MEETING MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, December 17, 2014
7:00 P.M.
Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Council Chambers

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

Members Absent: Kwesi Steele, Lenny Asaro, Carol Goddard, 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. OLD BUSINESS

A. PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

1571 Maple Avenue

14PLND-0118

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
Mr. Latinovic explained that upon request from the Plan Commission, the petitioner has submitted requested materials. He also noted that the attorney representing the Winthrop Club Homeowners Association had also submitted additional materials, all of which can be found in the packet posted online.

Tom Ramsdell, attorney for Winthrop Club Homeowners Association, 1571 Elmwood Avenue, cross-examined witnesses who had previously spoken on behalf of the applicant for the planned development.

Michael MaRous, MaRous and Company, real estate appraiser, answered questions regarding his match-pair report and stated that the development provides for rentals and modern development which encompass public benefits and housing goals for the City. If the building was built parallel to One Evanston building and in compliance with what Zoning allows, then it would have a more proximate and negative effect on One Evanston.

Michael Werthmann, KLOA, traffic engineer, provided testimony regarding parking and whether or not it complied with ADA standards. He noted that the elderly or physically handicapped will probably not choose to live in this facility if they own cars.

Steve Lenet, AICP, ASLA, from LCT Design, gave testimony regarding the 2009 Downtown Plan and previous goals the City had in mind for this property. He noted that the Downtown Plan recommended a less intensive developments west of the Davis St. station, but the development is subject to the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Ramsdell concluded his cross-examination and began presenting his primary case and objections to this project.

Allan Kracower, Kracower & Associates, urban planner, stated that his role in this project included identifying context for the standards and in his opinion, this project is excessively dense and does not meet ADA requirements. He thinks the project excludes those in need of housing. He contested the listed public benefits and noted parking concerns.

Bernard Citron, attorney for 1571 Maple, remarked that the Downtown Plan is only advisory. The Zoning Ordinance governs land use in this case. Mr. Kracower commented that the Downtown Plan is mentioned in the Zoning Ordinance which elevates its significance.

Commissioner Shure asked about the status of the Downtown Plan and whether it was advisory. Chairman Peters thought the question was beyond the scope of this evening’s meeting.

Mr. Treto stated that the Zoning Ordinance is the governing code. The Downtown Plan serves to supplement the Comprehensive Plan both of which serve as a guide for the Zoning Code. The Form Based Code, a recommendation from the Downtown
Plan was not adopted by the City Council. Despite various recommendations made in the Downtown Plan, the Commission must govern by the Zoning Ordinance.

Bill Kokalias, Axios Architects & Consultants Ltd., architect, provided and explained his illustrations demonstrating the visual impacts the planned development would have on One Evanston building to the south.

Chairman Peters inquired whether the building could be built with a different alignment and what the impact would be. Mr. Kokalias responded that it could have a different alignment, but it would more significantly impact One Evanston.

Chairman Peters suggested taking a ten minute break at 8:32 pm.

The Commission reconvened at 8:42 p.m.

John Sattar, JCS Real Estate Services, Inc., appraiser, stated his role in this project was to identify imposed impacts of the planned development on One Evanston building. He expressed disagreement with Mr. MaRous’ report.

Upon questioning from Commissioner Ford, Mr. Sattar noted general health and welfare as being potentially impacted by the development. He worried that a cumulative impact will mean future developments will get the same allowances.

Commissioner Lewis asked how a vacant lot affects property value. Mr. Sattar stated that any kind of decrease in property value would be temporary until the site was developed. Mr. Sattar then clarified that no studies on parking impairing the general welfare were completed for his report.

Howard Ellman, President of the Winthrop Club Homeowners Association for One Evanston, highlighted his personal experience in dealing with this planned development and thought the Downtown Plan was not adequately considered by City staff.

Commissioner Ford noted that the public benefit bonuses listed in the Downtown Plan’s Form Base Code are conditional, not required.

Commissioner Shure noted that the Downtown Plan is only advisory.

Chairman Peters asked what should be built on the property. Mr. Ellman stated that a building with less density and which better fit in with the neighborhood would be appropriate.

Chairman Peters invited the public to ask questions or provide comments.

Joe Rocheleau, 1400 Maple Avenue, stated that he does not believe the planned development meets requirements, fears cumulative effect, and believes proposed parking plan is impractical and unsustainable.

