

Capitol Neighborhoods Inc
Downtown Plan Committee Meeting

April 28, 2008

Barriques Coffee House, 127 W. Washington Ave.

In Attendance: Jonathan Cooper, Elliot, Bob Holloway, Ledell Zellers, Fred Mohs, Davy Meyer, Melissa Berger

Minutes:

We started by discussing the format the group has taken so far, initially discussing a few big-picture items and becoming familiar with the materials, and then diving into the Land Use section of the Downtown Advisory Report (DAR) and examining it piece by piece.

Melissa handed out summaries of recent meetings, the City's Downtown Plan Kick-Off (4/9/08) and CNI's DT Plan Program (4/24/08).

We touched upon the city's re-released timeline and how April-May the process is focusing on the "Big Picture" of where we've been and where we're going. The city has suggested that groups contributing follow the same format.

Bob points out the benefits of following the city's format, particularly putting our proposals in line with the city's proposals—both those from the original DAR and the new ideas coming out of the public engagements.

Ledell points out that in recent highlights of the public meetings, historic preservation is not mentioned as one of the chief issues of concern. She maintains that we must do our part to bring this issue to the forefront, that architecture is a public art and the manner in which old and new is blended is critical as a public topic. The group also discussed that preserving individual historic structures is one factor, but creating historic districts to preserve neighborhood character is equally important.

Melissa raises the question of looking at the broader picture. In Thursday's presentation it was asked: what are some examples of what enjoy, what we'd like to keep? What are some examples of mistakes? What specifically do we want to improve? (detailed in the meeting's agenda)

Fred points to other communities that have redeveloped successfully, highlighting Lincoln Park in Chicago, areas of DC and Boston. These are areas that preserved interesting buildings and heritage, but also developed in ways that have led to thriving neighborhoods.

The continued decline in our residential neighborhoods is cited. Preserving older housing stock is important, the continuation and improvement of Small-Cap TIF is critical, and we must reduce crime and fear in our neighborhoods and create a confidence not currently there.

It is said that our neighborhoods must highlight their best features. That means yards should have green space, not just parking. Existing architectural attributes should be enhanced.

Jonathan says that a good example of development is Block 51. Green space was preserved along with some adequate parking solutions.

Bob points out that there are vacant areas behind buildings on the north side of W. Washington that could be better used and enhanced.

Ledell points out that Community Car could help us transform some parking space to green space.

Question posed by Fred: What do people want to have to live downtown?

- place to park off-street
- yard, garden space
- schools
- safety
- realistic prices that reflect owner occupied use, not rental use
- confidence in surrounding housing stock, investment

Williamson / Marquette went through a transition and came out a success

We may have other allies:

- Vilas neighborhood is in a similar situation
- UW offering grants for staff to live downtown?
- Meritor Hospital has stake in surrounding neighborhood, active in n'hood
- Meritor Retirement may also be useful ally in Bassett

Since there is strong sentiment that a flourishing downtown needs to deal seriously with the issue of our transitioning neighborhoods, should a Market Analysis be done to find out what people want and need to live downtown?

- Who has moved out and why? (noise?)
- Quality Rentals are necessary
- Retaining some Student Rentals
- Rent-to-own options to encourage students to stay in the area after Graduating? Other incentives?
- Quality Jobs will continue to be a large factor in people moving DT

Re-group, three broad themes emerging seem to be the following:

- Historic Preservations, Historic Districting, Adaptive Re-Use
- Livable Neighborhoods
- Job Creation

Proposed good examples of livable neighborhoods are

Block 51,
W. Main/Doty Street area near Bedford Court and 4th Ward Lofts ,
500 Block of Wisconsin Ave,
Sherman Avenue pocket bordered by Sherman, Baldwin, & Gorham
State Street

In wrapping up, there were three words thrown out for definitions, taken from the Q&A session of recent CNI Program:

Sustainability
Green Building
Lake Access

Sustainability temporarily skipped.

Group agreed that while Green Building is a noble cause, there are many definitions already out there. Consensus today seemed to be that it is not a high priority downtown compared to other issues. It should be noted that green building has not come up as a concern so far in these committee meetings, while it has come up at the city meetings. The embodied energy of current buildings is briefly discussed.

Lake Access drew discussion. As a starting point, the group created the following list. Lake access is: 1) public access, 2) for all citizenry, 3) free of charge, 4) ideally preserving green space boundaries, 5) which is safe and 6) which is quality access.

Future discussion pending on #2 and #6. It is also suggested that rather than defining lake access in general, we could concentrate on lake access specifically at the two parks included in the boundaries of the DT Plan: James Madison and Law Parks. Desirable lake access and potential hindrances to lake access may be different in each case.

Ran out of time... Meeting adjourned!