Excerpt from the
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
Minneapolis Community Planning & Economic Development (CPED)
Planning Division

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 13, 2007

TO: Steve Poor, Manager, Community Planning & Economic Development - Planning Division

FROM: Jason Wittenberg, Supervisor, Community Planning & Economic Development - Planning Division, Development Services

CC: Barbara Sporlein, Director, Community Planning & Economic Development Planning Division

SUBJECT: Planning Commission decisions of February 5, 2007

The following actions were taken by the Planning Commission on February 5, 2007. As you know, the Planning Commission's decisions on items other than rezonings, text amendments, vacations, 40 Acre studies and comprehensive plan amendments are final subject to a ten calendar day appeal period before permits can be issued:

Commissioners Present: President Motzenbecker, El-Hindi, Huynh, LaShomb, Nordyke, Norkus-Crampton, Schiff, and Tucker – 8

Not Present: Mains and Williams

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5. Art Lofts on Plymouth (BZZ-3334, Ward: 5), 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N (Becca Farrar).

A. Rezoning: Application by Todd Knutson, on behalf of Danbar Homes and Mississippi Pathway for a petition to rezone the properties located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N from the R1A district to the R4 district.

Action: The City Planning Commission recommended that the City Council adopt the findings and **approve** the rezoning petition to change the zoning classification of the property located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N from the R1A district to the R4 district.

B. Conditional Use Permit: Application by Todd Knutson, on behalf of Danbar Homes and Mississippi Pathway for a conditional use permit for 8 residential dwelling units in the R4 district located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N.

Action: The City Planning Commission adopted the findings and **approved** the application for a conditional use permit to allow for a 8-unit townhome development for property located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N.

C. Variance: Application by Todd Knutson, on behalf of Danbar Homes and Mississippi Pathway for a variance of the front yard setback requirement from 25.3 feet (subject to a front yard increase) to 10 feet along the east property line adjacent to Sheridan Ave N for the properties located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N.

Action: The City Planning Commission adopted the findings and **approved** the application for a variance of the front yard along the east property line adjacent to Sheridan Avenue North from 25.3 feet to 10 feet for the structure on the property located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Avenue North.

D. Variance: Application by Todd Knutson, on behalf of Danbar Homes and Mississippi Pathway for a variance of the front yard setback requirement from 15 feet to 10 feet along the south property line adjacent to Plymouth Ave N for the properties located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N.

Action: The City Planning Commission adopted the findings and **approved** the application for a variance of the front yard along the south property line adjacent to Plymouth Ave N from 15 feet to 10 feet for the structure on the property located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N.

E. Site Plan Review: Application by Todd Knutson, on behalf of Danbar Homes and Mississippi Pathway for a site plan review for 8 residential dwelling units in an L-shaped, 3-story structure located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N.

Action: The City Planning Commission adopted the findings and **approved** the site plan review application for property located at 2500, 2506 and 2510 Plymouth Ave N subject to the following conditions:

1. Planning Staff review and approval of the final site, elevation and landscaping plans.

2. All site improvements shall be completed by March 9, 2008, unless extended by the Zoning Administrator, or the permit may be revoked for non-compliance.

3. Modification of the north and west elevations to incorporate some level of transparency in the walls that enclose the 2nd floor terraces located above the ground level garages.
4. The proposed residential live/work units shall comply with the home occupation standards of Chapter 535 of the zoning code.

5. No box elders to be planted on site. Red maples should be planted instead.

6. Assure real stucco and not EIFS is utilized on the structure.

7. Convert the three on-site surface parking spaces to a landscaped area.

8. Work with staff to explore additional options with the elevations (windows) integrating context and character of patterns of the existing neighborhood.

Staff Farrar presented the staff report.

Commissioner Huynh: Can you address the concerns of the amount of impervious surface area currently? I understand that it does meet the zoning code requirement, but has there been discussions any further with the client in terms of decreasing the width of that driving aisle?

