

MINUTES
URBAN DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Date: January 17, 2012

Location: Council Chambers – City Hall

Members present: Todd Garner, John Hearn, Marlon Mormann, Tim Rypma, Aaron Todd and Greg Wattier

Members absent: David Abler, Scott Allen, Brian Clark

Staff present: Rita Conner, Terrance Vorbrich and Glory Parks – OED; Mike Kelley – Jason Van Essen – Community Development; Jennifer Bohac – Traffic and Transportation

Guests: Rox Laird – Des Moines Register, Dan Manning - Lillis, O'Malley, Olson, Manning, Pose and Van Dyke, L.L.P., Brian Shiffler – Shiffler & Associates Architects, Gary Hammers – GSH Landscape Architects, Dr. Mike Eberle, Mike Draper, Dr. Isobel Osius, Joe Mowers, Walter Clark – area residents

A. Election of 2012 Urban Design Review Board Officers

Deferred to next regular meeting.

B. Call to Order: meeting called to order at 7:34 a.m.

C. Approval of Minutes from December 20, 2011

Motion to approve by Todd. Seconded by Hearn. Motion carried.

D. Review and Recommendation on Proposed Design and Financial Assistance for Waterfront Lodging, L.L.C. (2nd and Water Street).

Rita Conner gave a brief recap of the history of the project.

Ms. Conner explained that staff works to vet a project before it is ready to go before the UDRB or other boards and commissions. The first step is to be sure the project is in line with the plans, goals, visions, and regulations of the City, then to put together a package that the City Manager can support and can be taken in preliminary terms of agreement form to the City Council.

When a project goes to the City Council in the form of preliminary terms of agreement, this is the City's way of making it available to the public; to say here is a project that is being considered by the City Council and it is beginning the process through boards and commissions.

City staff originally believed that a commercial element would be a critical factor in the project. Staff came to understand from a programmatic standpoint that commercial space was not able to be incorporated into the first floor of either hotel. The alternative was to incorporate commercial space into the parking garage, but with the proposed relocation of the structure, this element has been removed.

The request of developer and staff is final approval of the proposed financial assistance and design. Preliminary terms of both were presented at the December 20, 2011 meeting of UDRB. Staff is asking if the board feels we have a product that satisfies the intent for urban density for the Riverfront, the esthetics that are desirable for that type of place, have we taken input and have we been responsive to that input. The most recent changes to the configuration of the buildings and site plan have not modified the financial assistance portion of the project.

Brian Shiffler of Shiffler and Associates Architects explained where the project is and what can be done to make the neighborhood groups more approving of the project. Mr. Shiffler described the site plan showing the placement of the buildings and colored elevations. The hotel facades are 95% brick and concrete panels with a small amount of EFIS near the top curved signage fascia. There are functioning balconies on the east side of the Hampton Inn. The proposal shows all automobile traffic entering and exiting on Market and Water Streets in order to keep it moving within the court and pedestrian travel around the site on sidewalks. Materials on all buildings will be the same just used in different proportions and on different parts of each building in order add individuality but to stay unified as an architectural complex.

After meetings with both adjacent Home Owners Associations the placement of the parking garage was a major objection. The owner has been flexible with the placement of the building and a revised site plan was presented with the parking garage moved 2nd Avenue and the extended stay hotel moved to Vine Street. The extended stay hotel will be flipped and the parking garage will get double flipped but because the site is almost a square the changes are mostly a civil engineering change. All mechanical engineering criteria of the buildings will stay the same. Continuing to work with staff to fine tune some details of the project.

The residents and some volunteers from the UDRB were asked their opinions of the parking structure. The worry is that headlights will shine into the Browncamp Lofts, the arches are architecturally simplistic, and the matching materials do not really match the architecture of the other buildings. The architects are happy to rework the façade of the parking garage to make it a more compatible piece of architecture. The design team would like to propose working with City staff to refine the elevations.

The real issue of headlights is the slanted entrance and exit ramp, the parking areas are flat parking plates. Parking ramps are simple buildings and only require 50% open to avoid mechanical ventilation, this enables closing of the north and south facades that face the residential buildings.

Dan Manning explained the site is scheduled to be purchased by the end of January. Several extensions have already been granted for the financing, purchase agreement and franchise agreement. Because of the time constraints the owner is requesting final approval with the exception of the parking structure component to get final approval of a subcommittee of the UDRB and that all approvals from P&Z and Council be consistent that those approvals be contingent on final approval of staff or a subcommittee of the UDRB.

Moving the extended stay hotel to be adjacent to the railroad tracks will add cost for snorkeling the room ventilation units up the side of the building, there will be weight added to the north wall, and triple glaze all the windows. Due to these added costs all three buildings will have thin brick making the brick 100% visually consistent.

The Court Avenue District guidelines are specific to a percent of masonry materials but do not reference a dimension of brick. A detailed analysis of the cost difference of full brick vs. thin brick has not been calculated.

