

Varsity Ann Arbor – Citizen Participation Meeting Report

July 20, 2011

The following is a summary of the Public Participation meeting that was held to present the evolving Varsity Ann Arbor, student focused, housing project proposed to be located at 425 E Washington St. This meeting followed a formal meeting with the newly constituted Design Review Board (held June 22nd) and numerous informal meetings with neighbors and interested citizens throughout the months of May and June. The meeting was attended by 5 members of the design team and approximately ten times that amount of interested citizens.

Notices: 2016 notices were mailed to addresses provided by the city planning department as well as others who had requested notification. Some duplicate notices were sent by e-mail to interested parties.

Meeting Date, Time & Location: Thursday July 7th, 2011, at 6 – 7:30pm – Michigan League in The Michigan Room.

Local design team member J Bradley Moore formally started the meeting @ 6:12pm by asking those in attendance to sign-in, outlining the meeting format and introducing the other design team members including Earl Ophoff of Midwestern Consulting, Bob Keane of WDG Architects and Wade Eller and Donnie Gross, representing Potomac Holdings. Following the introductions, design team member Bob Keane conducted a power point presentation describing the project. First he gave an overview of the project scope and history. Color slides were presented showing the location of the project, the neighborhood context as well as the proposed building & landscaping. Attendees were shown how the project had been initially presented to the Design Review Board (DRB) and how the design had been modified to respond to comments made by the DRB – including slides showing “before & after” views of the proposed project. The power point presentation concluded at approximately 6:37pm at which time color presentation boards were displayed on tables at the side of the room, including the “before & after” material presented in the power point presentation, for participants to view at their leisure.

Following the presentation, Mr. Moore & Mr. Keane opened the floor for public comment and questions.

An audience participant asked if the project would be targeted to students. A design team member indicated that marketing would be targeted to the University of Michigan Student body but that under the Fair Housing Act the owner could not discriminate against others so that they would accept non students as well.

An audience participant asked how traffic on E Huron would be affected since one parking garage accessed Huron and specifically how many cars could “stack” on the property waiting to get into the garage. It was indicated by the design team members that there was room for one car to “stack” on the property in front of the Huron side garage door between the sidewalk and the garage door. Furthermore, it was indicated that the design team does not believe that there will be negative consequences to the traffic on Huron because; A) The vast majority of the building occupants will be U of M students who, unlike working professionals, use their cars infrequently, B) the Huron garage door accesses only about two thirds of the proposed 77 project parking spaces whereas currently all of the 84 on-site parking spaces exit onto Huron, C) The Huron garage entry will be signed/designated as “right-in and right-out” only, D) the vast majority of cars coming and going to the existing professional building on the site are patients with hourly appointments which means far more vehicle trips per day. A design team member indicated a complete traffic study had been conducted and would be part of the formal site plan approval application which that would quantify the traffic issues. Further, this study would be submitted to MDOT for their review.

An audience participant asked where the other third of the parking space would be accessed. A design team member answered that those spaces would be accessed from a garage door on the E Washington St. side of the building.

An audience participant postulated that it might be better to have all the cars access 100% of the parking from the Washington side. Design team members indicated that A) Washington St. street was a far more pedestrian oriented street than Huron and that would create a maximum conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, B) The geometries of the site, given that its width on the Huron side is significantly narrower, makes an internal connection between parking levels impractical, C) The site already has accesses onto both E. Washington and E. Huron so nothing is proposed which does not already exist on the site.

An audience participant asked how this project would “serve the citizens” of the city. A design team member indicated that it would benefit the city through things like increased economic activity, jobs and increased tax base.

The same audience participant asked if all the increased tax revenue would go to the DDA and not to the general fund. A member of the design team indicated that the project developers/owners had no control over how tax revenue would be distributed and that that was more or less an internal affair of the local government and citizenry. Tom Heywood, Executive Director of the State Street Area

Association, was an audience participant and detailed for those assembled how the increased tax revenue would be allocated between the taxing authorities.

An audience participant asked what the setback of the proposed project would be on the E Huron side. A design team member answered that the set-back at the building "base" would be a minimum of 15 feet and that the tower above the base would be set-back at least an additional 5 feet as per the city zoning ordinance. Further, the existing house on the east side of the proposed building had a front set back of approximately 30 feet and that the existing house to the west had a front set back of approximately 25 feet. The design team member indicated that as a comparison the Sloan Plaza building across the street had a set-back at the building base of approximately 12 feet and a setback at the tower of 20 feet. Furthermore the team member indicated that the side of the building facing Huron was not straight but articulated in such a way that the minimum setbacks stated of 15 and 20 feet were just the minimums and that these were exceeded for part of the Huron building face.

