

Southeast Como Improvement Association 2016-2017 Annual Report

Section 1: Administrative and Office Updates

Staff

SECIA maintained Executive Director Cody Olson for the 2016-2017 board year. Cody has been with the organization as the director since December of 2015, and was an intern with the organization from 2013-2015. Cody will continue leading SECIA in the 2017-2018 board year, and attached at the end of this report is a proposed additional staffing breakdown for 2018.

Interns + Service Learners

In 2017, SECIA was able to employ 2 paid interns, and work with 12 additional volunteer interns or service learners.

We hired Hok Leong (Kenos) in February 2017 to work with us on Community Building projects. He has helped with community events such as the Como Cookout, Garage Sale, and community meetings. Kenos has also helped community and office projects come to fruition and helped to promote community arts in the neighborhood, as well as increase our social media presence on Facebook and Instagram.

We also hired Ben Murphy in February 2017 to work with us on Communications efforts. Ben has worked to increase our outreach, has created event materials, and helped to refine our channels for gathering information. Ben was able to produce a Tidbits e-newsletter every 2 weeks and helped Cody with Comotion content and creation for the 3 Comotion newsletters that have or will go out in 2016-2017.

We have also been able to make use of over 410 service learner or volunteer intern hours from 12 different students. These volunteers have worked on a range of projects: Utility Boxes, Gardens, Non-partisan voter outreach, Events, Graphic Design, and help with various other SECIA projects and programs. Many of these hours came from intern Alex Simpson, who has helped the association with graphic design work and has been putting together a plan for a community-led Farmer's Market for the Community Building Committee.

Board of Directors

At our 2016 Annual Meeting, SECIA elected new board members Jim Nyberg, Ben Brummel, and Shannon Evans-Engstrom. We re-elected existing board members Phil Roban and Wendy Menken.

Our Executive Committee leadership changed the next month, with Karl Smith being elected to serve as President, Stewart Smith as Vice President, Wendy Menken as Treasurer, and Ben Brummel as Secretary.

Office

We have been fortunate enough to continue using a room at no cost in the Northeast College Prep building at 300 Industrial Ave NE. The office is usable by staff anytime during the week from 3:30PM-8:00PM, and has access to a conference room as well if we need it. We currently also rent 1 storage unit from The Lock Up at 1355 Industrial Blvd NE. This unit costs us approximately \$211.00 per month.

Section 2: Communications

Tidbits

SECIA sent out “Como Tidbits” a biweekly newsletter to a subscriber list, and also posted on our website and social media. We continued the revamped process of reaching out to community institutions for news rather than creating it ourselves, which has allowed us to create a more detailed Tidbits with a wide variety of topics. We experience 1% growth in Tidbits followers in the past year, and will continue to make sure that Tidbits reaches as many inboxes as possible

Comotion

After a year-long disruption in service due to office and administrative issues, SECIA sent out two “Comotion” paper newsletters to the community, with a third scheduled to come out in December. The Comotion goes out to every home and features a 4 page, color update on major events and updates with the organization.

Website

The Como website went through a major revamp in the past year. We hired contractor Sean Hayford O'leary to completely redesign the website. The revamped website was finished in March 2017 and launched shortly after with edits to be made in the months that followed. Several board members and staff are now trained in on the website. We hope to obtain the help of an intern to do continued maintenance of the site into 2018

Facebook

We reached over 42,000 people via Facebook in 2017 21,000 of that number came from paid advertisement for the Como Cookout and 10,000 came from other informational posts.

We spent \$189.38 on Facebook ads in the past year, which allowed 32,636 people to see or interact with posts from our association. This translates to \$0.006 (just over ½ a cent) to reach people which is by far our most effective use of funds for outreach

We currently have 401 followers on Facebook, a number that has gone up 22% since last year at this time.

Section 3: Committees and Appointments

Livability

SECIA's Livability Committee, headed by resident Katie Fournier, has worked on a number of projects, both small and large, since the last annual meeting. In this report, we will focus on the 5 main projects.

1. Improvement of the five traffic diverters

The neighborhood traffic diverters, four on Talmage and one on Brook, have become very dilapidated and overgrown since they were installed more than 40 years ago. (Thank you to the Menken family which has worked hard to maintain and improve the plantings at 14th and Talmage.)

During 2016 we sought a partner at the University of Minnesota for advice on the redesign and renovation of the diverters. The School of Forestry offered to make our request a Capstone project for its Spring 2017 Urban Forestry class. Class members produced a report with information about the value of public urban plantings and two possible redesign plans for the diverters. The report paid particular attention to the potential for capturing rain and melt water to irrigate the diverters and reduce street run-off to the river.

