MEETING MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, March 12, 2014
7:00 P.M.
Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Council Chambers

Members Present: Scott Peters (Chair), Jim Ford, Lenny Asaro, Colby Lewis, Carol Goddard

Members Absent: Terri Dubin, Seth Freeman, Richard Shure, Kwesi Steele,

Associate Members Present: David Galloway, Stuart Opdycke,

Associate Members Absent: none

Staff Present: Damir Latinovic, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Mark Muenzer, Director of Community Development
Mario Treto, Assistant City Attorney

Others present: Judy Fiske, First Ward Alderman

Presiding Member: Scott Peters, Chairman

1. CALL TO ORDER / DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chairman Peters called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M and explained the general meeting procedure, schedule, agenda items, time limits on public testimony and opportunities for cross examination of witnesses. Chairman Peters concluded the opening statement by saying that the Plan Commission forwards a recommendation to the City Council which makes the final determination on any matters discussed by the Plan Commission.

Chairman Peters introduced Carol Goddard, the new member of the Plan Commission.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: February 26, 2014

Upon a question by Chairman Peters for any corrections, Commissioner Ford stated he is not sure why Scott Bernstein, president of the Center for Neighborhood Technology was listed under “others present”. Additionally, Commissioner Ford noted two minor corrections on page 10 of the draft minutes.

Commissioner Opdycke thanked staff for the comprehensive minutes but noted such detailed minutes may not be necessary because the City posts the video of the meeting on its website. Commissioner Ford noted that he prefers the detailed summary of the minutes. Commissioner Asaro stated that based on his interaction
with some of the residents, people are more likely to watch the meeting than read the minutes.

Chairman Peters suggested to postpone the discussion on how the minutes should be prepared for the end of the meeting.

Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Commissioner Ford seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved by voice call 4-0 with Commissioner Goddard abstained.

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

1515 Chicago Avenue

Tom Blunk of Janko Group, LLC/Quadrangle, LLC, developer of the proposed project, has applied for a Special Use for a Planned Development in the D4 Downtown Transition District (Zoning Code Section 6-11) to construct an 8-story, 85-ft. tall extended stay hotel. The proposed hotel would include 114 rooms and 35 open parking spaces. The applicant seeks Site Development Allowances for the parking setback for the open parking lot in the rear of the property. In addition, the applicant may seek and the Plan Commission may consider additional Site Development Allowances as may be necessary or desirable for development of the proposed hotel. The Plan Commission makes a recommendation to City Council, the final determining body for this proposal.

Mr. Damir Latinovic, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner for the City, provided a brief overview of the project and the staff report memo. Mr. Latinovic noted that as one of the conditions of the approval staff is recommending the applicant convert the ground floor hotel restaurant/bar space to a normal commercial/restaurant space open to the public. The addition of the commercial space open to the public is necessary and vital for continuity of the retail street wall and benefits the pedestrian environment and vitality of the downtown. Mr. Latinovic also noted that one of the other conditions of note is a requirement for the petitioner to install no-right turn sign at the intersection of the alleys which would prohibit any trucks servicing the building to make southbound movements. Instead all trucks would have to exit the site on Davis St.

Mr. Latinovic concluded the presentation by stating the project is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Design Guidelines for Planned Developments. The project meets all zoning requirements except for the three minor site development allowances which staff believes are necessary to make the project feasible and achieve the proposed public benefits. Staff recommends Plan Commission make a positive recommendation to the City Council with the conditions outlined in the staff report memo.

Commissioner Lewis asked for the intent of the required five-foot setback for the open parking spaces. Mr. Latinovic explained the required setback was likely placed in the ordinance to achieve adequate separation between the parking lots and lot lines where one could install landscape screening or a decorative fence for screening. Mr. Latinovic added that there is no required setback for buildings or enclosed parking from any lot line.
Upon a question by Commissioner Opdycke on future snow removal, Mr. Latinovic explained this question was brought up by staff and surrounding residents at the neighborhood meetings and the question may be better answered by the developer.

Commissioner Opdycke stated that he has to leave early and wanted to provide his thoughts on the project. He stated that generally he is in favor of the project and would encourage the Commission to approve the project. He also stated he supports all conditions as outlined by staff except for the 2nd condition regarding the need for yet another restaurant. He also suggested adding another condition that would require the developer to pay for the repaving of the alleys. He believes overall the project is a good addition to the area.

Chairman Peters swore in all individuals that will be providing testimony during tonight’s meeting.

Mr. Gregg Graines, of DLA Piper, the attorney for the applicant introduced his team and invited the applicant Tom Blunk to provide a summary of the project.