An audience participant indicated that the rendering illustration did not, in their opinion, seem to show the differences in Huron setbacks accurately. A design team member said that no deception was intended and that it was merely the viewing angle of the perspective.

An audience participant indicated that the mid block connection proposed along the east side of the property should be less straight. A design team member said they would work with the church next door to enhance the design of the mid-block connection in the project tentatively designated as the project mews.

An audience participant indicated that the design team should consider increasing the number of one bedroom units. A design team member indicated that they would get with the owner to review unit mix.

An audience participant asked if there would be a way to free up the ground floor for retail space. A design team member indicated that the owner's market research showed weak to no demand for retail in this area of E Washington St. This was born out by the long vacancy of the retail space in the building adjacent to the west. The owners would rather have an active amenity space for the building tenants on the first floor than unused retail space. The owners are not averse to having retail spaces in their buildings and in fact incorporated 23,000 sq.ft. of retail space into another of their student focused residential projects because it made sense in that project due to retail demand in the area. The owners feel that because retail demand is low in this location this project is best suited to help support the

existing and proposed retail space in the area (such as the new market proposed to occupy some of the first floor retail space at Sterling 411 Lofts next door).

An audience participant asked what the mix of unit sizes would be and also what the on-site tenant amenities would be. A design team member indicated that 2 bedroom units represent the greatest quantity of the units representing approximately two thirds of the units, that approximately 20% of the units would be 4 bedroom units and the rest would be one bedroom and/or studio apartments.

An audience participant asked if the bedrooms would have two occupants in each bedroom. A design team member indicated that the leases would stipulate only one occupant per bedroom. Furthermore, the units come furnished with only one bed per bedroom.

An audience participant asked if each bedroom would have its own bathroom. A design team member indicated that most would have – that the bathroom to bedroom parity would be approximately 90%.

An audience participant asked what each bedroom would rent for. A design team member indicated that the anticipated rents would range from between \$900 to \$1100 per month.

An audience participant asked what the exterior building materials would be. A design team member described the full depth brick, glazing and metal panels proposed for the building.

An audience participant asked if the number of 4 bedroom units could be reduced. A design member indicated that the unit mix was part of the feasibility of the project but that they would revisit the unit mix with the owner.

An audience participant asked if the project could include any artwork for the employment of the general public. A design member indicated that they would explore such opportunities with the owner.

An audience participant asked what the size of the bedroom-bathroom suites would be. A design team member indicated that it would vary somewhat but generally would be between 185 to 235 sq. ft.

An audience participant indicated that, in his opinion, with 400+ bedrooms and only 77 parking spaces there would be a large number of tenants without on-site parking who will need to find a place to park. A design team member indicated that the parking ratio was developed based upon A) the requirements of the zoning ordinance, B) the experience of the owners and industry standards in this type of development, C) similar projects in town like Zaragon 1, Zaragon 2 and 411 Lofts. Tom Heywood, Executive Director of State Street Area Association, indicated that 400-450 monthly permit parking spots would be moved out of the "Tally Hall" parking structure to the new Library lot parking structure once the latter is completed, thus freeing up the spaces in the "Tally Hall" parking structure across from the proposed Varsity Project by the time it is completed. Furthermore, there will be 80 surface parking spaces on the library lot until the city decides what to do with the air rights above the library lot parking structure.

An audience participant asked if only tenants of the building would be able to park in the building and if the parking spaces would be rented to tenants separately from the bedroom/apartment rent. A design team member indicated that only tenants would be permitted to park in the spaces within the building, that each space is assigned by number and that the monthly rent for the parking space is in addition to the rent paid for per apartment/bedroom.

An audience participant indicated that in their experience city parking requirements are inadequate and that there should be one parking space per apartment. A design team member indicated that they would convey that suggestion to the owner.

An audience participant indicated that the building design did not, in their opinion, respond to Design Guidelines in respect to issues of context and that the building should be set-back further from Huron Street to provide more green space. A design member indicated that the proposed project has more green space than is currently found on the site which is 100% "paved over". Furthermore that Sloan Plaza across the street, which has similar setbacks and much more street frontage, has green plantings between the building and side walk as will this project.

An audience participant asked if any space in the proposed project will be office space or other uses not directly associated with the residential uses in the building. A design team member indicated that there would only be space for the use of the residential tenants.

An audience participant asked about the timing of the project. A design team member indicated that they were looking for initial occupancy in late 2013.

