferior structures but where we lived, it was based on the wind. Our houses wouldn't get swept in tornadoes. They had natural air conditioning with the flaps. They had natural heating; it was like a jet and how a rocket works but its propelling downward and not up. Our ancestors were amazing scientists. That is part of the story they don't want us to know and tell. About the contributions of Indigenous people to the place. There will have to be a longer and ongoing discussion. I don't have any answers and it will take many voices. I think we definitely need to start with community building and stories and relationship building. With people, and the river, and plants and animals. It will take more time.

Q. Vice Chair: Kate, will we just hurry up and keep pushing forward and make that the reason why we just ignore everything that the people who are originally here are telling us?

C. Several years ago I was in D.C. and went to the Smithsonian Native American Museum. Stored away is their display and presentation of the Dakota ware of 1864. I think it would be very good if we would bring that display to the Walker or another museum here in town. Everyone could see history of that war and how detrimental that was to the Dakota people.

Q. (Kate) Can we go back to the previous question – I wasn't able to fully hear and understand it but it sounded like a question for me?

Q. Vice Chair: It's a broad question those of us that are operating and moving in White spaces. For me the CAC is a White space. It is designed with western mentalities and colonialism at its base. White supremacy at its base. We are an advisory group. We don't make decisions. We are just there for show to make it look like the City and Park have made a good effort. While I think there are some wonderful and well-intended people on our Park Board, that Park Board is still a White people. No matter how many Black, Brown, maybe Asian people you put on there, it is still a White space. For example, Roxxanne says we need to slow down. At no point have I seen an acknowledgement of the need to slow down. Michelle has been asking for this conversation for months and we are just now having it. We've been at this for a year and everything that has been communicated to me has basically been like the opinions of the Dakota, and North Minneapolis, and residents are not a factor. At the end of the day the entities will continue along on their timelines and their budgets and their schedules and the rest of us just have to get on board with this. And that goes back to what I was saying earlier. After all of this, I am really curious to see what the Park Board has to say as it moves forward. Does it move forward? And that goes for the city as well. If there aren't people from the City here, this conversation should be shared with them. Because we are at a very pivotal time in our history as a people and nation. If we don't

take the right steps right now, we are going to be complicit in just perpetuating white supremacy further. Not sure it's a question, just a statement and point of awareness.

- a. (Kate) Thank you, I wanted to go back to your question because I felt it was important. I want to give Ethan and Denise a chance to respond. But I do think this is definitely a white space and a colonial construct; we are all working with in that. Whether we like it or not. What I would try to do is put all of the parameters that we, as the Park Board, have to work within. I can communicate what those are and what would be the likely outcome if we push back on them. Someone else had emailed me with a request that we look at the schedule. We had originally tried to meet a more aggressive schedule. We wanted to slow it down, but also to be respectful of people's time and how much they wanted to devote to this. But that is something that I can try to define what it is that we contend with as far as schedules, funding, etc. I can get your input on the best way to move forward.

C. Vice Chair: I want to follow up to your comment, Kate. At some point we need to release this idea that there are immovable barriers. We created those barriers and we can move and destroy them whenever we decide to. That is where this challenge comes in. Part of the conversations that I am having with white people right now is about sacrifice. There are challenges to be met and sacrifices that have to be made. People have to be willing to give up privilege and comfort and contentment. It's easy to assume that we have to deal with the way it is. We don't. We can lose our jobs and lose some funding. We can push back on things and make our principles the forefront rather than an afterthought.

- a. I agree with that wholeheartedly.
- a. (Kate): think I can put out there the schedules that we have to meet for the funding that we have and what my understanding of the consequences might be if we don't meet them. There is risk for not meeting schedules and funding, and I can explain what I think the likely scenario would be. Or does the funding get applied in a different way? Is there something that is just restoring the riverfront and some of the other things we have talked about today? There have been some promises made to the state in order to get the funding; the promise was a public park. I assume you'd want to have this discussion at the next meeting.

Q. I feel like as a white person on this committee that we need to be responsible and really go out of our comfort zone and stand up for what we think is right. All this hard work should not come down to our relatives; our Native American and African American brothers and sisters. We should be doing this work because we cause these problems to begin with. In my mind we should be standing up to the City. Also, I want to put a plug in for a request to have time on how we should be dismantling racism as a community.

