

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes (4-3-12) and Comments to the DDA (4-4-12)

Last night's CAC meeting was attended by students from UM's School of Public Policy as well as a representative of the general public. Susan Pollay provided us with a summary of some of the results of the survey for the "Connecting William Street" process and an update on the progress, plans and strategies that we hope will lead to more downtown vitality and downtown residential housing.

CAC members believe that improved transportation systems are a key part of the future success of the downtown. At our request, Susan outlined all the ways in which the DDA, the AATA, the University and others have been involved in supporting transportation improvements—whether it's the Go Pass, Zip Cars, a new Blake Transit Center, the 30 Year County-wide Transit Plan, the DDA's Downtown Parking/Transportation Management Plans and now, a new Airport shuttle. We believe these transportation improvements will make it more desirable to live, work, and visit in our downtown.

Most of last night's CAC meeting, however, was devoted to a discussion of the request for a grant from the DDA to the proposed housing development at 618 S. Main in the form of returned TIF funds. We had asked our member, John Chamberlin, also a professor in UM'S School of Public Policy, to attend the recent meeting of the DDA's Partnership Committee that was considering this 618 S. Main TIF request. John gave us an excellent report on the discussion that took place at your meeting.

You know that the CAC joined with the Old West Side and all the Downtown Neighborhood Associations to strongly support the project at 618 South Main. We want that project to be built. But you also know that the CAC always supports, and respects, careful, consistent City Planning.

What you may not know is that the CAC played a significant role in creating the partnership process that for the first time in 1999 provided DDA assistance to Syndeco for what became Ashley Mews. It included "a contribution from its Housing Fund in the amount of \$75,000 to support the affordable housing aspects of this development and \$589,000 in TIF funds for the construction of pedestrian improvements along S. Ashley and S. Main Streets, on the Mews and on the Pedestrian Plaza."

We later supported other projects--some built, some not--that made use of returned TIF funds or outright grants—the Village Green project, Liberty Lofts, Kingsley Lane. In each case the DDA struggled to make sure that it followed rules of procedure that were consistent, open equally to all applicants, and provided a public benefit that might not otherwise be achieved--in that era, downtown housing, particularly affordable housing.

We haven't changed. Last night, members of the CAC decided that we would continue to support the project at 618 South Main. But we would also continue to insist that any decisions the DDA makes should be based upon the principles they have always supported. Let's be consistent and avoid setting any unfair precedent. We will be following closely the discussions and future actions of the DDA on this proposal.