Public input

Dr. Mike Eberle, 100 Water Street, Apt. 402 stated that the family, attorneys and architect involved have been very cooperative. He feels that looking at a housing unit is better than looking at parking ramp. Believes there is a disconnect in that Ms. Conner stated the hotel market will be baseball fans and Science Center of Iowa and the owners stated they feel the market is corporate with an occasional family reunion. This is an issue everyone should have known about.

The City should get neighbors involved in the process at an earlier point. This project will be put in with no involvement of the residents unlike other hotels in the downtown area that have restaurants where area residents participate. Believes underground parking would have made a lot cleaner looking project.

Mr. Eberle hopes that going forward the City Council, boards and commissions will set a standard that the downtown development and riverwalk areas are worthy of.

Mike Draper, 100 Water Street, Apt. 404 would like to see an exit on 2nd Avenue feels that exiting on Market and Water Streets is too confusing for visitors.

The owners stated to the residents that the hotel will be far beyond 58% capacity Monday through Thursday but have a lower occupancy on the weekends. Mr. Draper is tired of the money issues...no underground parking because of the money issues and triple glazed glass so there is no real brick. Money issues from the beginning may lead to other problems as the project goes forward. If this is the best we can get... I believe they are going to pare down slowly as the project goes on because of more surprise money issues from the lot.

The signage is irritating. We were told the sign would be white, but all the drawings show red signage. They said only a portion of the sign would be facing Browncamp. Would rather have the sign facing 2nd Avenue, no customer is ever going to see the sign on the river.

Mr. Draper asked the attorney and owner about their concern for the this hotel detracting from future hotels near the Event Center and their response was that they would like to build near the Event Center but that much of the land there is owned by the county and others. Mr. Draper feels it will be hard to get a hotel near the Event Center that is not built by the County and that leads to unfair competition.

The timeline of the project seems to have changed numerous times and now the end of January is a hard date. The current owner should be able move the closing date into February. Mr. Draper feels that it is extremely out of line to have the final approval conditional on a subcommittee final approval of the parking structure.

Joe Mowers, 100 Market Street, Apt. 501 echoed Dr. Eberle's comments regarding the willingness of the family, the attorneys, and the architects to meet with residents. The switch of the parking garage to SW 2nd Avenue is generally preferential by the residents who attended the meeting. It is not unanimous that flipping the parking structure is good for Browncamp but as generally preferential, this should not be seen as support of the project as a whole.

Dr. Isobel Osius, 118 Water Street, Apt. 422 emphasized two points: Dr. Eberle comments that the community groups should have brought in on the project sooner and that the Downtown Neighborhood Association would have had an opportunity to review the project before it got to the point of rushed mid day meetings that not all residents could attend. Would also like to see the Urban Design Review Board involved in some way earlier in the process as well.

Something seems wrong with planning when all the work on the plan is done on a functional basis; on an economic basis. The esthetics of the plan and the overall design issues are not considered until last minute and then shoved through really rapidly with a tremendous amount of pressure.

Dr. Osius does appreciate the willingness of the design team to make adjustment and if we're not going to have a park that they have done their best to accommodate the neighbors.

Dr. Eberle expressed agreement that a small retail space on 2nd Avenue does not make any sense but would like to see facilities within the hotels.

The hotel franchises have criteria for the use of every square foot of the buildings, including a specific ratio of tables and chairs to number of guests, leaving a small allowance for the outside patio and no kitchen space. All food for the hotels will be catered in.

The sign will be backlit channel letters the same as the Embassy Suites on the east side of the river.

Mike Draper stated the idea that it is private property they can do whatever they want does not make sense. The hotel owners more than once stated that city staff told them even if it passes zoning it still has to go before council and no one on the city council would vote for a hotel with surface parking; which is a lot different than saying we have to give them financial assistance or we have no design influence. Some things just don't add up on this project. This is how a franchise works, these are the rules and there is no variety in projects based on location. I would think any project of this size would have talked to the neighbors before they did. The plans now are almost the exact same plans presented to council in November.

Walter Clark, 100 Market Street, Apt. 312 urged the board on behalf of the residents not to have an immediate vote on the project based on all the reasons previously stated. The residents learned of the project exceedingly late and believe that more changes are needed.

Board questions and comments

- Are the architects sure they can solve the problem with the headlights shining into residents windows?
- Please explain the time constraints of the project.
- Will real or faux brick be used? Do the Court Avenue District guidelines require full brick?