C. Best way to dismantle is to give the land back. I vote for that.

C. Me too.

C. Are we taking a formal vote?

C. We live in a Western society where we try to rush everything.

Closing notes from Denise and Ethan: I think the current state of our being is directly related to the colonized, capitalist system. The destruction of land and people are all related. That is how we say “we are all related”. In this current culture it’s not that way. It doesn’t view things as a relative, things are a resource. Until we release our selves form this colonial mindstate, we will not be able to have changes.

I think one last thing that I’ve heard that I will share. One never recovers from a glimpse of freedom. Some of our communities have gotten this look at freedom and so we have a hunger or a need. There is an experience that communities of color have that white communities don’t have when they step outside of their home. The the more the City burns, as a Dakota person, the happier I am. This has been a long time coming and we’ve been saying this for a long time. One hundred plus years and nothing has changed. People talked about being an ally. Consider what that means and making sacrifices. In Standing Rock lots of well-intentioned white folks wanted to pacify the Indigenous movement. If it was truly Indigenous led it might have turned out different. Our people have always defended ourselves and our land and our families. Today they criminalize that. We didn’t have Indigenous religious freedom until 1978. They didn’t protect our burials until 1990. And they aren’t talking about these things. What about kids off in assimilation schools? The Dept of Education doesn’t recognize Indigenous languages. As well intentioned as we are, we live in a place that continues to commit genocide on a daily basis. If we don’t indict it, we become co-conspirators in our own oppression. So we have to free ourselves. By being a relative is the only way.

Thank you all for coming out and spending the evening with us.

Chat Comments

Some comments and links below were not discussed and not captured in the notes above.

Dakhóta Lápi Okhódakičhiye (DIO) Website link:

<https://www.facebook.com/DakhotalapiOkhodakichiye/>

- a. This content is so enlightening, thank you so much for sharing this with us.
- b. There is a heron rookery right across River from the UHT site
- c. Thank you, Denise and Ethan.
- d. Thank you, Ethan and Denise!
- e. Thank you!
- f. Wonderful presentation, thank you

- g. That was a really great presentation and gave a lot to think about and a lot more for me to learn
- h. thank you, great presentation!
- i. Powerful.
- j. wopida!
- k. Yes, Thank you so much, this is so important!
- l. How can we support your vision for Mississippi River? What specific actions can we take?
- m. Thank you.
- n. So what would that 4th option for design look like when you were talking about a healing space at UHT? Would it be a prairie land area, or what is your thought on that?
- o. Thank you for the wonderful presentation and for sharing such important information.
- p. a lot to think about here. a question I have is, how can indigenous history/people be and the value of the river be presented to people visiting the UHT park?
- q. Absolutely. Native Animals. Natural landscapes...
- r. No more trapping and killing of beavers at Lake Hiawatha. Or anywhere in the city.
- s. The circle of life.
- t. I really loved your presentation and your story. I hope we can restore the land and the river so we all can heal...
- u. park space is perfect opportunity to do better.
- v. I agree that black, Dakota etc. have been ignored
- w. I don't think there's anyone out there who would call this UHT planning process so far healing, or restorative, or truly community-driven.
- x. But DO we have to work only in those parameters? Why ? The business as usual parameters have gotten us to this place and we can't keep going in the same manner
- y. Has the \$20kk for concert venue been approved
- z. It has not; the state bonding bill is not yet complete (and might not be until July or later)
- aa. (And it's a \$20 million request from the city)
- bb. Thank you Michelle for pushing for this conversation. Thank you to Ethan And Denise for sharing. And thank you ALL for listening and pushing for a holistic approach to shaping our shared experience.
- cc. The venue is same ole money I feel the land and the review needs to heal
- dd. Why should state money be used for concert venue that won't been outstate residents. Why not use city money for something city wants
- ee. Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Kimmerer is an amazing book about reconnecting with Earth - it's so much more than that, but it's incredible.
- ff. This will change by action by or force against Whiteness. Peace!