Mr. Tom Blunk of Janko Group, LLC/Quadrangle, LLC., the applicant, provided a summary of the proposal. Mr. Blunk mentioned that he is a resident of the City and as such this project has a special meaning to him. He provided a summary of the nature of an extended stay hotel and how it differs from a typical hotel. He explained that they have a letter of intent from Hyatt House for the project. He mentioned that they also plan on renting some parking spaces off site even though they meet the zoning requirement for parking on their property. Mr. Blunk mentioned they are not asking for any financial incentives. The three development allowances for parking setbacks are minor. The project will bring 200 construction jobs and 25 permanent hotel jobs.

Mr. Blunk stated they will add over 100 guests daily which will provide critical vitality to the area where now the site is vacant. The building will have 3-5 deliveries a week. The previous 12,000-sq. ft. office building on the site included 35-40 parking spaces, many of which had direct access off of the north-south alley similar to their proposal.

Mr. Blunk then discussed the plan to remove the existing Elm tree in rear of the property to accommodate the construction of the building. He also indicated that they are willing to donate towards urban reforestation fund for the loss of the tree or install a new 9” tree (25'-30' high at the time of installation) in the southeast corner of the site, in coordination with the adjacent property owner to the south. This option would eliminate one required parking space and would therefore require approval of an additional development allowance for the number of parking spaces provided. Mr. Blunk stated they held two neighborhood meetings and met twice with local architects and Alderman Fiske in addition to numerous conversations with city staff to come up with a design of the building and site that was to everyone’s liking.

Devon Patterson, design principal for Solomon, Cordwell, Buenz, the architect for the project, provided an overview of the design of the building. He provided a summary of the design changes over time based on different meetings with staff and area residents and architects. The exterior of the building would be all brick of reddish color with metal panels and stone base elements.
Mr. Blunk concluded by saying that based on resident input they will add signs to parking stalls accessed off of the alleys to prevent any oversized vehicles to be parked there.

Upon a question from Chairman Peters on snow removal, Mr. Blunk stated they will have a plan for their site and would be happy to spearhead a coordinated snow removal effort. December, January and February are the slowest months of the year, so one or two of the parking spaces could be used for snow storage during winter months.

Upon a question from Commissioner Ford, Mr. Blunk stated the code requirement and their proposal accounts for staff parking in the 35 parking spaces on the site.

Upon a question from Commissioner Lewis on the brick and other materials, Mr. Patterson explained the exact colors and material types and sizes are not finalized yet at this point. He also went over the types of aluminum windows proposed.

Commissioner Asaro asked what the concerns by Ms. Klotz were when the project went in front of SPAARC where she did not vote in favor of the project. Mr. Latinovic stated Ms. Klotz was concerned about the proposed parking spaces that have direct access off of the alleys.

Upon a question on public benefits, Mr. Latinovic stated the public benefits should be finalized before the project is presented to the City Council.

Upon a question from Mr. Asaro, Ms. Judy Fiske, First Ward Alderman, provided an overview on the meetings that took place with the applicant. She explained there are still concerns with the project regarding the alley usage, the setbacks and regarding the elm tree in the rear and she hopes these can be resolved during the project review process.

Mr. Asaro clarified he was not inquiring for personal point of view from the Alderman, but rather the position of the Alderman as it reflects the constituents she is representing.

Upon a question from Mr. Galloway, Mr. Patterson stated they have not selected the final color or the materials for the window frames.

Linda, Damashek, 1318 Judson Ave, asked about the samples of materials, to which Mr. Latinovic stated he will provide the material samples that have been submitted after the break.

Upon a question, Mr. Latinovic stated the property is not located in a TIF district.

At this time, the Commission took a ten minute break.

After the break, Chairman Peters swore in the individuals that will be providing testimony during the meeting.
Ms. Kristine Westerberg, 525 Grove, president of the 525 Grove condominium association is representing the Hinman/Grove neighbors who border the site to the south and east. The residents have concern about the proposed parking setback from the north, south and east lot lines, which is a necessary buffer between the commercial and residential properties. Adjacent buildings to the east are setback from the alley. The columns of the proposed building would extend up against the east lot line which would contribute to increased congestion along with the proposed 0-feet parking setback. The proposed setback along the south property line also eliminates the existing tree which is about 60 feet tall.

Ms. Westerberg proceeded to show the slides of the proposed building with the required setbacks and what impact that would have on the proposed building and surrounding alleys and properties. She also proceeded to elaborate on the construction concerns that the neighbors have.

