

CPC Minutes of November 16, 2010

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, November 16, 2010 at 4:45 p.m. in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 4th Floor Auditorium, 400 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:47 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Steve Durkee, Vice Chairman Harrison Bilodeau, Bryan Principe, Andrew Cortes, Meredyth Church. Mr. Samuel Limiadi arrived at 4:52 p.m..

Staff Present: Robert Azar and Choyon Manjrekar.

Approval of meeting minutes from October 19, 2010: Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Mr. Principe to approve the minutes. All voted in favor.

Mr. John Garrahy, representing the applicant for Agenda Item 2, Case 10-030MI, a minor subdivision on 1144 Chalkstone Avenue was heard out of order and requested a continuance till the Commission's January meeting. Mr. Bilodeau made a motion seconded by Mr. Principe to continue minor subdivision case no. 10-030MI, 1144 Chalkstone Avenue till the Commission's January meeting. All voted in favor.

CITY COUNCIL REFERRAL

Abandonment of a portion of Briggs Street

Mr. Azar introduced the proposal to abandon a portion of Briggs Street between Eddy Street and I-95 right of way. The street runs adjacent to a newly constructed soccer field. Mr. John Kelly, the applicant representing Meeting Street said the abandonment was being requested out of an abundance of caution as it was unclear if it was in fact a right of way. He said there were no issues with abutting properties and utilities as Meeting Street owned property on both sides of the proposed abandoned area. Mr. Azar said the applicant would be required to perform an administrative subdivision to merge the abandoned land. Mr. Kelly agreed. Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Mr. Principe to make a positive recommendation to the City Council to abandon the requested portion of the Street.

Providence Tomorrow

Downtown Plan - Presentation of revised version of the Downtown Plan by DPD staff.

Mr. Azar presented an updated draft of the plan with changes made in response to public comment by the Providence Foundation and other commenters in addition to minor changes. Comments received from the Jewelry District Association and the West Broadway Neighborhood Association (WBNA) would be incorporated into the December version, which would be acted upon. Mr. David Kolsky said that the plan needed to address pedestrian connections between the East Side of the City and Downtown. Mr. Durkee said it was important to maintain connections and made comments on the Core Connector study, unrelated to the plan. Mr. Peter McClure said view corridors could be improved without going through buildings by coordinating and connecting new development. He asked about the status of the goals and policies table. Mr. Azar said that the table was included in the plan. Mr. McClure said items in the table should be prioritized in order of importance with redundancies removed. He said development on I-195 relocation parcels could take years and interim uses should include items like community gardens, which would beautify the area and be easy to develop when ready. Mr. Azar said the plan discouraged parking lots. Mr. Principe said it was his knowledge that development would be governed by a City-State Commission and asked about the City's role.

Mr. Azar said all development would conform to the City's zoning. Zoning for the parcels was being developed. Parking is listed as an interim use but measures to attract diverse uses would be taken.

Mr. Bilodeau asked if it would be possible to have an overlay district that facilitated pedestrian movement. Mr. Azar said a connection between downtown and neighborhoods is essential and would be addressed. Ms. Kari Lang of the WBNA said that the plan did not reflect the Federal Hill/West End/Reservoir (WE/FH/R) plan approved by the Commission in February. The plan called for development along the Franklin Street Corridor to have a minimum of two and maximum of four stories, with an extra two stories and a 75 foot height limit granted for providing amenities. The change was not reflected in the edited FH/WE/R plan and the Downtown Plan. Mr. Azar said the changes would be made. She said the page in the plan detailing development along the West Franklin Street Corridor consisted of controversial projects, unrepresentative of what the community wanted to see. Mr. Azar said the page intended to illustrate land use challenges, not potential development. Mr. Kolsky said that it was important to have stronger bonding requirements for redevelopment of empty parcels.