Commissioner Ford inquired whether parking fees would be bundled with the residential lease. Mr. Citron answered that parking fees would be separate from
leases similar to most other apartment buildings. He noted that this building is not catered to those who use cars frequently.

Doug Fuson, 1570 Elmwood Avenue, stated that he was told in spring of 2013 that nothing over 4 stories tall would be built on this lot and stated concern that the zoning ordinances are getting confusing.

Debbie Magnuson, 2611 Hartzell Avenue, cited her real estate experience and expressed concern regarding traffic and lack of demand for rental units. She stated that view does affect price and believes assumption that most people are going to use public transit is impractical.

Steve Lewis, 1400 Maple Avenue, stated that Evanston has the ability to be selective. The development is not necessary and he doesn’t want to accept bad deals from developers while allowing them exceptions.

David Reynolds, 204 Davis Street, stated that the parking garage at Church and Chicago was built to address parking problems. Not requiring parking for this development is problematic. He expressed concern that there are more benefits for the developer than the public.

Janet Larson, 1501 Oak Avenue, stated her concerns regarding views and reduced natural light. She noted that women might not be comfortable being required to use a parking garage two blocks away.

David Kuo, 1570 Elmwood Avenue, commented that the elderly, handicapped, and women might be limited by the development in terms of accessibility and safety. He also noted high rental rates and traffic congestion as concerns.

Katie Traines, 1570 Elmwood Avenue, submitted a petition to the Commission with 78 signatures.

Donna Marcus, nearby resident, noted that permit parking is available for street parking and expressed concern 1571 Maple residents taking advantage of it. Mr. Latinovic clarified that residential permit parking is only available to residents who live on that block, which will not include the residents of the proposed development.

Upon questioning from Mr. Citron regarding Mr. Sattar’s testimony, Mr. MaRous clarified that a market study was prepared by appraisal research counselors cited in his report. Mr. MaRous further explained his match-pair analysis.

Upon questioning from Mr. Citron, Mr. Lenet stated that the weight of public benefits needs to be considered as opposed to the number of public benefits on a case-by-case basis.

Corena Pinopa, 1571 Elmwood Avenue, asked Mr. Lenet about the net benefit of tax revenue, since property taxes of units facing the new building will drop to the value of units going down. Mr. Lenet clarified he does not believe there would be any decrease in any taxes but only additional tax benefits.
Mr. Ellman noted that there will still be tax benefits to a shorter, less dense building.

Mr. Kuo stated that rental residents are transient and maybe larger benefits could come from condominium owners. Mr. Lenet responded that zoning cannot discriminate or characterize residents. Despite how this development is marketed, it is defined as a multi-family residential building by the Code.

Commissioner Ford questioned the meaning of the term ‘transient’ in relation to Evanston, referencing 4-year student renters. Mr. Lenet stated that 4-year renters are also likely to become permanent residents.

Michael McLean, 642 Sheridan Square, developer, noted that in this area of downtown Evanston, 56% of units are rental units. It would be difficult to define Downtown Evanston as transient, however. He also stated that technology companies are more likely to move to downtown Chicago because that is where the talented, young millennials want to be. In order to keep tech companies in Evanston, Evanston must attract and retain the in-demand, talented, young people.

In response, Mr. Kuo stated that he did not think the size and price of the units in the proposed development would be enough to attract the demographic Mr. McLean had described. He noted that this demographic already exists in Evanston due to Northwestern University.

Mr. Ellman asked whether rental units making up 56% of this area is actually a good thing. Commissioner Ford noted that give or take a few percentages, a 44% ownership and 56% rental for the area is actually rather balanced.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Peters closed the public participation and public comment portion of the hearing.

A brief discussion followed amongst the Commission members if they should continue the case to the next meeting date or invite the closing statements by both parties.

Commissioner Ford made a motion to continue the hearing to January 14, 2015 for closing arguments and Commission deliberation.

Commissioner Lewis seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved 5-0.

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2015 PLAN COMMISSION SCHEDULE

Commissioner Ford made a motion to approve the 2015 Plan Commission Schedule as presented by Staff.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dubin.
A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved 5:0.

4. ADJOURNMENT

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

A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved by voice call 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 10:42 pm.

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