An audience participant asked how much bike parking there would be on-site. A design team member responded 72 spaces would be provided inside the building and approximately 10 spaces outside.

An audience participant stated that they would like to see a taller building with more parking incorporated into the design with one parking space per apartment. A design team member indicated that they would revisit that idea with the owners.

An audience participant suggested that the project offer a shuttle service for tenants to shopping areas outside the urban core. A design team member indicated that they would convey that suggestion to the owners.

The co-pastor of the Baptist church to the east of the proposed project offered thanks to the design team for the open and on-going dialog with the church that was initiated early on in the project design process.

An audience participant stated that they really liked the idea of the through-block connection and that they were happy with the design changes that were made as a result of the Design Review Board but that the local citizenry would be pushing for even more changes/improvements in the design. Further that the Huron Street side needs more work and that the building should be set back further from Huron even if it means going higher.

An audience participant stated that they feel that having the 4 bedroom units at the end of the building corridors is a bad idea.

An audience participant stated that they thought the "Varsity" name might create confusion with other enterprises in town and asked how the project name was arrived at. A design team member stated that the name was the brand name of the Owner who uses it on all of its projects throughout the country.

An audience participant asked if the owner was going to retain ownership or if they were just going to sell it. A design team member indicated that the owner is a long-term holder of its properties.

An audience participant asked how the project fits into the context of adjacent historic districts. A design team member indicated that the building would be a good fit.

An audience participant asked what if anything was going to be done to the adjacent house to the west of the project on Huron St. A design team member said that the Owner had indicated he intended to fix it up.

Mr. Moore indicated that any additional comments or concerns could be forwarded to the project website at varsityaa@gmail.com

The meeting formally concluded at approximately 7:32pm.

See Appendices attached

Appendix A

The design team received several pieces of correspondence from interested parties after the Design Review Board meeting and prior to the Citizens' Participation Meeting which are chronicled herein.

From: Norm Tyler – June 23, 2011

Brad,

I attended as an observer yesterday's meeting of the Design Review Board. There is one major concern I have with the design; that is the building's elevation on Huron Street. The current design assumption obviously is that this is the back of the building, with a garage door and a security office facing the street. Many neighbors consider Huron Street, because of its prominence, instead should be considered one of two fronts to the building. There should be more of an amenity to this elevation.

Perhaps the designers could consider the following:

- This street-front should be more fully landscaped.
- Move the garage entrance back further so there is at least one car length between the door and the sidewalk.
- I understand you intend this to be a right-turn-only exit. This may not be practical, since I feel many residents will make a left turn illegally nonetheless. Have you discussed this situation with MDOT, since Huron is a state road?
- I feel a setback of some kind at the northeast corner of the massing could make a better reference to the low-scale structures next door.

I look forward to seeing the response of the design team based on the comments of myself and others. The project will be an important structure for the city, and I am sure we all want to see it work successfully in every way.

Norm Tyler...

From: Ilene R. Tyler, FAIA, FAPT, LEED AP – June 23, 2011

Brad, I understand you are accepting comments from the public regarding last night's Design Review presentation. I made my notes strictly tied to the Design Guidelines and they are so noted below. I have stated them in a declarative style, with the understanding that you will read them as a suggestion for you and your team to consider.

A1.5 Enhance the terminus to the alley from Liberty; soften with more green landscaping.

A1.2 Widen the Mews, and "funnel" both entrances to the Mews; possibly widen mid-block at the First Baptist garden, treating this as a pedestrian-friendly node along the Mews.

A2.6 Provide more of a green roof. Why waste all that flat roof area? Is it too high? Will there be too much rooftop mechanical equipment? Of course, I don't know the project that well, but

the tiny area (even if deepened to 40 feet) is too small to contribute to a lessening of the large impervious building footprint.

A3.5 The entry area does offer public urban space, but it needs more reason for people to be there and to be used. Enhance with a focus, furniture, etc.

A4.2 Soften and screen the entries to the parking structure. The entries need to be recessed one full car length, so cars don't sit on the public sidewalk trying to enter or exit.

A4.5 Will MDOT approve the E. Huron exit without an acceleration lane? This seems very unsafe and should be discouraged, unless there is strict control against turning left, and room to ease into traffic turning right. Vehicle exiting takes up too much of the frontage, but what there is needs to be improved over the current concept. While not the functional front door, it should not read as a back door and service entrance on our primary cross-town roadway.

A5.4 Show items and locations for public art to "enrich and enliven pedestrian walkways..."