Since receiving the report we have attracted a group of about 25 people interested in helping with diverter improvements. A Steering Committee of about 5 people has formed and conducted a field inspection of the diverters in early October to review their current condition. Several members of the larger group joined the inspection. Public works infrastructure located in some of the diverters will need cooperation and assistance from city staff, as will removal of dead and deteriorated trees and their roots.

The inspection team was pleased to find that neighbors of several diverters have worked on them over this summer.

Our sincerest thanks go out to Lila Smith for gathering the many photos of diverter design in other places that you see on the display boards around the room tonight.

In 2018, we hope to improve one diverter as a “pilot” diverter, and gather feedback from residents and users before fully committing to all 5.

2. Rental signs on single-family homes and duplexes

The Livability Committee initiated a request to the City for a prohibition of permanent rental signs on single-family homes and duplexes more than two years ago. We were told that this would be an uncomplicated change. Rental signs could be handled similarly to realtors’ signs; they would be limited to the time when the dwelling is actually available to rent.

However this request became tangled in the City’s total rewrite of its sign ordinance and still has not been resolved. The language in the current draft is not very satisfactory; it prohibits ‘For rent’ signs, but does not appear to prohibit the identification signs of large landlords and rental management firms. The new ordinance is under review by the City Attorney’s office at the moment. The committee continue to maintain that single-family homes and duplexes should not be billboards for rental companies.

3. Duplex task force

At our request the UDA formed a task force with the City to consider alternatives for the U District neighborhoods to the new reduced lot sizes for duplex development. The task force met several times last spring and summer, but seems to have lost the cooperation needed from the City’s Planning Department. We are working to get this project back on track.

4. Improved pedestrian crossings

We plan to ask the City for striped pedestrian crossings near bus stops along Como. A first priority however is the 15th Avenue crossing at Brook, which is used by many children to cross to the park.

5. Project for Pride in Living’s plans for the Bunge site

PPL has regularly presents its plans for the redevelopment of the Bunge headhouse to our committee. We advertise these presentations in the Tidbits and other SECIA communications. Their current plans are for two wings of small (mostly 1 bedroom) apartments; the wings would use the headhouse as common lobby and social space. The west wing is to be artist lofts, managed by PPL; the east wing is to be student cooperative housing, managed by the Riverton management company and governed by a board of residents. The next meeting on this property with a new update from PPL will be December 12th at 5pm

Our Livability committee meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7 pm at Van Cleve Park. Many of its projects develop from the suggestions of neighbors, and all meetings are open to the public.

Environment

Our Environment Committee is one of our oldest committees, and has done excellent work to advocate for the health of a neighborhood that has historically been (and still is) industrial. The committee's main work in 2017 involved partnering with our gardens to promote the evolution of Southeast Como into a green community, and keeping close tabs on the legal action between the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and General Mills around the Superfund site at 2010 E Hennepin Avenue, and the newly found site in Mid-City Industrial.

This monitoring will continue into 2017, but our committee is also looking for fresh ideas to work on in 2017 that will continue to improve the health and green space in our community.

Community Building

The newly-formed Community Building Committee had plans to hit the ground running in 2017, and held several meetings. In the summer however, personal and staff time from our committee members was not as readily available, and Community Building work was put on the back burner to other organizational work.

The Community Building Committee will go into 2018 focusing on several goals:

1. Working to involve our underserved populations, particularly our renters, the members of the East African community, and the Student Community CoOp in the organization, making sure that SECIA as an organization represents a variety of perspectives and ideas.
2. Building on the research work still currently in progress by our intern, Alex, to bring a Farmer's Market to the SE Como Community.
3. Making sure SECIA is a known entity to the entire community, as we have a high turnover rate on a yearly basis.

University District Alliance

The Alliance is a partnership of communities, learning institutions, and the City of Minneapolis that works to make the area surrounding the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis one that: capitalizes on its exceptional resources; is vibrant, safe,

healthy, and sustainable; and is a preferred place for people of all ages to live, work, learn, visit and make community enhancing investments.

Our community members Bill Dane and Katie Fournier represented Southeast Como on the Alliance for the past year, and for 2018, Katie will return to represent us alongside Karl Smith.

East Side Park District Service Area Master Plan/CAC

This planning project will guide long-term capital improvements, management and operations at all Minneapolis neighborhood parks east of the Mississippi River (Northeast and Southeast Minneapolis).

The East of the River Park Master Plan is a unique opportunity to build community and create a shared responsibility for a comprehensive vision for Northeast and Southeast Minneapolis parks for the coming decades. It will take a complete look at all outdoor park facilities, create improvement plans for each neighborhood park, and guide decisions on capital improvements.

The CAC will work with MPRB staff, the Youth Design Team and consultants over the next 12-18 months to make recommendations to MPRB Commissioners. It is our hope that the CAC and the park planning in general will be a process that harnesses diversity, allows the community to actively contribute to MPRB decisions and actions by creating an inclusive environment in which community feedback is embraced and acted upon.

