

SAPCC Land Use Committee meeting 9-2021
7pm, via Zoom

Committee members: Karen Nelson, Sherm Eagles, Ray Bryan, Chris Courtney, Bob Straughn, Nick, Regan Golden-McNerney

Staff: Kathryn Murray, Abdirahman Ali

Guests: Matt Finn (Architect at LHB), Michael Russelle (SAPCC council, SAPCC Environment Committee), Marie Franchett, Betty Wheeler (Environment Committee), Paul Abdo, Tiffany Maloney, Rebecca Rassier, Karlyn Eckman (Environment Committee)

Introductions

Meeting minutes

Motion and second to accept the minutes from the last meeting.

Amanda will take minutes this meeting.

Midway Residence project

Marie Franchett – principal planning developer for St. Paul organization in the Midway Residence

-Matt Finn is project architect at LHP, here to give technical aspects of the project, Tiffany Maloney is here representing Catholic Charities.

-HRA owns the St. Paul residence project, 120 units, 60 of which are for disabled, formerly homeless, 60 for formerly homeless with chronic substance addition - operated by Catholic Charities.

-HRA owns, in part because bonding funds were used to build, Catholic Charities has a lease; that'll be in hearing, and refurbishing. The Minnesota Finance Authority has allocated \$1m, St. Paul something also several hundred thousand – funds will go to the HRA.

-Matt provides presentation, discusses improvements.

-The building is in SAPCC, north of University, 902 Hersey. It is designed in two halves reflecting the different types of residences, with a lobby/entrance in the center.

-It also has shared common spaces.

-It's single-room occupancy, with shared kitchen and dining spaces and a cafeteria sort of area. Most units face east or west.

-The siding on the upper 3 floors of the building was coming off, so LHB was originally involved in project just to replace that, but as they considered it they determined more needed to be done; they discovered they also needed to replace some of the insulation – thus they considered doing a more holistic restoration.

-Scope – replace siding, recladding the building – hope to still highlight the individuality of the residences, highlight the common spaces, reduce cost of heating/etc.. Priorities are to deliver on budget, incorporate colors the business is comfortable with.

-The know the scope and extent, but exactly everything isn't decided yet.

-Scope – remove and replace siding, windows, masonry, roof membrane; boiler and update control; update kitchens and bathrooms and increase accessibility; replace floorings

-Retain design integrity of the building as they move through the process

-Marie – here to answer questions. She hopes the council will support the project. They are looking for a letter of support and to answer any questions or concerns that folks have – any questions?

-Chris Courtney – is residency for individuals short or long-term?

-Marie – it's support housing, so usually pretty long-term.

-Chris – have residents had input? What is the impact of kitchen improvements, etc.?

-Matt – there are three shared kitchens, the design of them is largely to replace what's there, and improve accessibility, ensure that residents have wheelchairs may use it. Design is constrained by what's there, so improvements are mainly to improve access.

-Karen – any attempt to have informal connection with Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ), anything they could contribute to?

-Matt – wasn't aware of the zone, so we would need more help making the connection.

-Karen – CEZ has been doing ChromaZone event for last few years, does a lot of work with creative businesses, makers in what's basically CEZ; it's different organization from them, but might be helpful to make the connection.

-Karen – any more questions, or would anyone like to make a motion?

-Chris – asks about greenspace before/after the changes.

-Matt – the site stays exactly as it is, they're really only changing the building; there will be a few changes to sidewalks, plantings, some things that may be damaged in construction but will be replaced in kind, but really only the building is impacted.

-Sherm – would make motion in support; council has supported it since before Catholic Charities was involved, good thing, etc.

-Ray – seconds motion

-Vote, most in favor but Regan logged on just after Sherm made his motion, so **she'll abstain** as she didn't hear much but will review the info.

-Motion passes.

Potential Project

-Paul Abdo presents. Provides visuals of his plan.

-He'd like to know facts, get temperature of committee and people here, and get an idea of what type of support there might be, what's possible.

-He knows there's been a few projects proposed, including industrial. Knows it's had a history of storage, a few zonings have been considered. The most recent prior proposal was a trailer-tractor yard, would've involved just putting concrete down, which was possible under the existing zoning but not so much received well by the neighborhood.