A6.2 Provide convenient bike storage, including some for quick day use or visitors to the building.

B1.1 Reduce building mass on the Huron Street half of the building. This is adjacent to historic houses on each side, and the current massing overwhelms these buildings. Step the building down to the north.

B1.2 Vary the building massing to differentiate two building blocks occupying the full depth of the block.

B1.3 Wrap the 2-story base around the sides of the building; continue a horizontal differentiation along the east and west elevations, even if it is less developed than at the north and south ends.

B1.4 Increase the horizontal differentiation at the top floor. It is barely visible and needs more articulation to be visible from the ground.

C7.3 Make the windows operable, not just vents, but the actual windows.

General #1: Integrate into the whole site plan what is happening west of the new building, so this, too, does not feel like the back of the building adjacent to the historic houses.

General #2: Include site improvements and upgrades to the historic houses. These lose all morning solar access, and the new building should be stepped adjacent to them to mitigate this condition.

Please share my comments with the rest of the team and with the Design Review Advisory Board.

Thank you.

From: Raymond Detter – June 23, 2011

Brad and Associates:

I believe that most of Wednesday's criticism of the proposed "Varsity" project on Washington Street related to the design and mass of the east and north elevations of the structure. I am not going to repeat all the issues that were raised, but it is clear that significant changes must be made. On the Huron Street side, the re-design of the building must recognize that this can not be treated as "the back of the building". The final design must do more to relate to the historic context and character of East Huron Street.

I am attaching below a summary list of the "Major Points in the Downtown Ann Arbor Design Guidelines in Relation to the Proposed Project". These were drawn up before the Design Guidelines Board met to help us clarify the design review process and to point out the most important design considerations that relate to the Varsity project. Many of these, as expected, relate to the Design Review Board comments--even though, unfortunately, the Design Review Board members did not specifically identify specific design guidelines in their discussion. Equally unfortunate was the fact the Board members failed to cover some items at all.

We know the community will have a chance to raise these again at the Public Participation meeting on July 7 at the Michigan League. Any improvement of the project between now and then will be appreciated. Public hearings before the Planning Commission and the City Council will also allow these design guidelines items to be raised again.

From: Raymond Detter and Christine Crockett – June 25, 2011

Chris,

Good remarks! I don't see Brad Moore among the people to whom you sent it. That is essential. Brad will, hopefully, to try to get the developers to improve this god-damn Cabrini Green look-a-like.

Ray

On Jun 25, 2011, at 11:28 AM, Christine Crockett wrote:

I'm looking forward to meeting with all of you about this project. I especially like Ilene Tyler's extensive comments on the exterior design of the building. She has communicated what all of us have been saying in language that architects understand. No one can question Ilene's extensive expertise and experience as well as her consummate good taste in these matters.

Changing the four-bedroom units to one or two bedroom apartments would be make this project much more acceptable. The larger "pod" style apartments speak to the "party central" crowd, and grouping two of them at the end of a corridor could create unpleasant living conditions for the other residents on each floor. In the end one hopes that the developer would

understand that this project will be more universally desirable to future renters if they can count on a livable arrangement of units. In the cause of long-term viability and rentability of this building I urge the developers to eliminate the four-bedroom units altogether. The mix of units is quite unworkable in terms of the clientele attracted to the larger units and would quickly make the building unattractive to many potential residents such as graduate students and professors.

I am particularly bothered by way Huron is treated as a "backdoor" to the building. Because each side of this development faces an important character area, then the Huron facade, as well as all the others, needs to respond to the work that Peter Pollock and others produced in making Huron a more pedestrian friendly street. The current blank face facade with its garage door would only serve to make the Huron Street experience more dismal. The study of Huron, Division, and other important thoroughfares in the downtown specifically addressed the need to make Huron a more walkable street. This includes both improving the existing built environment and making sure that new construction contributes to a positive pedestrian experience. We must remember how important this study is whenever addressing new development. It certainly influenced the outcome of the North Quad complex in which the UM enhanced the corner of Huron and State with a beautiful entrance to university and a distinctively designed building for this block of Huron. We must expect the same of private developers. Chris Crockett

On Fri, Jun 24, 2011 at 6:39 PM, Raymond Detter <rdetter@umich.edu> wrote:

To All:

Check out the link to what was presented at Wednesday's Design Review Board meeting. I just want to make sure that all of us have seen it before our meeting at the Tyler's on Tuesday, at 7:00 p.m., June 28.

Ray

From: Christine Brummer – July 1, 2011

Brad,

We in the Old West Side have followed the design review process for The Varsity with interest and appreciation.

