# NEARTOWN  ASSOCIATION (NTA) MEETING
## Cherryhurst Community Center, Tuesday March 23, 2003
## Minutes

NTA President Raju Adwaney called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.  Ed Gonzales moved to approve the February minutes and Robert Graham seconded.

Several visiting speakers were in attendance to address the topic of  the proposed purchase of the Days Inn property on Main St. (Midtown) by an organization called U.S. Vets.  The building would be renovated into an apartment-style transitional living facility for veterans recovering from substance abuse.

?? Elizabeth Chouinard, president of Midtown Civic Club, presented her organization's position. Midtown Civic Club opposes the development of the Days Inn property for this use. Midtown Civic is concerned that the project is not in keeping with the enhancement goals of the Main St. Corridor redevelopment, that problems with drugs and related criminal activity already exist in the area, and that there is already a large concentration of social service providers in Midtown.  Midtown would prefer another use for the property such as a boutique hotel.  Ms. Chouinard invited attendees to a town hall meeting on Tues. April 1st at the Judson Robinson Community Center (Hermann Park) for more information/discussion.

?? Anthony Love, Houston Program Dir. for the U.S. Veterans Initiative, explained that U.S. Vets is a public/private partnership interested in spending $9 million dollars toward redeveloping the building as a high quality, clean, secure facility.  He stated that the facility would have 24 hour, 7 days/week security and that people entering the program must have been clean for 90 days.  The program does not take in people off the street and does not allow people hanging out, sleeping on sidewalks or panhandling.  One-third of the rooms will be used as hotel facilities for families with members in the VA hospital.  He stated that U.S. Vets currently has a facility at the DeGeorge near Union Station (at LaBranch and Preston) and invited attendees to visit the facility.  He stated that the private developer involved with U.S. Vets had determined that neither a high-rise nor a boutique hotel was economically viable at the site.

?? District D Councilmember Ada Edwards reported that she had gone to Los Angeles to visit the U.S. Vets facilities there.  One of the facilities is in Los Angeles proper, and the other is in Long Beach.  She noted that these were not typical service shelters, that one was located next to a school and both enjoyed a good relationship with their neighbors.  She had spoken with a representative from U.S. Representative Maxine Waters' office and the Mayor of Long Beach and both were supportive of the U.S. Vets facilities.

?? David Mandell, president of Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris Co., spoke briefly from the audience in support of the U.S. Vets project.

   A brief discussion followed.  Ed Gonzales stated that the Neartown/Midtown area was already overburdened with social service facilities.  This point was made by other speakers as

well.  Bridget Jensen noted that all of the residents were tested weekly for drug-free compliance.  Dana Padgett pointed out that U.S. Vets seemed to be offering both substantial financial resources and accountability for program participants, qualities missing from many other programs/facilities in the area.  There were questions about how the private development partner of U.S. Vets actually made money from this project, although there was never any clear answer to this.  The necessity of closing the Cherryhurst meeting facility for the evening cut discussion short.  A motion was made to support Midtown in the position they had presented.  The motion was seconded and approved by a show of hands.

Announcements:
Bridget Jensen spoke about Blueprint Houston, a citywide citizen initiative to organize discussion and planning for Houston's future prior to the fall elections.  Councilmember Edwards announced that Bridget had left her office and thanked Bridget for her work.


The meeting was adjourned at 8:25.
NTA Secretary, Dana Padgett