Staff Farrar: That's a good point and I probably should have touched on that as it relates to the alternative compliance section. As you flip to that portion of your staff report you'll see that they were required to have alternative compliance for a 20% window requirement. As you know, anytime a structure is facing an onsite parking lot, you have to meet the 20%. Because of the configuration of this structure, and as you saw with the layout, basically it's going to be garage doors. They're sort of all facing that L-shaped center of this site. Essentially, as you alluded to, yes they would meet their impervious surface requirements. There were discussions initially, way back, this project has been ongoing for about two years, and there were discussions originally with the applicant about possibly trying to introduce some kind of tree grates or something else within the middle. I think what typically arises out of that conversation is that it's always a pain for snow plowing. That was one measure that they didn't want to address or didn't feel like it was feasible to address. Going back to the alternative compliance measures, we had basically said within that section of the report that if you chose not to grant alternative compliance for the 20% for those three parking spaces that are surface, you could actually request a bigger yard on that side because basically that would eliminate…if you choose to deny the alternative compliance for that 20% it would allow you to make modifications to this yard presuming that you still had the 22 feet from maneuvering on the back side of these garages so perhaps more of an additional buffer in this area. There is potential, more or less, for additional landscaping along the interior side yard if you chose not to have visitor parking spaces. I think it's sort of a trade off. Again, they are over their parking requirement. They are providing 15 and are required to provide eight. They are meeting the impervious. It's like within that alternative compliance measure section we're basically saying "if this, then not this or you can do this", but we didn't specifically require a change in it because we felt that there were grounds for granting alternative compliance based on the configuration of this structure.

Commissioner Huynh: Thank you.

President Motzenbecker: I actually just saw, when I was looking at this, that there is some White Ash labeled, but I don't see them anywhere on here. Could you let me know where those might be?

Staff Farrar: I'll let the applicant. Some of these drawings are approximately two years old and I know he's trying to rehash the project. As the project has gone through the review process we've noticed some inconsistencies between legends and some other things on the plan. Maybe he can point those out for you.

President Motzenbecker opened the public hearing.

Todd Knutson [not on sign-in sheet]: I'm with Bruce Knutson Architects. I'm working with Dan Bartus of Dan-Bar Homes to complete this project that was started by another design company. I apologize, I didn't start the process but I am trying to pick up the pieces. If you go to the site plan, I'll address the trees there. We're noted four Box Elder trees and I don't know that I would ever recommend Box Elder trees. Those will either be the Ash or it was suggested that we use Red Maples.

President Motzenbecker: So the Ash trees are not on here at all?

Todd Knutson: That would be correct. We are providing the four trees on the west green space over there.

President Motzenbecker: There are five shown. There's one by the alley…

Todd Knutson: You're right. There is one more there. Sorry about that.

President Motzenbecker: I was just discussing before the meeting that it's interesting. I'd prefer that if you did a tree that it would be the Red Maple or other type, not the Ash. I'm a little concerned with the Green Ash Borer becoming rampant, that we're planning trees that may not make it.

Todd Knutson: Ok. That's fine; I have no problem with that.

President Motzenbecker: That'd be great.

Commissioner Norkus-Crampton: I like the idea. If we were going to remove these parking spaces and talk about the possibility of making that more pervious surfaces or green surfaces, do anticipate that being a problem?

Todd Knutson: I believe that Dan wanted to go for the extra parking on site so that we could possibly secure that area later for guest parking with the residents instead of having on-street parking. If it does become a concern I could approach him and we could work out doing more landscaping there; maybe lose one or two spots and have some retention.

Commissioner Norkus-Crampton: Since we were talking about not having trees in the parking lot or in the center there to allow for the snow plowing because that would be one thing… I was also just curious, and you might not be the right person to ask, but I was looking at the price of these units, I know a lot of artists but I don't really know any of them that would spend $300,000 on a living work space. Market research shows that $240-$280 would be viable for the people that you're trying to…

Todd Knutson: I do know that Dan has worked on a project. I don't know if you're familiar with it on 42nd and Dight and they've been tremendously successful at this price point for artists. They appreciate the two-story space on the main level to do their art work and it seems to be working out fine.