-So he drives by it a lot, being near the State Fair, and considered perhaps it could be residential and would be a better use of the space that way and more pleasant to drive by.

-He's got a draft plan.

-There's been some discussion over whether St. Paul or the county has jurisdiction over curb cuts from the street.

-In his plan, the building would have parking underneath, and 34 parking to the side above-ground.

-Studios, alcoves, 1 and 2-beds, 63 total; 4 levels.

-There's been houses purchased on Raymond, and there's U of M student housing, so this would be a bit of a transitory area between that.

-Higher and better use than what's currently zoned as industrial.

-Wouldn't disturb the soil, he says.

-He expects there will probably be comments; would like to see if there's any appetite for it at all.

-Karen – asks if anyone has questions, comments?

-Ray – has he looked at soil at all yet? Ray understands it was a dump, which can be nasty, not supportive soils.

-Paul – they have done research and soil borings. It was a dump site from ash burns, trash; really not good soil. The idea would be to disturb it as least as possible, encapsulate it; create more green space. The power company has an easement over the property, parking would be under that easement, would help encapsulate the soil.

-Ray – observes the pond in the plan is kept. Mentions that right now it is sometimes a pond, sometimes a wetland.

-Paul – due to water runoff, there needs to be somewhere for water to go; so either preserve the pond, or perhaps make it larger and into somewhat of a catchment for the property.

-Ray – asks Karlyn's thoughts.

-Karlyn – that pond is a fragment of a much larger wetland. That pond has the highest insect diversity of the 4 remaining Kasota ponds; important of diversity, dragonflies, fireflies; to turn it into a catchment would be harmful, mainly due to chlorides coming off of the parking lots, etc.

-Paul – so you're saying trying to keep the pond as natural as possible; as you can see there's plenty of other space to put a catchment pond on the property. Could also consider underground retention, though that might disturb soils, though might also be good.

-Karlyn – pond is hydrologically linked to spring that's right across the tracks, about 10-12 years ago it was piped, prior to that it was Kasota spring; but if you tried to dig in the soil further back you might affect the spring, but the spring is still there.

-Paul – spring is where?

-Karlyn – further to the west. The wetland is also hydrologically linked to the larger Kasota pond, it recharges Kasota pond.

-Karen – it's in the Capital Region Watershed, MWMO

-Karen – barely within MWMO? It took it over about 10 years ago.

-Michael – thanks Paul for being here, there's a few people from the SAPCC Environment Committee here too. How far do the borings go?

-Paul – 20-25 feet

-Michael – it's about 25 feet to the original what they think were wetlands before; above that is from what they know part of is ash burns, from wood burnings, but also hospital residue, there's also been findings of radioactive materials in another dump nearby from the 50's. MPCA wasn't worried, when they were going to be putting concrete over it, planning on only going about 3 feet deep. The Environment Committee would have concerns as there hasn't been much detailed testing, and it's a varied site, so once you start disturbing it you have to keep testing. He also wonders about the physical ability of the dump to support the building.

-Paul – footings down to natural would be best, could either do friction/aggregate piers, they use existing soil and the friction of the insertion of the piers to create the post, aggregate puts a straw in the soil, shake it, gets aggregate through the straw and adds structure to the soil, then you put the foundational squares in that. He did it with a project he's working on now, and it worked well and didn't disturb the soil at all really; vs. typically you'd remove the not-good soil and replace

with new - but here you can't do that, it'd be an impossibility from a physical and financial standpoint. He's not sure how MPCA thinks, whether it'd be possible, though it'll be something they'll be exploring.

-Michael – underground infiltration they wouldn't be in favor at all, it'd cause leeching with the other groundwater, especially as it moves. Also, from a more biological side, this site has served as a nesting and crossing site for turtles. There are 3 species in Kasota ponds - the development here would affect the nestings, for two particular ponds. If Paul pursues it more, we would be glad to have you at Environment Committee.

-Paul – appreciates hearing, to get our brains moving; and to hear what we know, as we've looked at this for a few years; and for hearing about the migration etc. Would like to see if there's opportunity for preservation or enhancement.

-Ray – turkeys, wild turkeys, do they use the land?