What follows is the gist of comments we would bring to the Citizen Participation Meeting on July 7, 2011.

Thanks for giving these matters your attention.

Regards,

Christine Brummer

President,
Old West Side Association

If hallmarks of design are the degrees to which a new development fits within the fabric of the city and is capable of standing the test of time by remaining functional and ageless, the following comments may be of help. We all want The Varsity to be excellent.

The foremost of the design guidelines for downtown Ann Arbor is context. Keeping in mind that this project spans from a façade on Washington to one on Huron, we recommend a thoughtful review of both faces. In particular, the Huron Street side of the building appears to be an empty slate although that is the side from which most will see the building. Concerns include the “blank” face of the building and lack of street level amenities.

Further, the adjacent properties on Huron appear to have shouldered aside. Under the Guidelines, the scale and nature of the historic properties to the side must be addressed in the design of this building. We urge consideration of points raised by the Design Review Board respecting massing, shape and interesting components with an eye toward complementing the neighboring structures. As the Guidelines declaim: Identify and then reinforce the positive characteristics of adjacent sites. One of the most noticeable aspects of the existing properties is their setback from the street. This leads to another, visible difference of green space and an inviting streetscape. These components are integral.

The specific context of this site raises safety issues. The Varsity as proposed presents a problem for pedestrians, motorists and residents on the Huron side. Of necessity, the garage door will be the center of activity pitting these against one another. We recommend some of the same considerations asked of other projects in a similar situation. First, please confer with others as to the practicality of a garage door letting out on to Huron Street at that point in the block—the parking lot is already a bit of a problem. Second, if the garage door is necessary, landscaping improvements including setback are required to improve the experience at ground level. At least provide space adequate to pull a vehicle off the street so traffic of all types is not blocked. Finally, address related hazard questions with lighting and door type. (Village Green has struggled with these same matters for City Apartments at First and Washington.)

The Guidelines are meant to emphasize opportunities for contexts of sustainability. Resources are to be preserved. This includes trees in place. The project may also create resources. Among many suggestions, use of the top for solar panel installations or a “green roof” is a possibility. Likewise, some provision for bicycles would be welcome if racks could be on premises. When walkways and other areas develop in response to Design Review Board recommendations, the mews and plaza space should be enhanced. “Provide landscaping, seating, public art, lighting, interpretive markers, and water features to enrich and enliven pedestrian walkways and use areas.” A property the size and nature of The Varsity should nail these aspects on all four corners.

Being first often results in greater scrutiny. Certainly the experts and interested parties gave specific advice. Maybe here there is also greater opportunity; The Varsity is poised to take advantage of a blue-ribbon panel. Thanks to the design review process, this project has every chance of successfully identifying and answering upfront concerns.

Appendix B

The design team received one piece of correspondence from interested parties after the Citizens' Participation Meeting which is chronicled herein.

July 8

Gentlemen

I attended the meeting at the Michigan League on Thurs. evening, July 7th, regarding your project. I had asked a question at the meeting about which I would like some further clarification. I had asked what your rent projections were. I was told \$1100. I am assuming that that means \$1100/bedroom/month.

Some additional thoughts entered my mind about your project after I left the meeting. College Park, Maryland was mentioned as a place where you have/will have a similar project. Where else do you have such projects built? or in the planning stages ?

The demographics of the Univ. of Mich. students' families, I think, are somewhat unusual for a state university. As I am sure that you know, a high percentage of Univ. of Mich. students come from very, very wealthy families. Many, many students bring automobiles with them to college. And not junky automobiles, either.

You will be "ahead of the curve" if you can find a way to provide 1 parking space/apartment. It's my understanding that you are allowed to build higher than you are currently planning to build. Not only do I think that providing 1 parking space/apartment would be GREATLY appreciated by your future tenants, I think the

Ann Arbor community will laud you for going well beyond what the City of Ann Arbor currently requires. It is very difficult for me to understand how you think that providing a bathroom for every student is a great idea (I do think that would be desired by future tenants) yet you DO NOT think that it is important to provide the POSSIBILITY of 1 parking space for each apartment. You say that Ann Arbor has an excellent bus system. That is not suitable for grocery shopping.

This fall, my husband and I will have been in the student housing business for 40 years. Over the last 40 years, a much higher percentage of students have brought automobiles to college. I urge you to provide parking for each apartment: for your own good, for the good of your prospective tenants, and for the good of Ann Arbor.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Barbara Copi (734)- 665 - 2238