Commissioner Norkus-Crampton: Ok. Thank you.

Commissioner Huynh: I have an additional question regarding the impervious surface area. With

understanding that you did inherit the design from a different firm, have you explored different options of just relocating the curb cut to the east just adjacent to where the garages are so that you could eliminate some of that asphalt area, but still keep the stalls and just shift it over one lane?

Todd Knutson: Again, trying to pick up the project, I believe there was some stacking space either required or requested, before the garages and then the drive aisle width and then the parking widths… so it's a product of putting the pieces together to get this width.

Commissioner Huynh: Ok. So the additional asphalt area accommodates additional outdoor parking areas behind the garage doors then?

Todd Knutson: Yes, like a stacking space.

Commissioner Huynh: Ok. Thank you.

Jean Kidd (1310 Xerxes Ave N): I became aware of this development as I was driving home and saw the orange sticker affixed to a resident's fence that happens to live adjacent to this property, which speaks to what it's like to live in north Minneapolis that somebody could affix a sticker to your fence and just kind of plaster it because it wouldn't be convenient to stick in a fence on a nice little post. Uncle Bill's is right across the street from this. I've lived in the neighborhood 17 years and it's a challenge. It's a challenge to live in north Minneapolis. When I see a development like this, once again I see opportunity for developers to come in, make their money and leave the area and we're left to live with it. Why don't you ask the individual that has to live next door to this? Once again, multi-tenant buildings in north Minneapolis have been a disaster and continue to be a disaster. I ask you, would you guys want to live next to this building? We have challenges in north Minneapolis. I think people need to appreciate that we live there, we've lived there a long time and we're sticking in there and we're asking for help. Challenge this individual to make an attractive building. A 10 foot setback? Do we not have enough unattractive areas in north Minneapolis? We need trees, we need parks. I prefer the mowed lot right now to anything else going in there. Uncle Bill's has been an ongoing issue. They're nice gentlemen that own, or are running a current business, but it attracts. We have multi-unit buildings all over that neighborhood. I don't understand why we want to keep bringing more into the area. They're not managed well. People come in, they make their money, they look good for a few years and then we're left with it. That's why you decentralized the whole project area that we had so many people living in one area of one economic status. If you're going to bring in artists, that's fine. That's what they say in theory, but in reality, is that actually what's going to be going on there? There is no guarantee. I'm asking you from the community that has to live here and struggle every day to stay living there, to really check what's going on here. Is it just an opportunity to make some money and then walk away from it and say "I don't have to live next to it and the rest of you deal with it"? Just check it is all I'm saying. Be the guardians for the people that do live here. It was R1 for a reason. It's a residential area. I really enjoy Homewood Studios. We visit there often. It just sounds like it's being packaged a certain way. In reality, we're going to go look at a big parking lot in the back, a couple of trees and isn't it great with a 10 foot setback. That doesn't go very well with the rest of the neighborhood. We're challenged. It's been a really difficult corner and it's creeping. We have a lot of rental in north Minneapolis. I don't know if we need anymore. That's the problem is that rental doesn't…

President Motzenbecker: I don't believe this is rental.

Jean Kidd: We had the trailer homes that got built there, now we're living with the residue of that. Then they put a moratorium on that, but that's kind of what happens in north Minneapolis. It's an opportunistic kind of neighborhood where people want to come in and make a quick buck and I'm saying that we're struggling. Please consider us and be the guardians to make sure it's done well. Thank you.