-Regan – had turkeys in her front yard

-Ray – were in his yard a bit ago

-Karlyn – they're transitory, she's seen them by HealthPartners

-Ray- he's seen them by 280

-Karlyn – coyotes also live in the area and may have been doing a number on the turkeys.

-Karen – Paul is discussing foundation schemes, wouldn't foundation schemes involve removing soil and replacing with something semi-permeable?

-Paul – no, it actually pushes the soil out, not down, compacts soil horizontally. Think of pushing a straw into sand, then you pour the aggregate on top of the straw, and shake it as you pull the straw out.

-Karen – so you're putting in aggregate but taking nothing out, you're saying?

-Paul – yes, that's one of the reasons why they're considering it – you're minimally disturbing existing soil, and not taking any out – which then you'd have to consider disposing of, cleaning, etc.

-Regan – asks about driveways, etc.

-Paul – there's not certainty about who is in charge of whether one can do a driveway; what they've heard is should/will need to only have one curb cut.

-Regan – every day she has trouble with the turnoff to 280 from Energy Park. She would be careful where you put it, that intersection is challenging, also with trucks and trailers, and U students. MDOT has mentioned a project to redesign the 280, close by areas. She's wondering if Paul has thought about traffic, talked with MNDOT, etc.?

-Karen – there's also more desires than anything concrete that would propose getting people from the U over the highway to the area, the granary crossing, so may want to look into that.

-Karlyn says via chat: “That stretch is also treacherous of cyclists and pedestrians”

-Betty – can he speak more on shaking when you do aggregate piers? They've found the material underground is very hazardous, and some of the immediate neighbors, some are quite close just on the other side of the 280, were very concerned about air quality especially during construction. Also, the land is a critical piece of a narrow corridor between St. Paul and Minneapolis, that's why we see turkeys, deer, etc., as there's a natural corridor that is unbroken but quite small now.

-Paul – doesn't have a direct answer, doesn't want to speak out of concern, but what they'd do is hire an environmental consultant, they'd do testing. They are still considering exactly how concentrated but would consider how much needs to be. They would also consider air quality

whenever do demolition or building. Also, his ultimate fear based on what he's heard is that someone puts down a concrete pad, and then there's 50-60 trailers on the property – which neither people in the area nor he, as he drives past it often, would like. There's a lot that can be done in the design of the area to keep that natural corridor – not a 100% solution, but a lot better than that other possibility.

-Bob – the comprehensive plan for the community calls for this area to be part of the some sort of green area for bike trails and whatnot, so that it is not impacted the way Paul is concerned about for trucks and such – but no one has done a study on that or such.

-Karen – with pedestrian and bike around the area, he'd think the city would have some input with the need for sidewalks and new developments.

-Paul – there was mention, whether it's pedestrian friendly, some talk of sidewalks, etc. – given this is preliminary, no one's said it needs to have x; this is part of thinking what's the highest and best use for the property.

-Karen – he's come to Land Use, as potential residential development, which is good, but it's also very much a thing for the Environment Committee, and Transportation. We encourage him to keep in contact.

-Paul – he's done a lot of developments over the past decades. Given the sensitivity of the area, and clearly there's very knowledgeable people in the room; he would like to listen, get input, hear about the site, see if there's opportunity and what it might look like for the site.

-Regan – for this complicated/tricky of a site, would there be additional oversight during construction? Or testing of the water, etc.? Or long-term commitment of the site, as it's in a precarious situation.

-Paul – multiple paths you can take, given this piece is part of larger infrastructure. First, yes, as the soil is tricky you'd be sure it's encapsulated, and yes, there is ongoing testing needed, not sure how frequently, would test water, etc., to be sure it isn't polluting., etc. He's not personally looking at it as a 20-year project, but whoever's in charge of the property there are systems in place, where agencies come out and make sure there's annual or biannual testing.

-Kathryn – mentions train tracks are there, transporting potentially toxic materials. A person nearby near the tracks lost their spouse to potential toxins, is that something they'll consider for residents?

-Paul – hadn't heard of or considered it, but in testing the soil that'll be part of it, look at results, see what they found and potential ramifications or impacts. Would want to know what the tests look like and where to go from there. Thank you for bringing it up.

-Sherm – few years ago had a project in the area that needed rezoning, it had a railroad spur nearby, railroad was adamantly opposed, because they were concerned that there would start to be complaints about the noise. Has he discussed with Burlington Northern or the other railroad?

