

Beaudry, Jacqueline

From: Tom Whitaker [tgwhitaker@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, August 12, 2009 11:38 PM
To: Greden, Leigh; Anglin, Mike; Higgins, Marcia; Teall, Margie; Rapundalo, Stephen; Smith, Sandi; Derezinski, Tony; Briere, Sabra; Hohnke, Carsten; Taylor, Christopher (Council); Hieftje, John; Planning; Rampson, Wendy; Pulcipher, Connie; Thacher, Jill; Beaudry, Jacqueline; smorrison@rentropmorrison.com
Subject: City Place Public Participation - Neighborhood Response
Attachments: CityPlace_ltr081209.pdf

NOTE TO STAFF: Please include this message and attachment in the City Place file in the Planning Dept. office, as well as any relevant Planning Commission and City Council packets. Please forward to Planning Commission members, as there is no way for the public to know that messages sent to planning@a2gov.org actually ever reach the Commissioners. Thank you.

Mayor Hieftje, Members of Council, Members of Planning Commission, and Staff:

Please see the attached statement from the Germantown Neighborhood Association, signed by members who attended tonight's meeting, as well as other Ann Arbor citizens, regarding the latest City Place PUD proposal.

Tonight we attended Alex de Parry's public participation meeting for his latest City Place PUD submittal. Sadly, there was nothing new presented at this meeting. It was the same proposal we had seen when we last met with Mr. de Parry in the January-April 2009 time-frame and it is unacceptable. Our meetings at that time were an earnest and thoughtful attempt at coming to agreement on a satisfactory proposal that would satisfy Mr. de Parry's desire to make money, with the neighbors' desire to see the neighborhood preserved. Many of us not only live here, but also own rental property that is attractive for its historic context. After several meetings with Mr. de Parry, he submitted his "by right" proposal. We initially perceived this as a hollow threat, but with little compromise on the alternative, we had no way of being certain which project he really wanted to build, so we dropped out of any alternative discussions completely and began fighting the "by right" proposal. We had to fight the most imminent threat.

At the time we dropped out of the discussions, I sent Mr. de Parry a lengthy message explaining our position (a position agreed upon by the majority of property owners in the area and copied below for your reference). The proposal we saw tonight, except for some new color pictures, is the same one we last saw in April and again, it is unacceptable. It destroys the historic homes (one would be completely removed, and six others would be gutted, taken apart and stuck back together on a huge connector building). In addition, it is far too large, both in physical size and density for the neighborhood. Mr. de Parry said this proposal will have 187 bedrooms (potentially over 370 occupants), with 96 parking spaces.

The neighbors of this project are grateful that Council finally saw fit to adopt an historic district study (albeit, in quite a limited area) and we will support this effort in any way we can. Unfortunately, this approach (as opposed to the zoning moratorium) means that will have to continue going to all these meetings, continue to correspond with Council, CPC and staff, and continue to feel threatened by developments that are out of scale and inconsistent with the Central Area Plan. Commissioners, Staff, and Councilmembers will also continue to be preoccupied by these distractions, instead of being able to focus on the R4C study and/or the historic district study. In addition, the postponing of a vote on his "by right" proposal (and agreement by Council that he can pull it back out at any time), means that we

continue to have two guns pointed at our heads, only now, this double-extortion has the apparent endorsement of City Council.

We hope, since we have been put in this position, that you will grant us the courtesy of thoroughly reading this and other submittals from neighbors so that you will remain informed about our true position. We object to City Place, whether it is the first PUD, the "by right" or this latest PUD. However, we would not object to a project that respectfully restored the houses and added some units in a way that was in keeping with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation.

Finally, you should all be aware that Fifth Avenue Limited Partnership, the organization that City Place was submitted under, continues to be in default (per City and County websites) on its property taxes for one of the City Place properties: 415 S. Fifth Ave. The Ann Arbor City Charter specifically forbids the City from entering into contracts (like a PUD or development agreement) with parties who are in default with the City. We ask that the City Place submission be put on hold until such time as Fifth Avenue Limited Partnership makes itself whole with the City and County on its property taxes.