Beverly Roberts (1022 Sheridan Ave N) [not on sign-in sheet]: We live two blocks down because it's a double block. We're the owners of Homewood Studios which is on the opposite corner. We are here to speak in favor of this project. We have lived in the community since 1970 and I share, with Jean, some of the concerns that we have faced in north Minneapolis over the years about the way that landlords and multi-unit buildings and residents who have not been careful about their homes and about their commitment to the community have made it a difficult thing. We, in the community, have been struggling with Uncle Bill's. It surprises me that all you have to say is "Uncle Bill's" and perhaps a panel like this knows what we're talking about, but we have been struggling with that issue for a very long time. We have had a series of community meetings and block club meetings looking at this proposed development and I would say that we are grateful that Dan Bartus has stuck with this project. We started in 1998, to look at how we could encourage developers to come into north Minneapolis to build projects that would house artists, that would be residential for artists, because we felt that artists were the ones that were going to help to stabilize the community and that were going to help rebuild the community and bring some vital life back into north Minneapolis. We see that as a real benefit. We believe that Homewood Studios is a benefit to the community. We get regular calls from artists who don't live in north Minneapolis who are interested to know if Homewood Studios provides live/work space, which we don't. We provide gallery space and studio space. So we know that there is interest and it surprises us that there's interest for artists that would actually move to north Minneapolis, do their art in our community and we think [tape ended] …for them to have live/work space. It would be lovely for us to have our own gallery on one corner and then on another corner a block down to have other gallery spaces so that people could come to the north side and actually see the work of living, breathing, working artists in a community. We believe that eight artists that own and live in the community would be an asset to us. We believe that this particular developer has stuck with this community long beyond reason, long beyond when he was struggling to get support in the community and we're grateful that he's willing to continue to try to work with the community and to try to build these units on this corner. I think that if this corner doesn't get this kind of development it will be another signal to the community that it's not worth investing in, it's not worth living in and particularly, it's not worth outside developers coming in and trying to make an effort. I think the signal will be sent and I think we're hoping that the signal will be that these are expensive units and I agree that artists look at this and say "wow, that's expensive", but they also see that they won't have to have a separate studio space. This will be paying for their home and paying for their studio space. We're hoping that this will be a real plus for the community. The block that this is going on…

President Motzenbecker: Could you summarize for us please, Ms. Roberts?

Beverly Roberts: The lot that this is going on has six vacant houses. The people that live in those blocks really look forward to something positive happening. Thank you.

President Motzenbecker closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Norkus-Crampton: I didn't notice any correspondence from the neighborhood group in the packet. I was a little surprised considering how long this process has been going on that we don't have anything. I'm assuming that the applicant's been working with the community group. Can you give me any information on that Ms. Farrar?

Staff Farrar: I'm fairly positive that originally the applicant was a combination of Mississippi Pathway and RRC. So originally the neighborhood was involved in the original proposal. These are CPED owned lands. Essentially what happened was that, for the purchase agreement, it went through as part of Mississippi Pathway LLC and then also to NRRC. Originally when I sat down, over two years ago, and looked at this proposal, I was sitting down with representatives from the neighborhood. The drawings themselves are very similar to those that I saw originally two years ago. I know that they're aware of the project. I know that a lot of people have come in and out of that specific organization. I don't know what the status of the neighborhood association is at this point. I know it's still active, but they chose not to respond and I don't know why.

Commissioner Norkus-Crampton: Ok. Thank you. Does the applicant have any further information on that? Ok. Thank you.

President Motzenbecker: Are you with the neighborhood group?

Corbin Connell (719 Queen Ave N): The group I represent is not affiliated with Mississippi Pathways. I'm a member of the Willard-Homewood Organization and specifically the Willard-Homewood Organization's Economic Development Committee. We do support this project.

Commissioner Tucker: I will move the rezoning (Huynh seconded).

President Motzenbecker: Moved and seconded. Any further discussion?