-Paul – he hasn't, but with the construction you can do now with walls and windows, other developments have had minimal impacts, one particular one is right by railroad and there have been minimal impacts.

-Karen – have also had the city backing down from rezoning because nearby industrial haven't been in favor as they've been worried they'd be run out of town.

-Sherm – it may be that you can build it but would have to convince the railroad it's not a problem, and they have significant influence. As it's a rezoning it'd go to city council. Sherm asks about SPD, it'd be residential in middle of industrial.

- Paul – there have been conversations, in 40-year plan, no real yes or no, they said to go meet with neighborhood, etc. So what he's doing now is meeting, getting as much feedback as possible. He's doing that, then will go back to city, with positive/negative feedback, then city will discuss viability considering 40-yr plan. He personally thinks it'll all end up being residential, as it's a connecting zone; but for now fact finding, then go back to the city, if it's a no it's a no, but don't want to put the cart before the horse.
- Betty – are these intended for market rate, and what price point?
- Paul – easy answer is market rate, but once they dig into it they'll have a better idea. A lot of the market study seems to say market rate, workforce housing; but they haven't looked more into what it's going to be.
- Karen – mentions the Design Guidelines, she'll make sure it gets to them, he says hasn't seen them yet.
- Karlyn comments in chat: "This site is a part of the historic Elm Street Ash Dump, with goes from 280 to 15th Ave SE. You'll notice that all of the structures on the north side of Kasota are perched and have no basements. They site atop of 20-25 feet of partially combusted incinerator ash. It would be difficult to construct residential housing on this route."
- Paul – they'll be doing more getting feedback, fact finding, then probably come back.
- Karen – as development progresses, we usually try to form a small few-member task group to meet with the developer as things progress; this overlaps with Environment and Transport more than usual so might need to be cross-committee; would he be open to that?
- Paul – yes, 100%
- Karen – will try to keep it to a reasonable number of people, discuss more later. She or Amanda (co-chair) will be in contact.

Standish

- Rebecca – she went to the two zoning meetings; there was a second one so they could add an addendum based on feedback provided.
- Zoning is done; communication done; except consideration of the alley.
- Dead-end alley that's already a bit of a nightmare for plowing, at an incline; so they did at an addendum, City Works would have to chime in on whether it's viable to plow - there's a cottonwood in the way a lot.
- Land Use did send letter; but didn't get there in time, we think, Amanda said.
- Betty asks for copy of the letter – send to Betty, she'll send it to other neighbors.
- Rebecca – she just wanted to give update, and be at this meeting as we'll discuss it. It was an interesting process; they wouldn't have considered the alley if she hadn't brought it up.
- Just an FYI she wanted to mention, if we (the Land Use committee, SAPCC) can intersect with Public Works perhaps; it's a mystery to her how it will be plowed.
- Karen – would the Transportation Committee be relevant?
- Rebecca – not really, it's a dead-end alley.
- Karen – citizens have influence themselves in these things.
- Betty – she sees the concern about how steep, and cottonwood, trees being removed; also it's close to double bridges, more traffic seems to just add to the congestion for that area, which has a lot just in that short space.

Luther Seminary Update

Sherm – there was the meeting, bit of info, but not heard that much of what they’re planning; expect more after Labor Day. He has had some concerns, especially with their plan projecting significantly more housing than the previous one – 700ish units, rather than the 500 or so the past one planned for, not sure how they’ll do it as not planning to go higher from what he’s heard.

-Meetings they’ve had weren’t terribly encouraging, though they were open houses, not presentations.

-It’s a similar idea as last, but less detail – United and Common Bond seem to still be part of the plan, though not assisted living. One difference is there doesn’t seem to be active senior housing which would be rental.

-Kathryn – she reached out to the task force. They’d been doing in-person meetings, we mentioned we’d be willing to help host a virtual info session as people may be concerned with in-person due to Covid and Delta. Seems like they’re planning to do at least two more neighborhood meetings, and may be virtual. Kathryn will keep reaching out, to keep in communication. Jessica will reach out about doing virtual meetings, as we have experience with that.