Mr. Arthur Salisbury asked how interim uses proposed by Brown University in the Jewelry District would be approved. Mr. Azar said they would be reviewed through updating the University's Institutional Master Plan. Mr. Bilodeau asked about guidelines for interim uses. Mr. Azar said they were temporary uses that took place on land prior to a building being built. A discussion on temporary uses ensued.

The item was continued to the December meeting for action.

Institutional Master Plan (IMP)

Presentation of The Miriam Hospital's (TMH) Institutional Master Plan

Mr. John Longo reintroduced the plan first presented at the October meeting. Public comment was postponed due to a Summit neighborhood event. He said there were no significant changes since the 2005 IMP and some projects were scaled back. The plan had been previously presented to neighborhood residents at meetings.

Mr. George Schietinger distributed a redevelopment plan for North Main Street and a prepared comment to the commission that he read into the record. He requested that Miriam Hospital construct a parking structure, eliminate some surface parking for housing and make an effort to redevelop the Sears site.

Mr. Robert Andrews said he opposed building a parking structure on the Third Street "arena site." He said a structure would make it difficult for patients and doctors to access the hospital. Third street is already congested and difficult to navigate in snow. As a volunteer for the Community Relations Committee for TMH, no complaints about parking were received at the neighborhood meeting. He said the traffic study conducted by an independent firm showed that parking was adequate. A parking garage would make North Main Street less user friendly and concentrate parking in one spot. He said the committee was involved with beautifying the site.

A discussion ensued about the possibility of structured parking.

Mr. Azar noted that a parking structure was not being proposed in the IMP. As such, the matter was not up for review. He said the surface lots are not part of the institutional overlay and can continue indefinitely as nonconforming uses as permitted by State Law. He said the Commission does not have the authority to require TMH to build a parking structure.

Mr. Patrick McGill, a third street resident said he opposed a parking structure as it would affect neighboring property values and obstruct the views of residents.

Mr. Grant Dulgarian said that the IMP was not in conformance with the City's Comprehensive Plan, which lists goals of improving mass transit and reducing air pollution. The IMP focused on automobiles and not on parking. He said the comprehensive plan calls for strategies to reduce emissions, reduce paved areas, mitigate

the heat island effect, trip reduction, maximizing energy conservation, providing incentives for alternative modes of transport and reduction of car trips for Major Land Development Projects (MLDP). Mr. Azar said that IMPs are not MLDPs. Mr. Dulgarian asked for a clarification of the definition of an MLDP. Mr. Azar quoted the definition from the Zoning Ordinance and said projects in Institutional Zones were not evaluated as MLDPs. Mr. Azar read Section 421.1 (B) of the Zoning Ordinance, which states that development in Institutional Floating Zones were not considered MLDPs. He said that TMH's parking lots were existing nonconforming conditions and TMH was under no obligation to change the lots.

A discussion ensued on the plan.

Mr. Dulgarian said the Comprehensive Plan required institutions to direct traffic and parking toward major arterial streets. TMH should park closer to North Main Street. Mr. Cortes referred to the independent traffic study submitted by TMH and noted that the report stated that there was no forecasted traffic increase. Mr. Dulgarian said the Comprehensive Plan discouraged parking lots in residential neighborhoods and creation of new lots. Mr. Durkee said TMH's lots were existing and nonconforming. Mr. Dulgarian said the City of Providence had received a grant to increase transit usage on major arterials and said TMH should become involved in improving transit on North Main Street. He suggested that TMH should charge for parking at the hospital. He said it was his opinion that parking on the Sears lot was illegal.

Mr. Limiadi asked if the Master Plan addressed transit and employee parking. Mr. Durkee said that Rhode Island Hospital was active in increasing transit users and this policy would be integrated into TMH in the future. Mr. Cortes said he appreciated the community outreach from TMH and said he felt the issues raised at the meeting were not relevant to the IMP. Mr. Principe said that there might be a desire for structured parking and it could be appropriate to encourage the hospital to build structured parking. Mr. John Longo said that TMH had explored parking alternatives at the Summit Avenue Campus. He said that the patient and visitor lots opposite the main building could not be moved. Moving the doctor and senior employee parking lot would only move a handful of people off the site and prove costly. He said it was unforeseeable for the spaces to be returned to housing in the near future. He said the Sears lot was given to the hospital as part of a land swap for buildings on North Main Street. The hospital could not fund construction of a structure on the lot, but was open to proposals. A discussion on parking ensued.

