



MEETING SUMMARY

Linden Hills Small Area Plan Steering Committee #3.

February 21, 2013, 6:30 PM St. John's Episcopal Church Community Room

Attendees: Jean Johnson, Rick Anderson, Ann Voda, Ken Stone, Eric Hanson, Jim Scott, Aaron Tag, Larry Lavercombe, Sara Jaehne, Pat Smith, Gretchen Johns, Grant Hawthorn, Constance Pepin, Terry Schlach, Linea Palmisano, Dan Cornejo, Chuck Liddy, Bob Kost, Kit Richardson, Mary Bujold, Colleen Carey

Discussions:

1. Participants introduced themselves, including Developer Advisory Panel members' Kit Richardson of Schafer-Richardson Development, real estate developer and architect; Mary Bujold of Maxfield Research, real estate market analyst; Colleen Carey of the Cornerstone Group, real estate developer.

Information concerning panelists' companies and past work can be found at their web sites:

Kit: <http://www.sr-re.com/>

Mary: <http://www.maxfieldresearch.com/>

Colleen: <http://www.tcgmn.com/>

2. A brief recap of the February 28th neighborhood work shop was provided to the panelists.

Additionally, committee members reported that they have not heard any direct feedback on the event however, one member mentioned that he still comes upon neighbors who are unaware that the Small Area Planning process is taking place.

3. Panel discussion:

Redevelopment challenges in Linden Hills

- A primary issue for many city neighborhoods is how to keep people in the neighborhood as they age. Also many people don't want higher density, even though density is probably not the issue. One of the main issues is how to build new development and keep a sense of place and complement community character. This is a common theme throughout the metro area.
- Its important to understand there are many facets and variables surrounding the issue of reinvestment and redevelopment and one shouldn't oversimplify the matter.
- There is tension between wanting to maintain the neighborhood's character and urban fabric and identifying where are the opportunities for growth and change. Every neighborhood experiences changes, so proactively identifying the desired types and locations of change is an important part of setting the table or smoothing the way for the neighborhood's evolution.
- Linden Hills, like other neighborhoods is changing, whether people want it or not – aging, income fluctuations, retail fashions, etc. are inevitable. Looking at other areas in Minneapolis and Saint Paul similar to Linden Hills can provide helpful insight. The Macalester-Groveland area for example is facing the same pressures for redevelopment and they're going through a similar process of talking to developers and engaging citizens in visioning their future. Many good examples of sensitive residential, mixed use infill and residential to commercial conversions can be found along Grand Avenue.

- Development goes more smoothly with less friction when there is a "guide plan". Especially if the plan isn't overly prescriptive. Most neighbors understand and feel that scale and massing, not density, are the biggest issues when it comes to new development. Eventually density does get linked to scale and massing as the financial aspects of a project get worked out. It's best if everyone can be in the conversation to help shape, understand and communicate the process of how a project unfolds.
- Developer's find Linden Hills to be an attractive area due to its residents' high disposable incomes, variety of housing, unique shops and stable/rising land values.
- City policy often drives the pursuit of higher density development (e.g. 46th and France) along commercial and high frequency transit corridors. The transitions between what's placed along these streets and what's behind them is of critical importance to neighborhood residents.

Aspects of the Small Area Plan

- It starts with "land use." What are the uses people want, where do they want them to be located and then that helps determine land values.
- It's best if a variety of building and density types such as side-by-side townhomes, not only apartments and condos are considered. This will help with transitions between new and old, smaller and larger.
- Identifying preferred land uses, sites for change and kind of change people want is the best way to get everyone (developers, the city and neighbors) on the same page working together.
- Need to identify where the most real redevelopment opportunities are located and do some testing/designing of those areas albeit understanding/recognizing that someone owns the land being identified in the plan.
- Preparing draft development pro formas helps people understand the financial aspects of redevelopment. You need to do the math, and work out development costs, what you can market the completed housing units or commercial space for, and work back to see what the (residual) land costs can be. If a land owner is insistent on a certain price, you work the numbers in the other direction, and sometimes come up with "well, now we need to do a 5-story building. If that's not possible, then people will work out another option that could be acceptable to all parties.
- It's best not to be too specific about design details in the plan, approach reinvestment more in the form of guidelines and ranges, focus on land uses not strict or firm limits of feet and inches, materials and colors.
- The SAP should spell out the "trade-offs" regarding possible increases in height or density.
- What about parking in the streetcar corridor alley? What about new townhouses abutting the alley? The alley could be re-purposed as a "woonerf" (space shared by vehicles, people, furnishings, trees etc.) like those in European cities.
- Perhaps rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of houses along the 44th Avenue corridor, to get a richer mix of uses in buildings that are already at a neighborhood scale.
- Grand Avenue which has a zoning (B2C) which permits commercial use on the property only if the commercial use is in a rehabbed building, not if the development involves new construction.
- What is central is historic character. There are some designated buildings. You could consider an historic district. There is also a "conservation district."
- You have some interesting older buildings, but be careful with historic district designation because it can be so restrictive (e.g. window replacement with energy-efficient windows). You need to have flexibility. (much discussion about historic designation, historic tax credits, the difference between the National Register of Historic Places and local historic preservation district restrictions, etc.)

- Continue to focus on you're the core commercial areas for new development. Use older buildings as places for the interesting one-of-a-kind shop (e.g. Jane's Yarn Shop). The new buildings are going to attract chain stores because they are the ones who can pay the new lease rates. Adapt your older buildings for new and different uses which is the reason people come to Linden Hills. You are likely to see specialty shops in older buildings. Getting these kinds of shops is much more difficult if you tear down your older buildings.
- Blend the old and the new, the local and the national. Grand Avenue is a corridor that does this well, and has done this over a number of years.
- Recognize that ground floor retail in new buildings can be a struggle so don't require it in every new building.
- Current commercial fabric is discontinuous (only two blocks long on Sheridan). Making it more continuous along 44th, from 43rd and Upton all the way to 44th and France could strengthen the neighborhoods walkability and its businesses at the same time.
- Think about incremental infill, not a few big or not so big projects. You need lots of smaller projects, some new and some in older buildings.

Small Area Plan Implementation

- Don't wait for a developer to surprise you. Identify large or other parcels that look like good candidates for redevelopment, and make your plan, and then go out and seek developers.
- Seek out a developer who shares your vision. There are always big risks, but what works best is a partnership built on trust and an open process of working out the details, and choosing what trade-offs you willing to make.
- The collaborative redevelopment planning process of the Pillsbury "A" Mill was described as an expel where the developer worked for a year with a subcommittee of the Marcy Holms neighborhood board to ensure the project met everyone's needs. This came on the heels of completing the neighborhood's Small Area Plan.
- Be creative, be flexible, and don't be restrictive. The message you want to give is that you know what you want and you want to work with a developer to make things better, more customized to Linden Hills, not just "review and pass judgment on his plans."
- Every developer is different, some specialize in a specific type, size or scale of project. So once the plan can identify the neighborhood's needs need/desires, and then go out and target specific developers who do that kind of development in communities and in situations like Linden Hills. It's a matter of seeking out developers that are the best fit for the neighborhood and inviting in to consider projects, rather than waiting to things to happen and then have to react (although that may still occasionally happen).

4. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:15 PM