- Does the Board have any control over the timeframe of when neighborhoods get involved?
- Feel that the Neighborhood Associations should be given notice of these types of projects the very moment they come before the UDRB, so they have the opportunity to have input in the project if they are interested.
- Seems to be a long time for a TIF and it puts this project at an advantage over other hotels.
- This is our Riverwalk, our river and it deserves a quality project using real brick.
- Would like to see commercial usage incorporated into the project.
- Could a kitchen be put into the hotel to add a restaurant to help incorporate the building into the area?
- The neighborhood groups involvement has changed things with the project more than previous UDRB input.
- Commercial along 2nd Avenue is a real challenge. Don't believe putting commercial on the east side will make it any safer and pedestrian friendly place. Would like to see 3rd street as the connection to Wells Fargo and HyVee Hall and very pedestrian friendly.
- What is the cost differential in full brick vs. thin brick?
- Precast concrete thin brick is a better product than some other applications that have been used in other areas of the city.
- Enormously respect the residents in the area. The conversations should have taken place sooner. Resident input has had tremendous impact. There has been a great willingness on the part of the design team in the last month to make large changes, mass changes, to listen and propose this big of a change at this stage of the planning.
- When there is city financing involved in a project it needs to have a higher level of design, a higher level of materiality.
- Vehicular access to the site should not come off Market Street but to come off of 2nd Avenue through the garage and into the middle of the site. Make for a more clean drive through. The dumpsters also may be able to be moved to 2nd Avenue similar to the Browncamp Lofts.
- Does the change in the arrangement of the buildings affect the financial assistance in the project?
- Believes there has been a tremendous amount of progress in the last month but there needs to be another wave of progress on the parking garage elevations, study of the site plan including traffic in and around the site and other changes that have been talked about.
- The UDRB only makes a recommendation to the City Council.
- Prefer the project go back to the HOA's to review a more developed site plan as well as the materials and elevations prior to coming back to UDRB.

A motion to approve level of financial assistance with the criteria that UDRB have a more thorough review of the design of the parking structure and the materials the entire development if that allows the development team to proceed with financing by Garner. Seconded by Hearn. Amended by Wattier – to approve the conceptual exterior design of the two hotels, not the garage building. To bring the garage and the materials of all buildings to the Board. Subject to HOA review. Motion passed 5-1.

E. Informational Review and Recommendation of Skywalk System Signage Design

Rita Conner introduced Jennifer Bohac, City Traffic Engineer, to walk through the proposed skywalk signage system.

Jennifer Bohac presented the signage upgrade project that has been developed with detailed analysis of the needs of all skywalk system patrons. The current system is 30 years old and is in need of structural repairs. A study done in 2010 by RDG at the request of the Convention and Visitors Bureau researched best practices. The proposed signage system was developed after review of the RDG study by a team including downtown business owners, the DCA, CVB, and staff members and will use the color system already in place.

The system consists of overhead directional signs, static directories (maps), vertical access signs (at street and Skywalk levels), street crossing signs, and informational signs. The schedule for the project is to complete design in January 2012, request bids for furnish and install in February 2012 with installation completed in June 2012. The cost will be approximately \$500,000.00 funded by the City with some private assistance through the Skywalk Association and the DCA. There will be approximately 140 overhead signs and over 50 directories and in skywalk.

In the beginning of the project interactive type information was considered through touchscreen directories, though after review the committee believes that a better use for the private funds may be a QR code that could be accessed using a smartphone or mobile application in the future. The CVA is pursuing 1 to 2 touchscreen directories through their own use near Capital Center.

Staff worked closely with the Iowa Department for the Blind to develop the ADA design goal. Installation of Braille signage near bridge corridors has been included to aid visually impaired users, and the signage design has high contrast colors for better visibility. The signage upgrade project will comply with all ADA regulations. The Static Directories will meet wheel chair accessibility requirements, sizes and positioning as well as height and depth to comply with ADA regulations for protruding objects.

The existing sign boxes will be used, upgrading the skins and lighting to LED. Additions to the new signage design include distance to specific items, icons for restaurants and entertainment and parking to give more information. The names on the overhead signs are those present in the skywalk agreement and public parking. Locations such as the Iowa Event Center, Court Avenue and downtown hotels will be signed more than two blocks away however other locations will be sign about one block away.

Static Directories will include an overall system map, a detailed map of your location and will include arrow indicators and directions to other locations outside the skywalk system. A map excerpt of a two to three block area will also define skywalk access, building primary and secondary access points, escalators, elevators, and bus stops.

Defining access to the skywalk system at the street level will be through vertical access signs projection mounted off the side of buildings or on a post near the street. The white S on red background signs will be 3" in width, not flat panel sign. Skywalk postings will say "Street Access" and hours of accessibility will be posted at the skywalk and street levels. There will now be bridge crossing signs that will name the street below the skywalk.

Staff is in the process the developing protocol for the schedule of updating the static signs. A business name change outside of the protocol will be the financial responsibility of the businesses. The changes to the directories and signage are fairly inexpensive. Through the Skywalk Association the businesses have agreed how the name of the building or business will read on the signage and the placement of skywalk access signage.

Board questions and comments

- Are there funds available to make changes as information changes?
- Who will be responsible for the cost to make changes to the signage as business names changes?
- The red signage is a somewhat disturbing, is there a different color that can be used?
- Excited that this is going to happen, that the funds are in place, that the signage will get cleaned up and entrances will be more identifiable.
- Do not use the skywalks, they are too confusing. This should help.
- Are there any energy improvements occurring within the signage boxes?
- This best thing is the sign that tells people the name of the street they are crossing over.
- Does the building owner have a say in the placement of the street level signage?
- Like the idea of mobile feature in the future.

F. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:28 a.m.