Mr. Arthur Sampson, CEO of TMH said the hospital could not be solely responsible for the redevelopment of North Main Street. TMH has made efforts to contact the community and would work toward improving the neighborhood. Mr. Durkee said he encouraged TMH to think about redeveloping the lot on Seventh Street as a long term goal. He commended TMH on the improved community response from previous IMP hearings. Ms. Church also commended TMH on the plan and said the parking situation should be monitored for the future. Mr. Bilodeau commended the hospital and said all sides need to be looked at in the future. Mr. Durkee said progress on landscaping should continue.

Mr. Cortes made a motion to approve the plan as presented. Mr. Limiadi seconded with the suggestion that TMH continue to look at ways to encourage transit use by staff and patrons, explore parking solutions around the seventh street lot and continue to work on improving landscaping. Mr. Cortes accepted the amendment. All voted in favor.

LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Case No. 10-036MA – 454-466 Pine Street, 56 Somerset Street and 415 Friendship Street – Amos House (Master Plan Approval)

David Presbrey presented the existing conditions on site and the proposed plan, which would involve demolishing the existing building on Friendship Street to provide a landscaped parking lot. The newly proposed building would be larger than the existing one and reoriented toward Pine Street, providing a larger

kitchen and dining hall, social services office and educational space. He provided an overview of the floor plans and said building elevations were designed to be sensitive to neighborhood character.

Mr. Durkee inquired about the canopy above the length of the east elevation. Mr. Presbrey said it was intended to provide shelter. Mr. Durkee commented that the elevation on the eastern edge seemed steep. Mr. Presbrey said it was about a 4.5 foot increase on the east elevation, but the topography was generally consistent around the site. Mr. Durkee also commented on the difference between the rooflines and materials used on the eastern and northerly façades. He said the character and magnitude of the design were inconsistent with the neighborhood. Mr. Durkee said that the applicant could meet with the DPD and Commission to determine a design that better respected the scale and aesthetic of the neighborhood. A discussion on building design ensued.

Mr. Bilodeau said he had observed a trend of buildings providing social services looking “blocky” and said the level of transparency proposed by the applicant was commendable. Mr. Limiadi said he felt the gabled roof was out of character with the neighborhood. A discussion of building design in the vicinity ensued.

Mr. Cortes said it was his opinion that a flat roof with a cornice and fascia would be more suitable than the gabled roof which would unnecessarily add height to the structure. He said he would prefer less transparency along the dining room facade. Mr. Presbrey said that the transparency would be similar to that introduced into various City libraries. Mr. Durkee said the design would require more thought. Mr. Principe said that the nature of services provided was encouraging. He said the building design resembled a college dormitory dining hall. Ms. Eileen Hayes said she felt that the transparency would help foster a sense of community amongst patrons and make the space seem more open. A discussion ensued about project funding and building design. Ms. Church asked about how funds would be raised for the building. Ms. Hayes listed funding sources. Mr. Bilodeau urged the applicant to consider installing a flat roof instead of a gabled one. Mr. Durkee said the applicant should schedule an interim meeting with the DPD to refine the building design in addition to other preliminary plan requirements.

Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Mr. Principe to approve the master plan with the conditions that the applicant meet with the DPD to determine a refined building design, consult with the City Forester to determine means of incorporating more landscaping and pervious surface on site and receive approval from the Department of Public Works for any new curb cuts. The motion also included a positive recommendation to the Zoning Board to grant the applicant relief for front and rear yard setbacks, building height and parking. All voted in favor.

Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Mr. Principe to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Manjrekar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Choyon Manjrekar,
Recording Secretary.