-Betty – she did go to the second meeting, a difference she noticed is where Master Properties had earlier assumed they could do affordable housing in Lauderdale and then later learned Lauderdale wasn’t interested in subsidizing that; vs. this developer is thinking they may get city housing support/dollars in the St. Paul portion. She asks Kathryn if we can get them to send us their visuals, for the community?

-Kathryn – their visuals were just preliminary, very similar to the old ones, not sure how helpful it would be. She thinks the refined plan would be a better thing to get. She can ask, but doesn’t see it as being helpful, but can ask if Betty would like.

-Regan – what is the status? Are they locked in?

-Sherm – rather than having a master developer who’ll put the deal together and purchase the property from Luther, this is a partner to Luther who’ll put together a plan, oversee infrastructure, and then Luther would sell buildable-ready sites to the individual developers who’d do the actual building. With Common Bond, United Properties, he doesn’t remember the name of the developer; they moved things around a bit, ex: the senior co-op would be in Lauderdale, co-op is looking at 85-100 units – which is no more and probably less than they were talking about before. Common Bond is about 100. The rest, not sure where the other 500 or 600 units are going, but you can guess it’ll probably be market-rate housing of one kind or another. He would mention that both Councilmember Jalali and her aide were there at the first meeting. Roger and Sherm had a discussion with them about trying to bring the affordable housing up – as it stands now if they got 600 or 700 units it’d be less than 20%, where we’ve proposed 30%. They’ve discussed perhaps using some of the federal money that’s coming to improve affordable housing, either Ramsey or St. Paul.

Other updates

Intern – Abdirahman Ali has started working with the District 12 (SAPCC) and District 10 (Como) community councils

-Karen asks – how long is he here, how can we interact with him?

-He’s here about 4 months, a temporary internship. He’s doing the renter’s database, calling apartments, asking how much their rent is, whether they do Section 8; helping with websites; and

going out and taking pictures, as Como website has lots of low-quality and pictures that aren't theirs.

-Karen – mentions one thing that vexes us in SSAP especially is contact with the apartment complexes, we can't just walk in, or leave notices about events – so any ideas he has or such would be great. Renter outreach is difficult and we have many in the neighborhood, we appreciate anything that can help us along those lines.

-Abdirahman – email him about any work he can do, etc.

-Karen – we have plenty we can do, will coordinate with Kathryn.

Westgate Park

-Not much new news.

-Michael – the trail, is finalized for a grant last he heard; it would help if they can get it. There are final plans for sidewalks and plantings, the city has sent it out for bids. We've tried to point out how poor the soil is, there were borings in the area, but only some actually in the site. The soil in the site is fill and a mix of fill, whatever they could put there. There's no regular soil that he can see in the boring logs; looking at the site, there's a lot of concrete pieces, etc. obviously visible, doesn't seem to be really any topsoil he can tell. There's some weeds, non-noxious weeds, but it isn't being mowed. Their engineer relied on the 2016/2017 borings, which tell about the subsoil but not topsoil.

-We've submitted a name for the park - it will go in consideration with other names that have been suggested, Parks Commission will make the decision.

-We have suggested to work with a native artist, but art will be limited to about 1% of total cost, \$3k; we have proposed raising money to double that, so the park can have a permanent artwork.

-It's been a real problem to try to talk with city people; city's been frustrated. Also, Liz's boss asked us to only have one person communicating with them, so he's tried to contact Liz via Kathryn.

-Karen – also mentioned she's heard that, too many people have been contacting her; Karen, Sherm, Michael, but she did respond to Roger.

-Karen – if it's gone out to bid she should be able to see it via her workplace, she'll see if she can find it.

-Michael – she has a screenshot Liz showed last month – not very detailed. He thinks it's because it's been sent out to bid that they don't want to talk about it in detail.

-Betty – part of the reason why it's a problem that the soil is bad and also compacted is that they're planning on planting many trees – but hard for trees to survive if a large area of the soil hasn't been remediated.

-Karen – the plans should also show what the contractor is planning in terms of trees. At that point we can also do more pushback if it's not adequate. She'd guess they probably have layer of pretty compacted aggregate, for sort-of road, but it may be better under that; other construction in the area has showed sandy soils. She's optimistic that if they can get past aggregate there would be better soil.

