

Recap of the East Town Business Partnership Business Forum

Safety Net Innovators Tackling Poverty and Homelessness

February 18, 2021, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Via Zoom Conference

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybBfT-7sqgs&feature=youtu.be>)

I. Welcome and Announcements

ETBP President Carina Aleckson welcomed everyone and advised they continue to host these forums in digital space, but because they miss in-person networking, in 2021 they're carving out time at the beginning to re-experience those networking moments. Executive Director Dan Collison will place everyone into assigned breakout rooms to introduce themselves and reconnect with each other.

Upon returning to the main group, Aleckson introduced herself as the Community Development Program Manager at Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/cruhlandt/>), and noted because she works in human services she's very excited about hearing from today's talented and knowledgeable panelists.

Collison then announced the following activities occurring in the East Town district:

- The ETBP Board has been working on its 2021 Membership Survey that will be released in the next week (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/58WSYPS>); it'll only take 5 minutes and they'd love to receive your feedback as it'll help them set priorities for the next year.
- Next month's business forum on *Non-Profits: Insights and Opportunities in 2021* will be held on Thursday, March 18th and jointly hosted with the Minneapolis Downtown Council (<https://www.mplsdownatown.com/registration210318/>). Some of today's panelists will return to lead breakout groups.
- This weekend, February 18-20, is the rescheduled 4th Annual Illuminate The Lock art event: *Madweyaashkaa: Waves Can Be Heard* by visual artist Moira Villiard (<http://millcitytimes.com/news/updates-on-the-4th-annual-illuminate-the-lock-february-18-19.html>). It's free and open to the public but registration is required. It will take place entirely outdoors next to the Mississippi River.
- The Mill City Farmers Market continues with its Winter Market through April, the next being on Saturday, March 13th; pre-orders are encouraged (<https://millcityfarmersmarket.org/visit/>).
- New businesses opening in East Town:
 - Boludo in the former McKinney Roe space (<http://millcitytimes.com/news/small-business-spotlight-boludo.html> and <https://www.startribune.com/boludo-a-top-destination-for-pizza-and-empanadas-is-expanding-to-east-town/600005121/>).
 - The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen (<https://mbspmag.com/eat-and-drink/sioux-chef-owamni-opening-spring-2021/> and <https://sioux-chef.com/>) in the Water Works project (<https://mplsparksfoundation.org/Initiative/water-works/>).
- Special acknowledgements to:
 - Cyndy Harrison for all that Sawatdee Thai Restaurant continues to do through COVID in helping us emerge with vitality (see *Legacy and Innovation in Thai Food* at <https://easttownmpls.org/video-gallery/>).
 - *The Mill City Times* for doing a great job in promoting all that is taking place in this district, its interview with Rinal Ray (<http://millcitytimes.com/news/the-mill-city-times-interview-rinal-ray-chief-executive-offi.html>), and Becky Fillingner, a Small Business Reporter, who he's been engaged with in covering emerging businesses and community stories.
- Meet Minneapolis Q1 2021: Get Away Without Going Far (<https://www.minneapolis.org/downtown-hotel-deals/>) campaign and activation overview.

- For what's happening in our neighborhood associations within the East Town district:
 - Visit the Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association's newly refreshed website at <https://www.thedmna.org/> for Board and Land Use Committee meeting dates.
 - Visit the Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc.'s website at <https://www.elliottpark.org/> for Board, BLUH (Building, Land Use and Housing), and Community Safety Committee meeting dates.
- Grab Coffee with Ward 3 Council Member Steve Fletcher virtually on Thursdays at 5:00 p.m. (https://www.facebook.com/MinneapolisWard3/events/?ref=page_internal). These meetings can be accessed on Microsoft Teams or by phone at 612-276-6670.
- Hennepin County and the Minneapolis Regional Chamber have launched Elevate Business HC (<https://www.elevatebusinesshc.com/home>), a public-private initiative offering pro bono services designed to support businesses in Hennepin County impacted by COVID.
- For help in navigating City Hall with your business questions, visit the Minneapolis Business Portal at <https://business.minneapolismn.gov/> which is designed to connect entrepreneurs and small business owners to the information and resources needed to plan, launch and grow a business.

You can also visit the Small Business Team at <http://www2.minneapolismn.gov/cped/ba/SmallBusinessTeam/index.htm> or 612-673-2499 (BIZZ). They are partnering with Hennepin County on relief for small businesses including restaurants and event venues (<https://www.hennepin.us/economic-development/programs/Emergency-relief>).