Mr. Mike Taft, 1508 Hinman, president of the Evanstonian co-op apartments at 1508 Hinman Avenue provided his construction background and 45-year experience. He stated that this is an extraordinarily dangerous site for construction. Mr. Taft explained and provided slides of the porous asphalt paving including examples from Bayfield, Wisconsin.

Mr. Taft further testified that the existing Elm tree in the rear is quite healthy in his opinion. The area around the tree does not have any concrete backfill but has a good topsoil. Saving the tree would afford the hotel guests staying on the south side of the hotel to enjoy the tree and perhaps even listen to a Baltimore Oriole singing in the morning. Observing the five-foot setback would save the tree.

Upon a question from Mr. Galoway on the life expectancy of permeable asphalt, Mr. Taft testified that it is much greater than standard asphalt. It lasts much longer, it does not crack and ice does not form on it.

Mr. Galoway asked if the porous asphalt is used what impact would that have on the detention requirements? Mr. Latinovic explained that the petitioner has not been required to provide full stormwater engineering documents and calculations at this point that specify the size and type of all stormwater detention areas and infrastructure. Typically, the project is required to provide on-site stormwater detention and must show that the rate of stormwater runoff will not increase from the current rate.

Upon a question what impact a green roof would have on the stormwater detention requirements, Mr. Latinovic explained that such measures do have positive impact on the amount of stormwater infrastructure that is needed.

Upon a question, Mr. Latinovic clarified the required setback for buildings and enclosed parking is 0 ft from all lot lines.

Mr. Howard Voeks, 1516 Hinman Ave, stated he appreciates the efforts the applicant and his staff have done to this point, especially positioning the building on the site so that it preserves some views. The extended stay hotel is also a great idea. Mr. Voeks proceeded to show pictures of the alley to indicate a narrow passageway. He also
mentioned that the Zoning Ordinance states the structure should provide suitable transition between commercial and residential zones. He urged the Commission to require the applicant to modify the plans to move the building off of the north-south alley in the back.

Commissioner Asaro asked what happens when a truck is blocking the alley? Mr. Voeks stated that residents typically ask truck drivers to move so people can access and pull out of their parking spaces. The alley is more like a street than an alley and there is not much room to maneuver. Upon a question, Mr. Voeks stated that it is a 20-ft wide alley and theoretically there is enough room for two vehicles to pass by each other.

Commissioner Lewis asked about the depth of the parking spaces on adjacent properties to which Mr. Voeks specified they are deeper than the requirement.

Upon a question, Mr. Latinovic clarified the properties in the rear are zoned R-6 and the required building setback from their rear property line is 25 feet.

Ms. Elizabeth Hayford, 1508 Hinman Ave, stated they are all concerned about the passage in the alley. There is still more work to be done on this proposal.

Mr. Sandeep Ghaey, 1509 Hinman Ave, is the owner of the adjacent wine shop, and asked about safety measures during construction. There is concern about vibration for their wine cellar. He further expressed concern about sidewalk access during the construction. The preference would be not to shut down the sidewalks during the construction. Mr. Ghaey offered a suggestion to make the north-south alley a one-way alley.

Ms. Jeanne Lindwall, 625 Library Place, stated she is an urban planner by trade and would like to speak about the importance of setbacks. For busy alleys setbacks are essential to allow appropriate room for passing by. Over the years there have been numerous projects where developers have been asked for additional setback buffer. She encouraged the Commission to be sensitive to the need for appropriate setbacks.

Mr. Eugene Turek, 525 Grove St, said Davis Street is a very busy two-lane street and he does not think trucks will be able to safely exit onto Davis St., especially when the construction of the addition at North Shore Hotel starts. There would be a lot of traffic using the same alley.

Upon a question, from Mr. Turek, M. Blunk answered there are two handicapped parking spaces proposed as it is required by Code.

Mr. Bill Schermerhorn, manager of 531 Grove Street, said theirs is the only property that is adjacent to this site. He is in favor of the project because of the big picture benefits the project will bring. The previous owners parked the cars on the site right off of the alley, sometimes 4 cars deep. The existing tree in the rear is right on the property line. The tree will most likely not survive the construction. Mr. Schermerhorn concluded the project has a ton of upside for the community as a whole.
Mr. Gregory Hughes, 2737 Central St., stated in his opinion the development is a first class development. He used to work for the company that occupied the building that was previously located on the site. They parked right up against the alley and never had any problems.

There being no further public comment, Chairman Peters closed the public participation part of the hearing.

Mr. Graines provided the closing testimony and reminded the Commission that their full team is here and able to provide answers to any questions.

