

**Lexington Park Design Advisory Group**  
**November 1, 2004**  
**Meeting Summary**

**Advisory Group Members Present:** Laverne Williams, Renee Tyler (Councilmember Montgomery's office), Tanya Bell, Judd Fenlon, Stu Alger, Randall Bradley, Gerald Christopher, David Stokes, Christine Zimmer Lonetti

**Staff Present:** Susan Kimberly, Al Carlson, Donna Drummond, Diane Nordquist, Martin Schieckel, (City-PED); Tom Beach (City-LIEP); Brian McMahon (University UNITED); Dave Gagne (Hamline Midway Coalition); Kristen Kidder (Thomas-Dale District 7 Planning Council); Linda Jungwirth (Commissioner Janice Rettman's office); Russ Stark (Midway TMO)

**Others Present:** Vic Rosenthal, Alyse Erman, Jane McClure, Pat Lamb, Chris Ochs, Pete Keely

Donna Drummond, city planner with the Dept. of Planning and Economic Development (PED), welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the advisory group. Everyone on the advisory group and in the audience introduced themselves.

Donna explained the status of the Aldi grocery store component of the proposed development. The City Council denied the appeals of the site plan and lot split that had been filed by University UNITED and the Lexington Hamline Community Council. Site preparations for construction of the Aldi store have begun. However, the architects for Aldi, at the request of Tom Beach, the City's site plan review coordinator, had developed an alternate concept for the University Ave. side of the building to add more interest to the facade. The original elevations and the proposed alternate facade, which used brick patterning instead of spandrel (opaque) glass windows, were both displayed. Donna asked for reactions to the brick patterning concept. The comments from the group were uniformly negative. No one thought the brick patterning was an improvement over what had been originally proposed. There were several suggestions made about alternative ideas to make the facade more interesting, including developing light wells or window display boxes that would be lit at night and could be used to display items such as store products, community artwork or other community-related displays. Comments were made about making sure the sidewalks were wide and easy to navigate for people carrying bags of groceries to the bus stop. Also, the proposed park/plaza on the east side will be an entry into the rest of the site, not just an entry into the Aldi store, and it should be designed with that in mind.

Donna then explained the proposed Wellington development concept and site plan for the rest of the site. It would contain a mix of ownership and rental housing, small scale retail, office space with Wilder Foundation as the major occupant, and a relocated Midway YMCA. A handout summarized the proposed uses and density of development. Donna indicated that the proposed density exceeded the density markers suggested in the adopted plan for the area (*University Ave. Transit-Oriented Development Framework: Snelling and Lexington Areas*). She also said she had prepared a handout summarizing the goals of this plan, and the design advisory group should refer to this as it considers the development of this site.

Tanya Bell of Wellington Management then gave an update on the status of development

activities. She indicated they had not found a lot of large office users in the market, and have focused their attention on working with the Midway YMCA and Wilder Foundation about possibly relocating to this site. They had met with both entities that day and both continued to be interested in the Lexington Park site as it would provide increased visibility, more space, and better access for both. She indicated that attracting large users such as this is critical for achieving density of development on the site. There is interest from retail uses, both neighborhood-scale retail and destination retail uses. However, the destination retail uses would require most of the site and preclude achieving a more mixed-use development.

Donna then explained that PED was hiring Maxfield Research to conduct a housing market study for both the Lexington and Dale intersections to determine the interest in ownership housing along University Ave. Wellington Management has indicated they have a good sense of the office and retail market for the site, but housing demand is more of an unknown. This information will help determine the viability of housing development on the site. The market study results should be available in early to mid-December. Tanya Bell also indicated they are working with Councilmember Montgomery on a survey of area residents to determine their interest in housing options on this site.

Pete Keely, an architect with ESG Architects, explained the site plan concept for the larger site and some of the site constraints they had to work with. The White Castle on the corner was taken as a given. White Castle is not interested in selling or moving. The grade change along Dunlap and on the south side of the site on the Keys property make it difficult to design access to the site. It would be difficult to reestablish a street grid because of these grade changes. Needed parking for the site is hidden in the center in a ramp, and access would be designed to have direct entries from both the University and Dunlap levels. There would also be underground parking for the proposed senior housing building. The site can be broken up into quadrants, and Pete explained in more detail what would be happening in each quadrant. The YMCA/housing building on the Lexington side would have a high first floor for the gym level, with an additional 3 stories of housing on top, for a total building height of about 70 ft. On the north side of this building would be neighborhood level retail. A rooftop terrace would provide green space on top of the building. The office/retail building that Wilder would occupy would be about 65 ft. high, and the senior housing is proposed at 4 stories, or about 50 ft. A public way would travel through the site from University over to Lexington, with significant landscaping to define it. This plan also assumes some shared parking with the White Castle, which has yet to be worked out.

