MEETING MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, November 5, 2014
7:00 P.M.
Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Council Chambers

Members Present: Scott Peters (Chair), Jim Ford, Carol Goddard, Richard Shure, Colby Lewis, Terri Dubin

Members Absent: Kwesi Steele, Lenny Asaro, Andrew Pigozzi

Associate Members Present: Stuart Opdycke

Associate Members Absent: David Galloway, Seth Freeman,

Staff Present: Damir Latinovic, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Lorrie Pearson, Planning and Zoning Administrator
Michelle Masoncup, Deputy City Attorney
Mario Treto, Assistant City Attorney

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.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: 10/08/2014
Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes as prepared. Commissioner Goddard seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved by voice call 6-0.

3. OLD BUSINESS
A. PLANNED DEVELOPMENT
1571 Maple Avenue
Michael McLean of 1571 Maple Avenue, LLC. developer of the proposed project, has applied for a Special Use for a Planned Development in the D3-Downtown Core Development District (Title 6-Zoning of the Municipal Code, Section 6-11) to construct a 12-story (133.3-foot high) multiple-family building with 101 residential units, 3,696-square feet of commercial space and 13 open parking spaces. The applicant seeks site development allowances for the number of dwelling units, building height, floor area ratio
(FAR), number of on-site parking spaces provided, and building setbacks from the east, north and northwest property lines. In addition, the applicant may seek and the Plan Commission may consider additional Site Development Allowances as may be necessary or desirable for the proposed development. The Plan Commission makes a recommendation to the City Council, the final determining body for this proposal.

Mr. Latinovic presented the Staff Report. The proposal has been modified to address many concerns of area stakeholders and city staff to better uphold guidelines that are outlined in the Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan. He concluded by reviewing the standards of approval for Special Use stating that staff recommends approval to City Council with the conditions outlined in the Staff Report.

Bernard Citron, attorney, provided a brief introduction to the project stating that this site consisted of a vacant lot in the middle of a downtown area. This development is essential for the business and housing needs of those who work in the city, at the hospital, Northwestern, or any surrounding restaurants. This development will promote affordability for young business professionals and utilize the walkability of downtown Evanston.

Michael McLean, 642 Sheridan Square, developer, cited his personal experience of losing a home and not finding a suitable substitution as a driving factor for working on this project to bring affordable living to Evanston. Smaller units allow for people to live more simply and the location reduces reliance on vehicles. Mr. McLean stated that the market is ripe in Evanston for this sort of development due to downtown businesses consistently losing skilled employees to downtown Chicago’s assortment of efficient and walkable living options.

Mr. Citron asked Mr. McLean to expand upon the need for development allowances regarding height and number of building units. Mr. McLean replied that the geometry of the site is quite irregular and presents physicality issues for design. The “flag shaped” lot makes any sort of development difficult. In order to accommodate the neighbors and accentuate the east-west view, the developers have requested reduced setbacks with a reduced building footprint.

Mr. Citron asked, financially speaking, if they could develop the site with fewer units, to which Mr. McLean responded, no, citing the physical nature of the site and noted there will likely be a reduced number of residents despite an allowance for more units. The residents of this building will increase economic activity. Residents choose to live simply because their entertainment, food, and work is right outside their front door.

Mr. Citron then asked Howard Hirsch, designer and architect, to comment about design guidelines for the building, to which Mr. Hirsch responded that if they followed the ordinance, they would be permitted to build a four story parking structure with 85 feet built on top of it. The irregular shape of the site would make for a very imposing structure. Designing a skinnier building without parking made for a better design and lessened the impact on neighboring buildings. Setback allowances would allow for a greater distance from neighboring businesses and better accommodates access to sunlight.
Mr. Hirsch went on to say that this development incorporates different massing into a coherent structure that creates a variation in scale from the street. These variations in scale further lessen the imposing nature of the building that developers like to avoid.

Mr. Workman, traffic engineer, stated that he did not think the development would have a significant impact on traffic and congestion. This development is going to promote the idea of warehousing vehicles. The need for a vehicle is greatly reduced due to the simplistic nature of the development and any kind of necessary parking can be acquired through leasing spaces at the Maple Ave Garage. In addition, 2 spaces for car-sharing vehicles, bike racks and proximity to the train will reduce traffic congestion.

Steve Leonard, land use/zoning consultant, stated that this development is consistent with buildings expected in a D3 Downtown Core Development District while upholding the standards and guidelines laid out in the Comprehensive and Downtown Plans. Mr. Leonard went on to say that this site needs more design consideration due to the shape and believes developers have taken proper steps to lessen impact, create cohesive design, and ensure appropriate usage for the site.

Michael MaRous, real estate appraiser, stated that he did not believe there would be an adverse impact on surrounding property values if the project was approved. He conducted a matched-pair report in which he studied Optima Towers, a similar development where the neighboring buildings are only 20 ft away from each other in some areas and featured an irregularly shaped structure. In his findings, valuation was only affected by height, core location, and market conditions. Distance from the neighboring building did not affect the values of the neighboring building and therefore, this development should not negatively affect the surrounding area either.