Ms. Goddard asked about vibration monitoring. Mr. Blunk stated there will be a construction management agreement and they will do foundation survey of the building to the south to make sure they will not negatively affect surrounding properties. He also stated the foundation piers will be drilled into the ground and will not be pounded in as it may be usually associated with deep foundation piers.

Chairman Peters asked if the project will comply with other ordinances and Mr. Blunk confirmed.

Chairman Peters invited the discussion by the Commission members.

Commissioner Ford stated the architect has done a marvelous job. The positioning of the building is good and having the walls come in and out is a wonderful design job. He stated preserving the tree and constructing the building of this size will be impossible. The tree will not survive. But Commissioner Ford stated the tree should be replaced. Regarding the parking, Commissioner Ford stated he would be willing to entertain a revised design that shows reduced number of parking to gain some setback off of the alley. But by and large the project makes sense at this location.

Commissioner Galloway stated he could not think of a better use for this site. It will provide the maximum amount of street pedestrian activity and a minimum amount of site generated vehicular traffic. It will also add to the local retail market. The architecture is splendid. The massing and east-west orientation is great. Every little detail does add to the quality of architecture and adds benefits. The first floor layout is smart and highly logical. Commissioner Galloway did say he is a bit uncomfortable with the stone coping that tops the 2nd floor terrace. He also stated his preference for the brick is the first option presented in the project binder. It would add the greatest amount of variation and detail considering that this would be utility size brick. Commissioner Galloway encouraged the applicant to select the metal that has very low reflectivity.

In regards to the setbacks, Commissioner Galloway stated part of the urban living is being engaged with surrounding residents and business owners regarding the use of the alley. He does not believe there is a problem that needs to be solved, but signs could be posted to encourage drivers to move forward in the parking spaces off of the alley as much as possible.
In regards to the tree, Commissioner Galloway believes the tree will not survive the construction. He would encourage exploring the options to provide additional landscape amenities instead.

Commissioner Goddard stated the project is a fabulous idea. She likes the site plan and the fact that the tower does not take up so much space. She is not concerned about having a full service restaurant on this site. There are plenty of restaurants downtown Evanston.

Upon a question from Commissioner Goddard, Mr. Latinovic stated the east-west alley is a one-way eastbound alley now, but drivers do not always follow that. That is why staff is recommending the applicant install additional traffic signage. Additionally, Mr. Latinovic stated that active loading and unloading in the alley is permitted. That is what the alleys are for. But the loading and unloading has to be active. If there is a truck parked in the alley and loading and unloading is not actively happening, residents are encouraged to call 311 and the City will come to enforce the parking restrictions in the alley.

Commissioner Goddard further said she is sensitive to the setbacks, but the project has too many other benefits to focus only on the setbacks. She stated she does not believe the Elm tree will survive the construction. The money and effort would be better spent on planting another tree somewhere else on the site or even somewhere else in Evanston.

Commissioner Lewis stated he also believes this is an ideal use and project for downtown Evanston. He does not believe there is a need for another restaurant. He believes this will become a source of pedestrian activity not a desert. Commissioner Lewis shares the concern about the construction activity. The tree issue could be resolved in many ways. A parking space could be lost to accommodate survival of the tree. However he does not believe that the tree will survive the construction. Overall, the project is fantastic.

Commissioner Asaro agrees with all the comments that have been made and supports the request. Someone is always going to be happy and someone is not going to be happy. Given the location of the site, the setback request is appropriate. He understands the position of the neighbors but given the location of the site he believes the proposed setback is appropriate.

Commissioner Asaro said he visited the other hotel by the developer and they make a good product. The fact that the developer is a resident of Evanston, he will be particularly mindful of the success of the project all the way through.

Chairman Peters stated, based on the comments by the Board, the 2nd condition in the staff memo regarding the need for the restaurant should then not be included in the motion. The other condition that could be added is that the project complies with all other applicable ordinances. Also, a condition should be added that the applicant installs signs prohibiting SUV parking for parking stalls that have access from the alleys. There should also be a snow removal plan acceptable to the City Council or their representative, such as the City’s traffic engineer or the planning and zoning department.
Chairman Peters also stated there is no evidence to the viability of the Elm tree after the construction. He proposes a condition as part of the recommendation that the Council, if they choose so, can adopt, that the tree be saved and up to 3 parking spaces be eliminated to save it. If the tree cannot be saved, a new tree should be planted with a minimum 9 inch caliper. In summary, Chairman Peters stated, the recommendation would be positive with the conditions he mentioned but that the tree is not resolved and it is up to the City Council to address the tree.

Commissioner Lewis stated that the idea of permeable pavement is also very interesting to him.

Commissioner Goddard asked if anyone knows what the cost of porous asphalt is versus the regular pavement.

