

May 3, 2006

Councilmember Debbie Montgomery
Councilmember Dave Thune
Councilmember Pat Harris
Councilmember Jay Benanav
Councilmember Lee Helgen
Councilmember Dan Bostrom
Councilmember Kathy Lantry

Dear Councilmembers:

University UNITED is appealing the proposed SuperTarget project at the City Council today. We believe an outright denial of the submitted plan is appropriate because the project is not in conformance with a number of City requirements. A denial would require Target to go back to the drawing board to revise their proposal to make it more transit-oriented. To be clear, we are not opposing the concept of a SuperTarget, we are only asking that it be designed to meet the needs of this community. If the Council is not of a mind to support our appeal this afternoon, an alternative is to request that the Council lay the issue over for several weeks to allow for exploration of ways to make the project better meet TOD criteria. (The "60 Day Rule" runs through June 8th.) We have recently been working with a prominent developer who has expressed interest in this project and is offering to make a specific proposal to Target and the City. At the very least we request that this opportunity be given some additional time.

There are basically three components of the proposed SuperTarget proposal:

- 1.) ***The actual 186,000 square foot building on the site of the former Midway Sheraton Hotel.*** Our ad-hoc community task force has accepted the concept of a single story building. However, we still would like to see some exploration of the possibility of parking either on the roof or under the store for the benefit of a future re-development on this or adjoining sites.

- 2.) ***The proposed 640 car parking lot in front of the new SuperTarget, on the site of the current Target store.*** The community would like to see new buildings constructed on a portion of this surface parking lot bringing more jobs, housing, and tax base. This can be accomplished by building a 400 car, three-story parking deck that could be accessible on three different levels given the sloping topography. This deck would have a footprint of approximately 29,000 square feet, which is approximately the same footprint as the proposed three new buildings in the surface parking lot. In effect, the deck is enabling a portion of the surface parking lot to be converted to new mixed-use buildings.

These buildings would have retail on the lower levels which would be very marketable because of proximity to Target. In turn, this attractive mixed-use development would enhance the destination appeal of the SuperTarget. Target would also gain by having hundreds of new residential units located within walking distance of their store, as well as a far more attractive pedestrian experience along Hamline Avenue.

The deck would cost approximately \$6 million, a large portion of which could be offset by the sale of the lots for the three new buildings. Our community group also requests that the city consider making an investment in this deck as the basis for ensuring that TOD development will occur. The investment would not necessarily have to be made immediately – perhaps an option could be secured that would give the City (or its assignee) the right to acquire and build this deck in the future.

In addition to building new mixed-use projects in the surface parking lot, we propose to create an attractive public space/ park that will be a real amenity to the surrounding redevelopment.

The current Target proposal also calls for a new east-west road located between their proposed new parking lot and the frontage out-lots, which we support. This road provides an attractive way to connect this block to the adjoining shopping centers to the west. We recommend that the City explore the possibility of acquiring and building this road to ensure it will be retained for the benefit of the public.

3.) *The University Avenue frontage lots which Target plans to sell off for later development.* Our community group strongly feels that development of the frontage lots must relate - as part of a master plan - to development on the entire Target block. Issues of parking, access and circulation, storm-water management, public space, etc., can best be addressed at a larger scale. The full possibilities for a quality development of the frontage lots require that it be connected to the Target project. Conversely, the new SuperTarget must be better connected to University Avenue and a future light rail line.

The attached schematic vision shows several mid-size retail store options at the corner of Hamline and University (currently Blockbuster Video and Hobbit Travel) which could accommodate a Best Buy, etc. These would add to the retail destination appeal of this project, and allow for a much strengthened pedestrian walkway along Hamline. Also, our schematic vision shows a new public road extending south from the current curb-cut on University Avenue. This would provide a great street for attractive mixed-use buildings, in the manner of a lifestyle center.

Our overall vision continues to allow Target acres of surface parking, but introduces a much more attractive and welcoming environment for their store. For the City, our vision clearly shows a more productive use of this valuable land generating substantially more jobs, housing units, and tax base. Any investment the City (and/or County) makes in this project will be quickly recouped with the expanded property tax base.

We acknowledge that our vision is very schematic. What we are asking for is the opportunity to work with a prominent real estate developer, CCHT, who has expressed a real interest in this opportunity. Within weeks we will have a very specific proposal to present to Target and the City that would make this project more consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the long term vision of this corridor.

While our emphasis is on the planning issues, there are also critical environmental concerns to consider. We believe that the adverse environmental impacts caused by this one auto-oriented big-box store that is so disconnected from the corridor will outweigh many of the gains the city hopes to achieve through other environmental initiatives. We have been hearing from city officials that we should accept a suburban style phase of development along the corridor as an interim step that can be undone later. We believe that this is irresponsible. To talk in terms of “disposable” buildings holding a place for later TOD is to fly in the face of true environmental stewardship. \$20 million dollars should not be invested in buildings with the expectation that they will end in the landfill within a few years. We are particularly pleased to be working with CCHT as they design their projects to have a life expectancy of 100 years.

I look forward to our public hearing this afternoon where we can amplify on some of these concerns. Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Brian McMahon