

City of Ann Arbor

*301 E. Huron St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
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Formal Minutes - Final

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

7:00 PM

Ann Arbor Municipal Center, 301 E. Huron Street, 2nd Flr.

City Planning Commission

- 9-a 11-0710** Arbor Hills Crossing Site Plan for City Council Approval - A proposal to demolish three commercial structures and construct a 90,000 sq ft rental/office center containing four buildings and 310 parking spaces on a 7.45 acre site at 3100 Washtenaw Ave located at the southeast corner of Washtenaw Avenue and Platt Road. - Staff Recommendation: Postpone

Dileo presented the staff report.

Tom Covert, Atwell, 4750 Venture Drive, civil engineer for the project, introduced the development team. He noted that they are not anticipating impacts to the wetland, which will be used as a pocket park. He noted that the landmark trees removed will be mitigated. He said that the site has significant grade changes that impacted the design.

Covert said they focused on pedestrian access to the site, consolidating curb cuts on Washtenaw, and will restrict exits to right turns only. He said on Platt Road there will be both left and right turns. The documentation for the private easement on the south access drive states that the owner has the option in 15-year intervals to decline or vacate the easement. He noted that distances in the center is similar to that of a city block, so one can park and access all buildings. Safety vehicles will be able to access all buildings. He said unique features include a rain garden between buildings A & B, and all native plantings that will require no irrigation will be used throughout. Covert explained the detention supports both quality and quantity and will overflow to the wetland.

Rob Burroughs, architect for the site, noted that Building A was designed to be accessed from both Washtenaw and the parking lot. He said they added a second story to create a prominent treatment to anchor the corner of the lot. He agreed with staff comments that the project was a contemporary building arrangement designed with the pedestrian in mind. He explained that the buildings included projecting canopies and awnings, and unique corner treatments have been added with tall projecting towers that can be seen along Washtenaw Avenue. A combination of regionally-sourced wood and opaque steel will be used along facades to create horizontal dimension and pedestrian scale.

Public Hearing closed at 7:45 PM.

Motion made by Westphal, seconded by Carlberg that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Mayor and City Council approve the Arbor Hills Crossing Site Plan and Development Agreement.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Carlberg said she was concerned about how close the buildings are to the Washtenaw traffic lanes, which puts pedestrians next to the traffic. She added the bus turnout is a plus, but the rest of pedestrian traffic seemed to be right on the street. In addition, she said she wasn't sure there are adequate sidewalk connections between buildings since people have a tendency to cut through parking lots. Carlberg said she's happy to see the site get redeveloped, but the facade along Platt is plain and unwelcoming to customers at the Recreation Center located across the street.

Westphal asked staff about P-2 of the Development Agreement and what would happen if the project is only partially constructed or not completed within the timeline.

Rampson explained that if the improvements were infrastructure-related, the City could hire a contractor to complete the necessary work and then put a lien on the property.

Westphal asked what the recourse would be with unfinished buildings.

Rampson responded that partially constructed buildings would be considered a nuisance, and the City could go to court and ask that the matter be abated through civil action.

Westphal asked if there is to be a sidewalk along Platt, since the evaluation doesn't show one.

Dileo said yes and pointed out the sidewalk on the site plan.

Westphal asked about possible pedestrian crossings from the shopping center across the street.

Rampson responded that mid-block crossings had been recommended in the Washtenaw Redevelopment Strategy, and there might be an opportunity for one in the future. She said the traffic engineers are hesitant to add any crosswalks with the current vehicle stacking that occurs at the Huron Parkway intersection. She noted that with the proposed signal at Platt and Washtenaw, it would create a protected pedestrian crossing that currently does not exist.

Westphal asked about whether there is a walkway on the north side of the rain garden (from Building A to B).

Covert said there is not a pedestrian walk, either to the north or south, to

get from Building A to B. He added there is a walk from Platt all the way into the site on the south side of the access drive.

Burroughs noted that the parking area is relatively small and doesn't allow for through traffic. Regarding architecture of Building A, he noted they have a limited area of access and visibility due to grade. He said they have doors at the western end which meshes with the intersection grade point at sidewalk level at Platt and Washtenaw.

Westphal asked if there was an active door at the glassed area of the corner, with seating possibility?

Burroughs responded yes, but there is a limited area for dining, but may use operable windows to connect indoors with outdoors.

Westphal said this west elevation will have the most visible part of the site and asked if windows could be added.

Burroughs said that they can consider the request.

Briggs shared Carlberg's concerns about depth of sidewalk and asked about the easement and its relationship with bicycle lanes on Washtenaw Avenue. She asked if the 23 ft easement will provide for ample sidewalk and bicycle lanes.

DiLeo responded that she could follow-up with this concern.

Covert said that the 23 foot wide easement as an integral part of the path on the west and east would be adequate since there is also the tree lawn of 10-12 feet.

Briggs asked if there would be ample space to provide bicycle lanes and sidewalk in the future?

Covert said yes, and that they could provide a bicycle lane between the curb and sidewalk in what is being referred to as the tree lawn.

Briggs noted that this would sacrifice pedestrian experience to do this, in the future.

Briggs asked the petitioner to describe the pocket park.

Covert explained that the west edge has the wetland and woodland preservation, then there is sheet piling at edge to create the retention with a 36-40" high railing with plantings and trees along one side, with the upper edge having paved plaza area and bicycle parking along edge.

Briggs asked if there was a possibility for trails or a bridge to be constructed through the wetland.

Covert said sidewalks would wrap around it, and that the wetland is fairly wet.

Enter Pratt (8:05 pm).