Mr. Graines stated his team does not have that number. Chairman Peters stated there was testimony that the short term cost is greater but the long term cost is not.

Mr. Blunk stated they have looked at porous asphalt in other projects and it does not replace the requirement for the detention basin.

Alderman Fiske stated porous concrete was installed on Davis Street by the City and it is working really well. She stated the idea of a condition to keep exploring the preservation of the tree is a good idea and is worth it. Evanston is the tree city.

Chairman Peters also stated the 20-foot alley functions as an alley. Some inconvenience is to be expected.

Mr. Graines provided a clarification on the applicant’s position regarding the condition on keeping the tree. He stated they are open to explore ways to keep the tree, but losing any parking spaces in order to keep the tree does not work for them. From an operational standpoint they need every parking space they can get.

Commissioner Ford asked for clarification on the order of preference regarding the tree condition: first to explore keeping the tree, second to replace it with another 9” tree, or third to make a payment in lieu into the tree fund.

Chairman Peters clarified he did not mention the payment to the fund and he does not prefer any order. But the idea is for the Council, staff and the developer to come up with a solution that is feasible.

Commissioner Ford clarified that if such condition is included in the motion his preference would be that it includes the order he listed.

Chairman Peters invited a motion.

Commissioner Ford made a motion to approve the Planned Development request with the following conditions outlined in the staff report memo (without staff’s condition for the restaurant on the ground floor):
1. The proposed planned development for the extended stay hotel located at 1515 Chicago Avenue shall substantially conform to the plans and documents attached to this report.

2. The hotel bar and dining area located at the northeast corner of the first floor should be redesigned to accommodate a commercial/restaurant tenant space.

3. The petitioner must sign and agree to a construction management plan including but not limited to a construction staging plan prior to issuance of the building permit.

4. Prior to commencement of construction activities a foundation survey of all surrounding buildings should be completed and submitted to the city. Upon completion of all construction activities a final foundation survey should be submitted prior to issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy to assure no structural damage was caused to surrounding properties due to the construction of the building.

5. The Planned Development ordinance should include a provision that any change to the use on the property must be processed and approved as an amendment to the Planned Development.

6. The vehicles and trucks servicing the building should not exceed 30 feet in length.

7. The following traffic signs should be installed in the east-west alley:
   a. A “one-way’ traffic sign should be installed at the access to the east-west alley on Chicago Avenue.
   b. A “no-right turn” traffic sign should be installed at the intersection of the alleys to prohibit any trucks servicing the building making the southbound movements, and
   c. A “do not enter” traffic sign should be installed at the intersection of the alleys to prohibit any vehicles going westbound in the east-west alley.

8. The north side of the first floor adjacent to the bar/dining area or a commercial/restaurant space should have operable windows to encourage sidewalk café-like environment and public interaction.

Commissioner Ford also stated to include the following conditions as expressed by the Chairman and the following order regarding the tree:

9. The applicant shall provide and comply with the snow removal plan for the alleys as acceptable to the City Council.
10. The proposal shall comply with all other applicable City ordinances.
11. The applicant shall install “no SUV parking” type of signage for all parking spaces with direct access off of the alleys.
12. The applicant shall explore ways to preserve the existing Elm tree in the rear, if feasible. If saving the tree is not possible, the applicant shall plant a new tree (minimum 9" caliper at the time of installation) near the southeast corner of the site. If neither of those two options are feasible, the applicant shall pay a contribution towards the Urban Reforestation Fund.

Commissioner Goddard seconded the motion.

Ayes: Commissioners Ford, Goddard, Asaro, Lewis and Chairman Peters.
Nays: None

Abstain: None

The motion was approved by a roll call vote 5:0

Chairman Peters proceeded to read each standard to confirm that the project meets all applicable standards for approval and is consistent with the Board’s recommendation. Chairman Peters asked if all members of the Board agree with his analysis of the standards and all members of the Board confirmed they do.

Chairman Peters invited the Board if they wish to discuss the style of the minutes.

There being no discussion, Chairman Peters stated Commissioner Freeman’s appointment on the Board expires on March 14, 2014 and he is currently serving as the liaison to the Economic Development Committee. So the Commission needs to elect a new active member to serve and fill the vacancy created after Marcy 14, 2014. Chairman Peters said if there is no other member that would like to serve, he would nominate himself. Commissioner Goddard seconded his motion.

A voice vote was taken and the motion to nominate Chairman Peters as the liaison to the Economic Development Committee was approved by voice call 5-0.

4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, Commissioner Asaro motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner Goddard seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Damir Latinovic
Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Community Development Department