November 28, 2017

Honorable Members of the Evanston Plan Commission
City of Evanston
2100 Ridge Avenue
Evanston, IL

Dear Commissioners:

I write in response to the staff report for the 601 Davis planned development application. Acknowledging the staff’s negative recommendation, we nonetheless appreciate staff’s positive comments regarding many attributes of the project and its congruency with the downtown plan. We recognize the concerns raised, and we offer the following responses to several salient issues:

Inclusionary Housing

- As noted in 11/21 memo from Sarah Flax to the Plan Commission, we have demonstrated that the project would be financially infeasible if we complied fully with the ordinance. Thus, while we do not meet the explicit on-site requirements, we do comply with the ordinance’s requirements in demonstrating that such a contribution would be financially infeasible (see 5-7-10 of Evanston City Code).

- Further, between our on-site units and our contribution to rental assistance/homelessness prevention, our proposal is economically equivalent to the in lieu of fee. It will serve many more people (80 families), and outside of the on-site units, it will target a much lower income spectrum vis-à-vis the IHO’s target of residents at 50% to 60% AMI. Finally, unlike affordable units which take time to construct, the rental assistance and homelessness prevention funds will be available much sooner – in 2018 rather than 2020 or 2021. Thus, we believe that our proposal not only satisfies the spirit of an alternative equivalent proposal defined in 5-7-9 of Evanston City Code, but also offers advantages to strict adherence to the requirements for an in lieu fee or on-site units.

- We note that we are willing to extend the rental restriction period for on-site units from 25 years (required under ordinance) to 50 years.

Drive Thru

- Chase owns and operates the drive thru parcel on Davis Street and has agreed to sell it to us with certain stipulations. Chase has indicated to city staff that it will maintain a drive thru in downtown Evanston indefinitely, as it views drive-thru ATMs as important to its future business strategy.
The project is not asking for a new curb cut. We’re enabling the reduction of the existing Chase curb cut from 80’ and 7 lanes to 16’ and 1 lane. As KLOA’s analysis indicates, the smaller curb cut is a marked improvement over existing conditions.

At its initial review in February 2016, the City’s planning staff acknowledged that while not perfect, the reduced curb cut was a significant improvement to existing conditions, and staff indicated it would not oppose the project on that basis. As City planning staff has changed, that view has evolved.

Much consternation about the curb cut centers on its conflict with the protected bike lane on Davis Street. On the protected bike lanes on Davis and Church Streets, there are approximately 35 curb cuts among streets, alleyways, driveways, etc. The existing curb is one of the worst. Our project will make it one of the least intrusive, far better than even the curb cut 1½ blocks west at the Sherman Plaza parking deck owned by the City, a curb cut which features 2 lanes – one for entering, and one for exiting.

Public Benefits/Project Impact

- The project offers many public benefits, a portion of which the staff report lists. We highlight two which are unique to this project. Both of these impose millions of dollars of cost on the project, costs which other projects are not bearing.
  - Preservation of an historic structure – we plan to invest significant dollars to preserve and enhance this Evanston landmark. Those improvements are further detailed in the attached list which was recently submitted to staff. Further, the preservation of this structure necessitates a taller building, higher parking podium, more constrained vehicular access, etc. Preserving this historic structure creates significant costs and constraints, and is a unique public benefit.
  - Elimination of blight and incompatible uses - this is not a standard project attribute or a project requirement under city ordinance. To the contrary, many proposed projects will displace existing, viable commercial structures and uses. This project will instead eliminate a property that has been cited multiple times for zoning code violations and another with exposed foundations. Elimination of blight and incompatible uses is explicitly recognized as a public benefit under Evanston City Code (see 6-3-6-3, which states that “elimination of blighted structures or incompatible uses through redevelopment or rehabilitation” is a public benefit). Land use policy has for decades recognized elimination of blight/incompatible uses as a public policy objective and public benefit.

We have continued to ask staff for suggestions on public benefits, and many of those suggestions have been incorporated into our project. Staff continues to indicate that the public benefits are insufficient. We would appreciate clarification on what would constitute sufficient public benefits.

Preservation of an historic structure and elimination of blight/incompatible uses are public benefits recognized explicitly by the Evanston City Code. They are enormously costly, and in and of themselves, substantial public benefits. They are unique to this project. In our opinion, when they are combined with the project’s other benefits and attributes (such as our inclusionary
housin program, $2 million annual tax revenue), they merit the development allowances being sought.

Design Elements

- We worked diligently to address staff’s 32 concerns before and during our DAPR process. We have responded to each of the items. Although a small handful remain outstanding, we will continue to work with staff to address any items remaining following the review of the Plan Commission.

- We have focused considerable effort on the design of the podium incorporating comments from staff, the Historic Commission, Bird Friendly Evanston and Design Evanston. Over the course of the design, there have been more than six separate design proposals. Changes have included:
  - Changes in proportion of exterior expression from two-story to one-story openings
  - Exterior material change to brick to better relate to the surrounding context
  - Articulation of the walls changed from framed openings to plaster infill to glass windows, providing a backdrop to the University Building and non-garage looking facades
  - Reduction in the height of the podium by five feet from 63 feet to 58 feet tall
  - Glass modifications and lighting changes for bird-friendly design

- We have worked with staff regarding the building drop-off location and considered three locations. Initially, the drop-off area was immediately in front of the residential entrance. Upon initial discussion with staff, we relocated the drop-off further west, adjacent to the drive thru, to minimize the number of locations of automobile, bike and pedestrian intersections. Upon further review and per staff direction, the location of the drop-off has been moved to the east, closer to the Chicago and Davis intersection. We welcome additional staff input on this topic. Additionally, we have proposed installing bollards and textured pavement/warning striping to alert pedestrians to the drop-off area and drive thru.

Finally, I also note that except the full IHO contribution (addressed above relative to financial infeasibility), the restricted delivery times and the lingering traffic obligations, we are willing to accept all other staff recommendations included on pages 13 and 14 of the staff report. On the exceptions, we are glad to discuss in further detail with city staff.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Cocagne
President/CEO
Improvements to University Building

The planned development includes the University Building, which will be preserved and maintained as part of the development of 601 Davis St. Should the project proceed, and subject to the review of the Historic Preservation Commission, the contemplated upgrades include:

- **Accessibility Upgrades**
  - Install an elevator to make the existing second level handicap accessible.
  - Add a second means of egress from the second floor along the west side of the existing building.

- **Exterior Upgrades**
  - Clean, tuck-point and restore existing limestone exterior consistent with its original form and appearance.
  - Replace the existing metal panels at the main entry with limestone panels that will be historically consistent with the building.

- **Retail Storefronts**
  - Install new storefront window system to match historic storefront.
  - Upgrade signage and canopies subject to the City’s signage review process.

- **Exterior Streetscape Improvements**
  - Make exterior paving and streetscape improvements consistent with what was presented at the Historic Preservation Commission hearing and as part of the overall project approval.

- **Strengthening/waterproofing of existing Foundation**