II. Safety Net Innovators Tackling Poverty and Homelessness

Collison noted within the East Town district, we have nationally recognized and award-winning social service organizations and he's pleased to have leadership from three of them with us today because their impact and innovation is astonishing. Then he introduced them in turn asking about their personal and professional journey and what about their work they find most compelling:

Rinal Ray, CEO of People Serving People (<https://www.peopleservingpeople.org/resources/media/ceo-transition/> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rinalray/>), said so much of her personal journey and experiences with her family and community have influenced her professional journey. She's the oldest child in an immigrant family who grew up in the Chicago area, and she's Big Sister to anybody and it's hard to turn that off which means at different times she uses different strategies. She was trained as a lawyer but is a public policy advocate in nonprofit leadership by practice. Now 3 months in her new role, she realizes she has always taken on bigger ventures than she thought she was capable and have learned she can swim in the deep end of the pool even though she doesn't think she can always.

Ray then described how she came into this work, i.e., through public interest law, volunteer management, and public policy advocacy at other nonprofit organizations throughout the Twin Cities. She came to PSP 3-1/2 years ago because she was curious about what public policy could look like when they center on those most directly impacted and there was an opportunity to build a policy program which she has had the opportunity to do in her three different roles.

The most compelling things for her at PSP are the passion of their people, resilience of the families experiencing homelessness they work with, generosity of the community, recognition that racism is built into their structure and system, and a strong urgency to do even better.

Collison highlighted he's been advancing media, videography, and interviews, the latest being a short documentary with Ray called *Belonging* at ETBP's Video Gallery page (<https://easttownmpls.org/video-gallery/>).

Deborah Moses, CEO/Executive Director of House of Charity (<https://www.houseofcharity.org/stories/moses-new-executive-director> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborah-moses-dpa-mph-054b0620/>) which has merged with St. Stephen's Human Services (<http://millcitytimes.com/news/stronger-together-the-house-of-charity-and-st-stephens-human.html>), started by saying if anyone asked her for advice recently, she'd said don't talk to her because she was someone who thought it was a smart idea to merge two programs in the middle of a dual pandemic [racism and COVID]. She thinks it's interesting how similar her story is to Rinal's; she's also first

generation American. Her mother survived the German Holocaust by joining the French Resistance and immigrating to the United States, so she grew up in a family where fighting for social justice was something they lived and breathed and that's all she knows. Moses grew up in the Twin Cities protesting Honeywell (<http://slphistory.org/honeywellproject/>) and being part of the social justice fight for their community; it made her grow and thrive, and she believes the importance of doing that in the right way. She made sure she was educated in a way that would best help her be a leader and improve the community, so she has a Doctorate in Public Health, and Doctorate in Public Administration which worked in the social service community throughout her career.

What resonates and drives her are the injustices in our country and community, the disparities we have in Minnesota and how best they can affect them, and how best she can be a catalyst within the system. An amazing passionate staff that works so hard to meet the needs of the community daily absolutely motivates her every day and this year was an amazing example. They did not miss one day of service during both pandemics of COVID and racism. Because most of their staff is BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color), they also experienced the disproportionate effects of COVID that the people they serve did. Every day they heard about one of their staff whose parent passed away.

Her real passion is to educate the broader community about what's going on within our community, to try and dispel much of the stigma that tends to work systematically on policy change that affects those they serve, and just being there to continue to have the honor of leading such a compassionate, diverse, and caring staff.

Laurie Ohmann, Executive VP and COO of Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis (<https://www.cctwincities.org/our-organization/our-people/leadership/> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/laurie-ohmann-7563445/>), said there are similarities between and among the three of them, and differences as well. One big difference is she grew up in a really small super homogenous rural community in Central Minnesota, and she's one of 11 children. Yes, she was raised Catholic and is with a Catholic organization but what drives her to come to work every day is this opportunity to build a sense of community among those they serve and with the people doing the work.

Her trajectory was to get an undergraduate degree, spend a year living in Budapest after graduating from University of Minnesota Duluth which was eye opening for someone who grew up in a homogenous place, and when she came back to the Twin Cities, she started her career by running a shelter for homeless families at the Salvation Army in St. Paul more than 30 years ago. That frontline social service work taught her that her interest is in more systems change work and supporting how they change the things that leave people in these positions. She got her graduate degree from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs and spent some time working in the nonprofit world in the Twin Cities doing single family housing development before joining the Public Strategies Group, a St. Paul based consulting company focused on trying to improve public sector customers and how public organizations increase the value they deliver where she spent 20 formative years. In the mid-1990s they had a contract with the Minneapolis Public Schools that resulted in a unique private-public relationship (<https://www.mackinac.org/794>). She had her first child as they went into that work and had her second child when they were winding up their tenure there.