Commissioner Schiff: This was a competitive proposal through the city of Minneapolis from vacant land that CPED had owned and what we did was look for the best proposals and work very closely with the Northside Redevelopment Council to find a good fit. This is our second attempt at making homeownership work on this site. It is a condition of the land sale for this to be homeownership and that's how we know it can't be converted to rental. We also know from looking at some of these drawings that these are matching what the market is calling for, for a new home ownership, particularly artists, young singles and people who don't want a single family detached home. This is definitely the market that they're looking for. It's our hope that with Bill's Market right across the street that Uncle Bill's will get a few more eyes and ears and a few more people to help pick up the phone and call 911 and to help bring legitimate activity to the streets of north Minneapolis that we think is going to be successful in driving out the crime. I think this kind of market rate home ownership is exactly what we want in a distressed urban area. I totally understand lack of trust from a neighborhood that is putting up with what none of us have to put up with on the Planning Commission because we don't live there, but those daily conditions that are no stranger to the areas that I represent in Phillips. Certainly will lead to a lot of distress from the community as to whether or not they will do what they say they will do. I'm confident that the land agreement that we negotiated will make this a good fit with the community. I think the design needs an upgrade and we can discuss that when we get to the site plan review, but I think there are some things we can do differently on windows to make it more compatible with the neighborhood and some other design elements that will make this a better fit. I think it will be a good project.

President Motzenbecker: All those in favor of the rezoning? Opposed?

The motion carried 6-0; 1 abstention.

Commissioner Tucker: I'll move the conditional use permit for an eight unit townhome development (Huynh seconded).

President Motzenbecker: All those in favor? Opposed?

The motion carried 6-0; 1 abstention.

Commissioner Tucker: I will move variances C and D (Huynh seconded).

President Motzenbecker: All those in favor? Opposed?

The motion carried 6-0; 1 abstention.

Commissioner Tucker: I will move the site plan review to get it on the floor, but I am guessing there are some conditions to be added (LaShomb seconded).

Commissioner Norkus-Crampton: I'd like to add a condition for alternative compliance for the landscaping that we convert the three onsite parking spaces to green spaces on site. Would that be acceptable?

Commissioner Tucker: That's ok.

Commissioner Schiff: I have a question about the window choice on the east and south elevations. Do those windows open? Are they casement sliding windows? What can you tell us?

[voice from audience]

Commissioner Schiff: Ok. Not really the style that you find in the neighborhood would be my initial comment. I don't know if some of the architects want to suggest a style that would be fitting of this neighborhood, but it seems to be a quality issue as well as a style issue from my perspective.

Commissioner El-Hindi: This in regard to style, which we don't regulate here. I say a suggestion, to go back to the neighborhood or the character of the neighborhood, it would be looking at the proportions of the windows and rather than ganging them up, they would be maybe more residential in nature where they would be separate units, but this is just a recommendation as far as looking into the proportions of those windows.

Commissioner Huynh: I concur with Commissioner El-Hindi. I think that perhaps the applicant can look at exploring context and character with the existing neighborhood and try to integrate a lot of the design elements as part of…incorporate some of those elements into the current design. I understand that you're inheriting this project and perhaps you can bring a lot of those elements forth with a lot of the design options for the windows that Commissioner Schiff had suggested. Perhaps that can be a condition, exploring additional options with the elevations integrating context and character of patterns of the existing neighborhood.

President Motzenbecker: Is that something that you're willing to let them work with staff on?

Commissioner Huynh: Yes, definitely.

President Motzenbecker: I just want to clarify the conditions that we're… I had placed a couple earlier that the Box Elders be removed and Red Maples be used and then just to ensure the fact that there was real stucco and not EIFS.

Commissioner Tucker: So that I understand the conditions, we're changing three parking spaces into green space; applicant will work with staff and neighborhood to adjust windows to be more in keep with neighborhood character…

President Motzenbecker: Yes, explore the context and character of the neighborhood and incorporate those elements.

Commissioner Tucker: Third, substitute Red Maples for the Box Elders listed and assure that real stucco, not EIFS, be used on exterior.

President Motzenbecker: Correct. All those in favor? Opposed?

The motion carried 6-0; 1 abstention.