There being no further witnesses, Chairman Peters suggested taking a ten minute break at 8:30 pm.

The Commission reconvened at 8:40 pm.

Chairman Peters stated that during the break, he received a letter from the attorney representing the property owners adjacent to the south (One Evanston building) requesting a continuance of the Case. Given the number of residents that showed up he stated he will accept public comment.

Commissioner Ford stated that leasing spaces from the Maple Avenue Garage was always intended by the City, but was wondering if there was a limit to the number of spaces that could be leased? Mr. Latinovic answered that City monitors capacity in all City-owned garages and leases only where there is still ample availability. Proposed lease from the Maple Avenue Garage will not affect the availability of public parking.

Commissioner Opdycke asked if there were any parking restrictions south of Lake Street that would make parking difficult if residents of this proposed development were to park on the street. Mr. Latinovic described surrounding street parking restrictions. He also pointed out that available street parking and the proposed City-owned garage are the same distance from the development with the garage offering evasion from street cleaning and snow, making it the more likely option.
Commissioner Opdycke asked if any affordable housing units had been required, to which Mr. Latinovic answered, no. Commissioner Opdycke urged the City move more quickly on updating the Affordable Housing Ordinance.

Chairman Peters then invited the public to provide comments.

Lucy Miller, resident of One Evanston, 1567 Elmwood Avenue, asked that future renderings portray the north facing side of her building to show the windows that line the façade. She feels that development will obstruct the views and wishes for that to be obvious in presentations.

Debbie Magnuson asked where residents at the new rental facility featuring 300 units on Emerson and Maple would be expected to park. Her concern is that those residents will also utilize a nearby City lot. Mr. Latinovic stated that the building had 350 parking spaces and they are not leasing any spaces from the Maple Avenue Garage.

Karen Whener, 1567 Elmwood Avenue, asked how much the rent would be. Mr. McLean replied that the market will dictate price and numbers may vary, but rents could range from $1,400 to $2,800. These rates are lower than other Class A apartments. Less reliance on vehicles or not owning a car at all could also save up to $10,000/year for residents.

Commissioner Shure inquired whether the developers have made accommodations pursuant to the American Disabilities Act, to which Mr. Latinovic confirmed that the entire building will have to be ADA accessible.

Sally Henderson, 1570 Elmwood, stated her concerns regarding height, noise, and lack of privacy. She moved to Evanston due to health issues and lives on a fixed income. She fears that her property value will diminished along with her view and money that was meant for her family someday will be lost because of this development.

Dr. Katherine Boho, 1570 Elmwood, stated that she opposed One Evanston building for the same reasons as this development. She said that she lives at One Evanston now for the view and was told nothing over 5 stories could be built on this lot. She believes this development is stealing their views, obstructing daytime brightness, and setting a negative precedence. Commissioner Opdycke noted that the residents of the building directly west of 1570 Elmwood had her same concerns and objections about her building.

Commissioner Lewis asked for clarification regarding building height. His understanding was that that 8 stories was allowable along with a 40 foot parking structure which would total 125 feet and the planned development in question totals 133 feet in height without parking. Chair Peters confirmed and said that a developmental allowance for height can be made if the developer does not exceed the maximum and standards are met.

Commissioner Ford asked if diagrams could be provided that would illustrate what east, west and north views would look like if he was standing at various points of the 6th Floor staring at the proposed development.
Commissioner Opdycke asked if the Downtown Plan was only an advisory document to which Chair Peters clarified that general conformity with the plan is one for the standards, but the document is only a guideline.

Thomas Ramsdell, attorney for HOA of One Evanston building, 1571 Elmwood Ave, asked that the meeting be continued to December 17, 2014 in order to allow for proper time to submit materials.

Doreen Haggerty, 1020 Grove, expressed her concerns over the failure to provide parking spaces especially with existing traffic in the area. She feels that this proposal is not senior-citizen friendly and recommends against approval. She provided the Chairman with a petition signed by most residents of her building all opposing the proposal.

Discussion followed on when the next meeting should be held and where.

Following the discussion, the Chairman announced the case is being continued to Wednesday December 17, 2014 at 7 pm. The special Plan Commission meeting will be held at the Civic Center. The room is yet to be determined. He suggested anyone interested can check with staff prior to the meeting regarding the exact location. Mr. Ramsdell and Mr. Citron confirmed the meeting date and time is acceptable to them.

There being no further discussion, Commissioner Ford made a motion to continue the hearing for Special Use approval for Planned Development at 1571 Maple Avenue to December 17, 2014 at 7 pm at the Civic Center. Commissioner Lewis seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved by voice call 6-0.

B. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, Commissioner Lewis made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Pigozzi seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved by voice call 6-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 pm.

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