Briggs asked about where ramps are going in along Building A and Building B.

Covert described the connections.

Briggs asked if there was any possibility to align driveways with the Whole Foods shopping center across the street.

Covert explained that they have to deal with conflicts of left turns from each site which resulted in a bit of an offset.

Bona asked about the floor area ratio, noting the proposed 28% when 200% is allowed. She expressed disappointment with the low ratio. She shared that the 2010 Census reported that commuters went from 45,000 to 60,000 per day.

Tom Stegeman, developer for property, said that feasibility and viability were paramount in this development and related to that is the number of parking spaces that can fit on the site. He added that the viability in current market established the project. He noted that they would not start construction until they have significant preleasing.

Bona stated that she would prefer a phased approach to take advantage of increased density, given that this is the most efficient and frequent bus route in the City.

Stegeman said that flex space on Building C was their attempt to address this.

Bona asked what would it have taken to provide structured parking on the site.

Stegeman stated that the expense of the structure, in addition to the market demand wouldn't allow it.

Bona asked about the plateau effect and the first floor elevations between buildings.

Covert said Building A is at 814 feet elevation, as is Building B. The Washtenaw driveway is at 812 feet with Building D at 808.5 feet. He said Building C and D relate fairly well together.

Bona asked that the petitioner consider identifying a location for a future connection [easement] to the east, if and when anything should be developed there.

Bona asked how wide the Washtenaw sidewalk would be?

Covert said the concrete sidewalk area is 17.5 feet wide and the planting extension is 10-12 feet.

Bona said this is generous, but would defer to the Non-Motorized Plan.

Bona noted that the west face along Platt is a major elevation and some signage is helpful, and the corner could use something more "signature". For Building B, perpendicular signage might be more effective than the type of signage shown in elevation plans.

Giannola asked if the Brownfield Plan anticipated tax credits.

Ann Jamison, consultant for the project, said that will not be pursuing tax credits, but will be pursuing tax increment financing.

Woods asked about the Platt Road side, next to where the approved school will be situated, whether this is the area where the easement is.

Covert said yes.

Woods noted that given the school activities next door there may be conflict with traffic turning left out of this driveway, at certain times of the day. She asked if the petitioners have talked to the school.

Covert said yes, and there will only be limited trips through this drive, and their peak will be different from the school's. He added that Stegeman continues to meet with the school leadership.

Stegeman said they also want to avoid conflicts and have have several discussions with the school.

Woods asked what the time frame was for the signal installation, noting that timing would be crucial to avoid potential problems.

Mahler noted that P-17 of the Development Agreement calls for an

agreement with MDOT. He asked about the status of discussions with MDOT and the City's System Planning Unit.

Covert said that they have submitted plans to MDOT, which were previously approved with an earlier project. He said they are being reviewing by MDOT, and since reducing traffic from previous proposal they are supportive. He said they have spoken with City staff and AATA about traffic study and the bus turn-out.

Pratt noted that there are good things that this project will provide. He said that he wasn't clear about architectural elements from looking at the elevations.

Burroughs said that the corner will have metal armiture with lattice elements or punched metal panel.

Pratt asked that these elements be better identified on the elevations. He said it would be helpful to know the percentage of transparency on the Washtenaw frontage, adding that he would appreciate them 'dressing up' that side.

Mahler asked staff what the outstanding issues are for postponement.

DiLeo said they are 1) Washtenaw County Water Resources Commission approval, 2) resolve instrument and parties involved for public access easement along Washtenaw, 3) formal approval from MDOT on the proposed signal.

Mahler asked if the Commission had additional issues they wanted added.

Bona asked about consistency with the Non-motorized Plan for this section of Washtenaw Ave.

Briggs asked about potential access and connections through the wetland area. She also would like a specific answer to why the intersections can't be lined up on Washtenaw. She asked if the greenspace between the road and sidewalk is adequate for making a pleasant pedestrian experience.

Carlberg suggested that, if the bike lanes are to be added later, she would be interested in seeing an alternative plan for tree placement.

Westphal asked to evaluate future connection to the lot on the east; labeling of materials; more signature element on Building A (signage and increased transparency); number of footing drain disconnects.

Dileo clarified that P-20 of the Development Agreement will be deleted, since it was shown that sanitary upsizing is not necessary, but P19 will remain and the number of footing drain disconnects will be identified.

Bona asked for east elevation of Building C, and asked the petitioner to revisit the architectural elements.

Westphal asked if the lack of fenestration on Building D is due to adjacent building.

Burroughs said this building is close to the property line, so they have a fire rating issue. In addition when looking at the west elevation, which is the front door, and in retail settings, this is back door to tenant spaces. He said they can enliven with architectural treatments and materials but there wasn't an opportunity for transparency on this elevation.

Bona added that when the site next door becomes developed much of that elevation won't be visible.

Westphal suggested that he would like to see possible corner treatments where elevation meets Washtenaw Ave..

Pratt asked if there are opportunities for storm water infiltration.

Covert responded that given the site conditions this is not desirable due to soil contamination issues.

Mahler asked when the Commission could expect the item to return before them.

Rampson responded as soon as the outstanding items have been satisfactorily addressed.

A motion was made by Carlberg, seconded by Vice Chair Westphal, that the Resolution/Public Hearing be Postponed Indefinitely. On a roll call, the vote was as follows with the Chair declaring the motion carried.

Yeas: 8 - Bonnie Bona, Evan Pratt, Eric A. Mahler, Jean Carlberg, Wendy Woods, Erica Briggs, Kirk Westphal, and Diane Giannola

Nays: 0

Absent: 1 - Tony Derezinski