

## **Council Member Column for Neighborhood Newsletters**

*Summer 1999*

### *Good Neighbors*

What does it mean to welcome a new neighbor? When the house next door is sold and the new neighbors move in, we are curious. Who are our new neighbors? What do they do? Will they mow their lawn? After all, we have an investment in our homes and in our neighborhoods to protect. We are and should be concerned. Yet, when our neighbors move in, we set aside these concerns -- to a greater or lesser degree -- as we get to know them.

We recognize that we have little control over who our neighbors turn out to be or what they choose to do. Part of city life is an enjoyment and tolerance of a considerable range in taste and custom from one house to the next. I may let my front-yard shrubs grow while my neighbor manicures his with great care. Neither approach is "correct" -- both must be respected within the broad context of our laws. Some neighbors we interact with daily; some we tolerate grudgingly. When conflict flares, we work with each other to resolve it. Failing this, we turn to other neighbors or even the government for help. This is the course and flow of our urban life.

What happens, however, when we learn that the Public Housing Authority has bought the house on our block or in our neighborhood? Does this change our expectations of who might move into that home? Are these expectations different from those we have for other new neighbors? If so, why and on what basis? These are hard questions which, as citizens, we all need to think through, both privately and publicly.

We in the Thirteenth Ward will welcome new neighbors over the course of the next months. As mandated by the settlement of a Federal Court lawsuit, the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority must locate 88 "scattered site" housing units in Minneapolis. The PHA has looked at similar existing uses throughout the city and has developed a plan fairly to distribute these new housing units. The Southwest Planning District, of which the Thirteenth Ward is a substantial part, is slated to host twenty-eight housing units. Given the built-up nature of the ward, I expect that PHA will achieve this, in the main, through purchase of existing structures.

In this context, I and staff from the PHA will attend your neighborhood meetings in the next months to discuss the scattered site concept in general and respond to your questions. We will also ask for your input as PHA identifies sites for purchase. We want and need your participation.

This is a change that is coming. It is incumbent on us in the neighborhoods to have a discussion about scattered site housing and to help participate in this change. If we get involved now, if we participate in the process of locating sites for these homes and supporting our neighbors when they arrive, we can make this change a good experience for both the neighborhood and our new neighbors.

While the conversation at a policy level is often about housing "units", no "units" will be moving in. People will be moving in. These are new neighbors who carry with them the same capacity to be part of the neighborhood, the same willingness to be

involved that you or I might have. As we approach this change, and as we prepare to welcome our new neighbors, I ask only that we come to the table with the open hearts and minds which, in my experience have always characterized the citizens of the Thirteenth Ward.