After 20 years focusing on the public sector, she came back full circle to nonprofit working with persons experiencing homelessness. She's in her eight year at CC, fourth year in the role of COO, and what she finds most compelling coming out of the pandemic, brutal cold snap, and record numbers of people struggling with housing stability, they're all saving lives on a daily basis and trying to come to terms with these massive economic and social justice disparities that are in our community. She remembers talking about those things in the Minneapolis schools 25 plus years ago and they haven't cracked this. It's wonderful to see their staff, also significantly persons of color, as well as their clients showing up every day with incredible resistance trying to get stable and build a sense of community, many of the things we all want for each other in our neighborhoods.

Collison then asked each panelist about some of the innovations that are critical to undergird the wellbeing of the families they serve. For People Serving People, the innovations are rooted in the families themselves; they know what's best for themselves and have a vision for their lives, and PSP's role is to support them in achieving that vision, i.e., in a very disciplined way center the voices of their families in PSP's organizational policies, practices in food choices, sharing of information, and ways they implement systems and structure. The largest emerging area of work is around prevention of the family experiencing homelessness through education programs, systems change, and public policy. Newer initiatives are around working with the whole family and having flexible resources to stay stably housed. They're looking at some of the core frustrations families have around the way local government works or county shelter policy operates, lifting what they think would be more effective for themselves, supporting that vision, and building personal, political, and financial power.

For St. Stephen's Human Services, one of the innovations in their Park7 Apartments is it's the first program in Minnesota serving the chronically homeless community that allows people to have pets. But of course, the biggest innovation is the merger. When House of Charity met with SSHS, they were in the middle of an executive director search (<https://www.houseofcharity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/House-of-Charity-Search-Brief-with-edits-9-17-18.pdf>), and comparing the two programs, having someone on the Board who had worked on mergers and had a lot of experience in our unhoused community, it seemed like a very good fit to come together to provide some efficiencies within their programs. Their services matched, not overlapped, and why they went ahead with the merger. Neither programs were in danger of closing and this was a way of taking two strong programs and serve the continuum of needs in a much broader perspective through one organization. Both programs always worked closely together, both have co-located at First Covenant Church, and have had ongoing, consistent, collaborative efforts that made sense to come together to serve their unhoused community in a comprehensive manner, so the merger, in and of itself, is innovative.

For Catholic Charities, part of the innovation they do in leadership is find ways to support the disciplined set of people working in this nonprofit space to keep at this day after day, because of the many varied and insufficient funding sources they all struggle with to put things together. They have a full continuum of services in housing with emergency shelters, opportunity to come to drop-in centers to get basic needs met, transitional and permanent supportive housing, and the next big effort is an expansion in the Elliot Park neighborhood, i.e., they just closed on the Augustana Healthcare facility. Renovations are underway and by the summer of 2022 they will have renovated the interior to provide 203 units of permanent supportive housing; they're grateful to find an opportunity to repurpose this building. They're also moving all their central administrative headquarters and additional program staff to the neighborhood to the tune of 150 people eager to support neighborhood businesses. A theme you'll hear that really makes it work is their ability to establish trusting relationships with people, to listen to their story, address the multiple layers of trauma they're often carrying, and trying to put together the basic pieces of their life.

Lastly, Collison posed what are the most pressing projects they're working on, followed by a lightning round to speak to resources.

III. Closing Remarks.

Collison thanked the three panelists for their leadership, everyone who joined the forum, ETBP President Carina Aleckson, and Executor Coordinator Christie Rock Hantge. He implored every to stay connection and have a great day.

IV. Zoom Attendees

Nancy Aleksuk, Swervo Development Corporation
Beth Brown, North Central University
John Campobasso, Kraus-Anderson
Rick Crispino, Bridgewater Lofts
Karen Dyck, Marketing & Business Development Consultant
Chris Fleck, Ambassadors For Business
Therese Gales, Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Christie Rock Hantge, ETBP Staff
Cyndy Harrison, Sawatdee Thai Restaurant
Renee Hawthorne, Steelcase
Chris Johnson, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
Mary Langfeldt, Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
BrieAnna Lee, Children's Minnesota Hospital
Paul Mellblom, MSR Design
Roger Raina, National Item Processing
Aimee Robertson, North Central University
Carletta Sweet, Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association
Al Swintek, CenterPoint Energy
Matthew Weiland, Clear Channel Outdoor