

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes –September 1, 2015
City Council Workroom, 2nd Floor, City Hall 7:00 pm

Members Present: Ray Detter, Joan French

Visitors Present: Christine Crockett, Steve Kaplan, Gwen Nystuen, John Nystuen, Doug Kelbaugh

Members Absent: Marsha Chamberlin, John Chamberlin, Jim Kern, Sue Kern, Hugh Sonk, Kathleen Nolan

After not meeting in August, those present at last night's CAC meeting discussed the major downtown zoning changes approved unanimously by City Council in July as well as a number of needed changes still remaining (Thayer and N.U., the Congregational Church site and others), the future of the Library Underground Parking site, as well as the future location of the new railroad station.

We also discussed and approved the contents of a letter I was asked to send to City Planners Wendy Rampson, Alexis DeLeo and Megan Masson-Minock, Planning consultant on possible changes to Downtown Zoning Premiums.

That letter expressed again our belief that premiums should not be granted at any time if they have a negative impact upon the historic character of downtown or the context of near downtown residential and historic neighborhoods. Although some folks reject this principle as too vague and impossible to attain or codify, I think the Ordinance Revision Committee Memorandum of July 17, by reducing the availability of some of the current FAR premiums, actually takes a step in the right direction--stricter requirements, fewer premiums, less threat to neighborhoods.

Most of us believe that our zoning should more clearly reflect what we want in size, use, and public amenities--as stated in our City Master Plans. Consideration of context is very important. Some of us, not all, believe that phasing out of the use of premiums would be a desirable goal. Let's tell developers what we want and not provide premiums that could produce what we don't want. Our recent effort to correct downtown zoning mistakes was a step in the right direction. We believe master plans, our zoning, and premiums should regularly be revised and made compatible as needed. If provisions for workforce housing are desirable and legal, we would encourage them with approval of lower minimum unit size, but not with premiums that may threaten the context of nearby neighborhoods.

All of us would support a recommendation "that the Design Review Board develop mandatory design rules for the pedestrian level in the downtown." But those design rules must be made clear to developers before they complete their development plans and before they lay claim to any premium advantages. There must be no question about what character areas and zoning requirements demand. We recommend that consideration be given to requiring major project

developers to engage in a broad discussion with the Design Review Board as a first step in the approval process--including negative impacts that need to be avoided. They should appear again after they put together development plans that meet the requirements made clear in the first Design Review Board meeting. No compliance, no premiums.