-Regan – offers to connect Michael with artists. Mentions that she's working on a development on Eet Street, a private school, and the developer is chipping in a significant amount for artwork, they have a budget of 12k for artwork, which is not that great but a start.

-Michael – approved list of artists for public artwork for St Paul, from 2018, most recent list, has one person of mixed heritage – so would like to propose other artists.

- Regan – agrees with concerns, though mentions part of that is there's lots of hoops to get approved.
- Sherm – mentions that a lot of the CEZ mural artists are indigenous, though not sure if they do other than murals – but may contact CEZ for names of artists.
- Michael – if any of us have friends or know companies who might want their names recognized for supporting the art in the park, let him know, they'd be able to pursue it in conjunction with Kathryn and the City Council.
- The name we proposed is “Chek'pa” – means twin or umbilical cord, strong connection between people, and between sky and earth. It fits in nicely as this is by border of the two cities, and with people moving into the area. However, we are not sure if it will be the name that's approved.
- Also thinks there will be some recognition of the oxcart path that's nearby. Thinks the park will be a good mix of cultural background.
- If you have any ideas, we'd welcome them.
- Karen – thanks Environment Committee for their work on the park and the update.

Midtown Greenway extension organization report

- Karen sent the report to the committee to read.
- Extension would come across Mississippi river, down railroad tracks, to east, eventually go over freeway to Ayd Mill Road – but would have Prospect Park spur to the university. The report doesn't mention Pelham connection to Grand Rounds.
- Will try to get together task force with Transportation committee, people in Westgate.
- Connection to frontage road, Eustis – that's another abandoned railroad spur that curves over by the Lab.
- The idea would be to make sure the Midway extension folks know there's another whole connection.
- The idea brought up in Transport is that the spur is abandoned, just being used sometimes for storage of cars; so it might be a good opportunity, connection – if so, would be valuable to us and Prospect Park.
- Take a look at the report if you have time.
- Bob – remembers a few years back seeing something about it, it was on the east side of Pelham. Someone did some thinking about it years ago, but not sure where that would be or who did it.
- Ray – he thinks that was his idea, that they try to find the lowest chokepoint off that spur, and try to take it down between the paper plant and warehouse.
- Bob – the one he was remembering wasn't by the paper plant, it was by Pelham.
- Ray – that's the closest – paper plant is so high up, you need to go over to get closest and lower; that'd be by very western edge of paper plant and eastern edge of the warehouse.
- Bob – jokes that it'd be in character for the greenway to have a steep exit (Karen says in bad character).

Benches, sidewalk

- Transportation committee got a grant for art on benches; previously had got a grant for sidewalks, near Seal, to be able to walk to the transit station. One Seal resident has already said the sightlines for crossing the road are better.

- There will be an event for painting the street, and crosswalk will be painted soon. They're looking for volunteers.
- Betty – new sidewalk and infrastructure to make connection from Seal to the Green Line is not just walking but rolling if needed, it's handicap-accessible. Exciting that some of our vision did come through.
- Karen – knows that Pat, others have put a lot of work in for this. If you have any spare time in the next month, Pat would appreciate the help, check in with her - or check in with Kathryn, as she also could use the help.

Parking minimums

- The city council passed something on parking minimums. Karen thinks it affects both residential and commercial properties.
- In some areas, such as around the Westgate Station, there already were no or low minimums, but this'll also change other areas.

B/O Architects, SOS Furniture Building

- No immediate news

DJR

- We'll have a presentation from DJR next month

Goals

- Green line overlay is one goal we were thinking about a bit; we will revisit it later at a future meeting.

CEZ

- Events upcoming in late September.

Kasota – further comments

- Regan – is there a plan env wants for the site, suggestions it has?
- Michael – would like to see all of it remediated ideally; but really just have consistent 6-8 inches of topsoil, is what they're supposed to have; or just left alone, as the vegetation there is keeping it ok
- Karen – any volunteers for task group for working with the Kasota site?
- Michael – several from Environment are likely to be interested
- Regan, Chris also volunteer
- Karen will also ask about Transportation
- Michael – we didn't discuss it, but student housing there where there's no sidewalk isn't a great idea, they'd need biking where it's a 45 mph cars and busy traffic
- Karen – mentions housing is good, but this particular site is complicated

Adjourn 9:08