The group then began discussing the specifics of the concept plan. Christine Zimmer Lonetti asked why parking wasn't below grade, and that outdoor play space should be designed for the Y, as many children attend the Midway YMCA.

David Stokes indicated that traffic would increase on Dunlap, but this was probably OK as there wasn't that much traffic along there now. Pete Keely indicated that the plan would significantly improve the streetscape along Dunlap.

Randall Bradley indicated that the mixed use concept is good, and that many cities around the country are experiencing similar development. He does not like the two single-story retail pads planned for the area behind White Castle, and would like to see a minimum of two stories there. In general, he feels the site density needs to be maximized as much as possible.

Kristen Kidder said that people in District 7 are very interested in ownership housing on the site. She is concerned about the visibility of the retail uses that would be across from the Aldi store, and how the development would relate to the backs of the single-family houses that are along Central Ave. on the south side of the site. She also wondered about the impact on tax-increment financing if there are two large non-profit (tax-exempt) entities on the site. Tanya Bell indicated that putting housing on top of the YMCA helps this, and that they are still in discussions with Wilder about the possibility of leasing instead of owning their space. Regarding the southern edge, Pete Keely indicated that the Super America station would be adjacent to the tallest building on the south side, and the lower scale parking ramp and senior housing would be adjacent to the single-family homes.

Stu Alger feels the mix of uses on the site is what many people in the community have wanted to see. There has been some sentiment expressed in support of the YMCA moving here. He would like to see more underground parking and work toward more of a street grid pattern for development of the site. Pete Keely reiterated the problems with the grade changes to the west and south, along with the presence of the alley, which make putting in through streets very difficult. Stu said there should be strong pedestrian ways through the site.

Renee Tyler indicated that Councilmember Montgomery doesn't like the idea of non-profits moving to the site, and would like to see new jobs, rather than relocated jobs, coming to the site. Councilmember Montgomery is also interested in seeing more housing, particularly ownership housing, on the site. Tanya Bell indicated that Wilder would be consolidating jobs from several locations outside Ward 1 as well as from the main Lafond location.

Russ Stark also expressed an interest in seeing a stronger east-west connection through the site, and the hope that parking could be shared among the various uses to reduce the amount of parking needed.

Pat Lamb would like to see a 3-D model of the area and development concept in order to better visualize the proposal. Others also indicated their interest in seeing a 3-D model. Pat expressed concern that White Castle would become a "babysitter" for the many kids that would be dropped off at the Y for children's programs. She also said that Lexington is hard to cross now as a pedestrian.

Gerald Christopher asked what the options are if Wilder decides not to relocate to the site. Tanya indicated that more housing would be an option, but that the strength of the housing market is an open question. The housing market study to be completed will help answer that. She also said if the Wilder and YMCA options don't work out, it is likely Wellington Management would proceed with a single-story retail development of the site. Gerald

Christopher would be opposed to this, and said if more housing is developed on the site, consideration should be given to moving the taller buildings closer to University and perhaps developing townhouses on the southern end to create a better transition to the lower-scale residential area along Central.

Brian McMahon indicated he likes the mix of uses and density proposed for the site. He said University UNITED is most concerned with the density and form of development, rather than the specific uses. He is concerned about the connectivity in this site plan, and would like to see better east-west and north-south connections through the site. He feels this would add valuable street frontage. He also noted that if the YMCA and Wilder move here, their current sites would be opened for taxable development. The proposed development would also be a positive investment in the area, possibly creating a lot of additional spin-off investment adjacent to it. He wants to see Midway retail concentrated between Snelling and Syndicate and would be opposed to adding major retail at the Lexington site.

Tanya Bell addressed next steps. She said the focus over the next couple of months would be on working with the YMCA, Wilder, and the City to determine the economic viability of this development, with less focus on the design aspects of the site. This might include working toward a memorandum of understanding with the City's HRA on the proposed development. She felt there probably wouldn't be much new site design information to present to the design advisory group at a December meeting. She is hoping they can come back to the group with more clarity from the City's policymakers on whether this is a viable development to work towards. Stu Alger asked if the group could meet in December anyway and perhaps hear informational presentations from groups that are interested in issues such as affordable housing, transit-oriented development, and living wage jobs. Donna indicated she would work with Stu on an agenda for this meeting. A tentative next meeting date was set for Monday, December 6, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m., location to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:45 p.m.

*Meeting summary prepared by Donna Drummond, PED staff.*