



**NORTH  
LOOP**  
NEIGHBORHOOD

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**North Loop Neighborhood Association  
Planning & Zoning Meeting Notes  
August 24, 2016  
6:00 P.M.**

**Heritage Landing Community Room, 415 1<sup>st</sup> Street North**

- I. August Board Meeting called to order at 6:03 P.M.
- II. Seven committee members were in attendance: DJ Heinle, Dave Decker, Kelly Nelson, Neil Reardon, Mark Hill, Karen Rosar, and Jo Vos.
- III. **A motion is \_\_\_\_\_ by the Board to approve the Board Meeting Agenda.**
- IV. **A motion is made (\_\_\_\_), seconded (Neil), and approved by the Board to approve the July 2016 Board Meeting Minutes.**
- V. North Office Building Project – 5<sup>th</sup> and Washington Update – Aron Johnson
  - a. Initial presentations were given in May and June. There were some concerns, mainly regarding trees and relation of the building to the street. Since the initial presentations, there have been both developer-driven changes made and changes related to the city code. The building appearance remains the same, though there have been small changes made in the stacking. The office entrance remains in the same spot, but the retail area moved to the far corner. The aim was to activate both corners to make a lively street front; street trees have also been added. The City wanted maple trees planted in residential area. The plan was then submitted to the HPC, who say that historically, there have not been trees in the area.
  - b. The skyway, as initially proposed, had been lower. It was pushed up higher for connectivity, which was favorable to the planning commission. There are historic precedents at that height level. ADA access is provided at the back of the tech center.
  - c. There also will be changes made to the existing alleyway. It is proposed that a portion of the alley will be vacated and replaced with a historic rail line, spurs, and decorative pavers. The changes are consistent with the small area plan and the historic street reclamation plan.
  - d. There is a proposed increase in the number of parking stalls due to the high demand. There are now 481, instead of 130 spots proposed; this increase,

however, requires a variance, as the code has a maximum number of parking stalls allowed.

- e. There will be approximately 250 spots for public use. The undersupply of parking in the neighborhood is starting to impact businesses and prohibit their expansion. This will be the first public facility built north of the tracks and will hopefully alleviate some parking pressure. The Planning Commission may have some heartburn over the number.
- f. Neil asks if the public parking component allows the project to exceed the maximum number of parking stall permitted. The automated rate structure will vary between public and private uses. It will not be run as a municipal garage. There are difficulties in trying to increase the public parking presence: the bikeway acts a barrier and the break in the grid creates two separate neighborhoods.
- g. It is asked if there will there be glazing on façade. There will be tinted glass with knee walls in front so that headlights don't shine outward to the street. The exterior lighting will extenuate the arches so that it appears as an active space and that the focus is not on the cars parked within it. Backlighting will be used as well, like at the ramp at Grand Avenue and Victoria in St. Paul. Another great example is the Johnson Building in Edina near highways 494 and 169.
- h. Dave asks about the mosaic project in Uptown with its ramp exposed. That type of facility is not what is being built here.
- i. Neil ask about access points. The ramp entrances and exits will be split to prevent backups; the private entrance will be off the alley.
- j. There is a question regarding the layout of retail space. The raised decking used to simulate a dock will be next to the retail and will accommodate the grade change along 5<sup>th</sup>. They anticipate a restaurant and/or high-end retail to occupy the space, which will have lots of visibility along 5<sup>th</sup>.
- k. DJ applauds the parking area façade, saying one would not know that there is any difference between uses. The Board has the support of Councilmember Frey, but pushback from the Planning Commission is still likely.
- l. Karen emphasizes the need to support the project, as she asserts that the Commission doesn't have an idea about how this neighborhood actually works. The Commission think we will just always hop on a bike – they are not looking at practical approaches for us all to thrive. We need a hybrid approach that integrates auto and transit. The local businesses rely on outsiders and we need to navigate some sort of parking balance. By doing this project, we are taking out surface lot and adding to the urban fabric. We don't advocate for stand-alone ramps, but expansive development that incorporates parking is exactly what we have been looking for.
- m. Neil asks what is being done to make sure the trees stay alive. Rectangular tree grates will increase tree lifespan considerably, as they accommodate roots spreading outward. The plan is also to plant perennials in the same bed. They aim to keep the soil loose, increase viability, and retain air and nutrients in the soil. The Park Board has changed the rules – there must now be 500 cubic feet of structural soil or 120 square feet of open area for trees they own and maintain trees in the right of way. Curb detail – salt drift are used to prevent salt from washing in to the trees; there is still a little spray, but with slower rates of speed, less salt should reach the plants.
- n. The removal of the steps in front was driven by the recreation of the dock. There are stairs in between and internal connections; the external steps were removed so as to activate both corners of the project. If the steps were to stay, there would

be a significant grade change. The space is 10 feet wide, which is deep enough to accommodate two rows of tables. As the space is back from the sidewalk, there is no need to provide access through it.

- o. The Project will require formal HPC approval, then will move on to the Planning Commission, and then to the City Council. They anticipate construction to start in the spring or summer of 2017.