Thank you for your time.

Tom Whitaker
President
Germantown Neighborhood Association

Email sent to Alex de Parry on April 6, 2009:

Alex:

At our meeting yesterday, we discussed the status of the discussions about your alternative PUD concept. Currently, the Germantown Neighborhood Association has several important issues that we are working on including our opposition to The Moravian, and the City Place "R4C" project. We are also gearing up to pursue an historic district study, which we are hoping will go before Council in late May or early June.

Because we are simply a group of concerned property owners and residents, our time to devote to these issues is limited, and we must pick and choose our priorities carefully. Since we began conversations with you about a redefined City Place concept in January, we have never felt that our vision of a small building, or group of buildings located behind the preserved houses on Fifth was an idea that you were willing to embrace. After a couple of meetings where we tried to communicate this to you verbally, we asked Mike Forgacs to try to graphically represent our vision, but that too seemed to get bogged down in details, and the concept you are still proposing, despite trimming the peak roof height and increasing the setbacks to the new building, is far larger and more dense than we can accept. We are also not comfortable participating in a project that would dismantle and move all, and demolish one of the existing houses. The result would be a loss of all historic integrity.

We felt we were already at this point a few weeks ago when we met at your office. Before coming to that meeting, we discussed that we were still very far apart in terms of the overall size and we tried to convey this to you at the meeting. We fully expected that it would be our last meeting and told you that unless you could significantly reduce the size of the project that we didn't see any point in continuing to waste everyone's time on this, or for you to continue to spend money on additional drawings. Yet, you went ahead and cut another two feet off the roof and redrew the parking structure to save some trees. However, from what I understand, the project is still about the same square footage and occupancy level as the first iteration you discussed with us in January.

Because we don't feel this process is leading anywhere close to an acceptable resolution, and the group has limited time and resources, we have voted to discontinue the discussions. As mentioned, we have other more immediate and pressing items on our agenda that require our full attention and that is where our focus needs to be.

As stated numerous times before, our goal is to see as much of the existing housing stock preserved in our neighborhood as possible. The existing neighborhood already provides quality, affordable housing for students, professionals and families in an historic setting. Preserving this quality of life is not only our mission, but is also the community's vision as stated in the Central Area Plan, the Downtown Plan, and supported by the new A2D2 zoning proposals. A2D2, properly adopted, will provide for density in the downtown, as well as buffers within the downtown to protect ours and other neighborhoods. This neighborhood is actually one of the best preserved neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. Somehow it managed to avoid most of the 1960's tear-downs and apartment box projects that harmed other neighborhoods like the Old Fourth Ward or the Old West Side. At least until now.

Finally, we, as your neighbors and fellow property owners want to invite you once again to change gears and consider an alternative plan that preserves the historical gems that you have been lucky enough to acquire over the years. In this economy, and the current housing glut in Ann Arbor, we think you would be wise to take stock of the incredible inventory of historic properties you have and create a project that is sustainable, aesthetically pleasing, and historically sensitive. The North Central area has seen a big influx of families and professionals who were attracted to this exact type of neighborhood. We think this same trend is starting to occur in our area and this should be encouraged, not ripped out and replaced with an unproven model (particularly your R4C proposal), that has limited chance of success. (Have you noticed that 411 Lofts is already offering \$0 security deposits to attract tenants?) Ann Arbor population and employment figures continue to fall and even UM enrollment has flattened.

Families, professionals, and grad students are attracted to the traditional ambiance our neighborhood currently affords. Personally, I believe it and have put my money where my mouth is by buying a house for my family here. Now I am ready to close on a second house, to be restored and retained as a rental, because I see opportunity in what we already have. We all hope that one day, you will see this opportunity, too.

Sincerely,

*Tom Whitaker
President
Germantown Neighborhood Association*