SECIA will be represented by Abdullahi Ahmed, a Como resident and staffer for Van Cleve park

Zoning+ Development

SECIA's Zoning committee meets on an ad-hoc basis and is led by neighbor Joan Menken. The organization looked at and responded to several zoning and development proposals including:

- Bike Lanes on 18th
- Proposed apartments at 18th and Como
- Blue Door Pub patio

and many more. We have always done our best to offer informed feedback on projects happening in our community.

Safety

Our Safety committee is currently in hiatus, but we receive excellent updates from our neighbor, Emilie Quast and the 2nd Precinct Advisory Committee (2PAC). Full updates and information can be found at <https://courtwatch2pac.com/>. Our neighborhood safety

committee can always be restarted with a critical mass of neighbors interested in safety issues in the community.

Section 3: Programs and Events

Gardens

SECIA and our volunteers manage 3 Community Gardens in the neighborhood, with different form and function

Talmage Crossing (located by the railroad tracks at 21st and Talmage) won a Metro Blooms award in 2017 for being an exemplary pollinator habitat. This garden is maintained weekly from spring to fall by volunteer Lila Smith, and a group of dedicated neighbors. It brings beautiful native plants to what once was an overgrown patch of railroad land.

Como Corner is our other native pollinator garden at 22nd and Como, which also takes over what once was an overgrown patch of railroad land. This garden is taken care of from spring to fall by Susanne Maeder and several other neighborhood volunteers and features a wide variety of native and pollinator plants, small pathways, and a bench for reflection.

Fairshare Farm at 22nd and Farimount is SECIA's food growing garden, and is managed by an ambitious group of volunteer coordinators, and is the home of our Bread Oven, which underwent repairs in late summer 2017. The "shared labor, shared harvest" model the garden employs is still relatively unique in the city, with only a few other gardens operating in the same way. Fairshare members host a monthly "Farm On" skillshare event that allows gardener members and the community to benefit from the unique sets of skills of our gardeners. Fairshare had another successful season in 2017 with 17 gardner members and 7 garden supporters, and will be looking for new members in Spring 2018.

Utility Boxes

Graffiti on Como's utility boxes has been a serious problem, but the "Flowers are the Opposite of Graffiti" program championed by volunteer Lila Smith has done a tremendous amount of work to cover our boxes in beautiful decals made with photographs of gardens and nature by Como residents. Over 370 neighbors voted on the last wrapped boxes, and the comments have been overwhelmingly positive.

In 2017 with the assistance of a Good Neighbor Fund grant of \$3,840, neighbor donations, and funding contributions from SECIA, we were able to wrap 4 boxes at 3 locations: 22nd and Como (by Sporty's), 15th and Hennepin (by ChinDian), and 15th

and Rollins at Van Cleve Park. We also re-wrapped a box we had done before at 18th and Como that was removed due to signal reconstruction.

Lila and the SECIA office have begun the process of getting community feedback on the next round of boxes to wrap in 2018. Thank you to all of the donors and volunteers who have helped with this project.

Talmage Art Walk

Talmage Art Walk is a proposed public art project in SE Como. The project consists of six "paint the sidewalk" artworks designed by SECIA's interns Kenos Leong and Alex Simpson. Talmage Ave SE is frequently used by the community to walk, run, and bike on. Therefore, Kenos came up with the idea of adding public art into this frequently used trail. Each design contains a different message but they all relate to the main theme of the project which is to share positive energy with others. The artists hope to bring more art and fun elements to SE Como.

This proposed project has been approved by City of Minneapolis's Public Art Advisory Panel and Arts Commission. The project installation date is proposed to be in Spring and is pending a work permit from the Public Works Department

Como Cookout

Our 2017 Como Cookout brought 900+ people to Van Cleve Park for an afternoon of free food, fun, and music. We had over 20 vendors in our resource fair, 2 live bands, 1 DJ and were able to offer 6 different food options. The event also featured door prizes, children's games, face painting, and a handful of interactive activities. We plan to continue this very successful event into 2018 with our co-organizers, Van Cleve Park and U of M Off Campus Living.

Solar Power Hour

We co-hosted a Solar Power Hour informational event at Insight Brewing in conjunction with Sunny Day Earth Solutions and the Midwest Renewable Energy Association in July. This event was well attended, with at least 35 people attending to learn more about how they can add solar features to their home or business.

Garage Sale

SECIA held a community-wide garage sale in September 2017 with 10 participating sellers. The sale was held in late September in order to make sure that it was available to the student population of the neighborhood, many of whom move in the beginning of September. We received positive feedback from most of our sellers, and plan to bring this event back in 2018 with increased advertisement, signage, and hopefully more sellers and customers.

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Financial Report

Section 4: Finances

Attached below is a report of our expenditures and income from October 2016-November 2017