#### VI. Smack Shack – Restaurant Representative

- a. David asks for amendment to agenda to allow for Smack Shack presentation at this time.
- b. The project has been underway for about a year. It was believed to be acceptable, as it is not touching the building and is a solar-powered, free-standing pergola. It organically fits into the design of building, is anchored into the ground, has a sloped roof and no conduit – though they may have fans in the future. It is meant as a cover over the sidewalk seating; not for winter or cold weather, but just for rain. They want to be able to use the area when the inside is at full capacity.
- c. But problems have arisen. The HPC now says that Smack Shack needs to have an appropriations certificate, as the work is in the public realm. The more work they do, the more they find they still need to do. It was recommended to the restaurant that they talk to the Board to get some advice and keep them all in the loop.
- d. A restaurant representative will return to the next meeting on September 21 with an official presentation and their contractor.
- e. Plans for street reconstruction are listed on project page for city; they indicate where parking is proposed, which is likely opposite side of street. The restaurant has run into a lot of problems with construction and its impact on pedestrian and vehicular traffic
- f. Trees along the sidewalk are not permitted by the HPC. As a result, there is no tree shade, which deters customers from sitting outside at lunchtime. The pergola was meant as a solution to provide shade.

#### VII. Neighbor Comments

- a. Matt asks if the approach toward parking is changing with the increase in demand and construction? He then asks if the NLNA might consider a public ramp for the neighborhood. Maybe something multifunctional with green space on top? What is the committee's stance? The committee usually objects to stand-alone ramp. If a ramp is above grade within a building or aligned with a building facing street, or set back inside a block, the committee has approached those developments in a positive way. All about formulation and contextual nature; there is not a blanket opposition to parking ramps. The board acknowledges the need for parking and encourages a solution.
- b. DJ says that private parking ramp as sole use are not supported by planning policy and garner heavy pushback from the planning commission, which can, however, be overruled by the council. If there is a groundswell of political will, something like that may pass. However, the City no longer wants to be in the business of running ramps. It really is about context: precast concrete is not well received; neighbors object to being able to see cars and the problems associated with increased traffic. Francesco asks if the board can we alert developers that this very smart solution is amendable to the neighborhood.

- c. Greco redesigned residential portion of the building so that parking faces internally. Going forward, it is likely that there will be more buildings combining commercial space and parking. Parking remains a priority at board level. Too much space is reserved for mysterious buses and curb cuts. There is a subcommittee which intends to research and analyze parking situations, driven by developers.
- d. There was an objection to the parklets, because of the parking spaces they utilize. The Board has been fairly supportive of those; trying to get rid of them may be an uphill battle, especially in an area where there is not a lot of green space. The North Loop is one of three neighborhoods where the installations are being tested.
- e. There is still parking available, but it on the other side of the highway and not visible. Could there be a better connection to the area via the skyway? The Target Field ramp is not full, but people don't find it and don't know it is there. Why build more ramps when available parking exists? Maybe instead we have an awareness initiative that features wayfinding measures. Many people prefer to park on street because it is visible, cheap, and easier to locate their vehicle. The challenge as a neighborhood is to combat the suburban mindset in favor of an urban one.

VIII. Subcommittees:

- a. All official committees are closed.
- b. Motion made (DJ), seconded (Kelly) and approved to support the amended project variance for additional parking up to 450, for street trees and perennials gardens, and for rectangular tree base details.**

IX. Any additional concerns

*5<sup>th</sup> and Washington Project*

- a. It may be a bad idea to put the skyway connection on the third floor because of the accessibility issues it may present.
- b. Is there any action needed regarding the alley vacation? It is unlikely, as the action is in line with both the HPC and small area plan.
- c. Existing skyway was approved previously because not in full building. Does that set a precedent? The committee doesn't want to muddy waters with HPC, as it is in favor of the connection.
- d. Francesco Parisi specifies that his vote in favor of the proposal is based on the fact that there was a preexisting skyway connection and hence the project is in compliance with Sections 1.41 and 1.42 of the 2010 Warehouse Historic District Design Guidelines regarding skyways. He further specifies that his vote in favor of the project is based on the fact that this is not an in-fill building for the purposes of Section 3.27 of the 2010 Warehouse Historic District Design Guidelines.
- e. Motion made (DJ), seconded (Kelly), and approved to support the amended project variance for parking up to 450, for street trees and perennials gardens, and for rectangular tree base details.**

X. New Business

- a. United Properties has separated a portion of the Washington development from Greco. Now that the two are separate, Greco is doing the residential work and United is doing the office space.

- b. Members have met with United, who were not ready to present tonight to the committee. The new hire from Denver is not yet familiar with City process. They are proposing an independent office structure and office tower – two building structures, with 0 lot line between the buildings. The United property will be closer to Free House; Greco's will be closer to Bunker Creek.
- c. At the board meeting next week, United is going to present renderings and the overall project, which features park space above Bassett Creek. Max Musicant will also be presenting.

Adjourned at 7:03 P.M.