

## **MEMO**

**July 15, 2013**

**To: Jule Stroick, Common Council, Plan Commission, Urban Design Commission, other City committees as may be interested**

**From: John Hackney and Jason Valerius, residents, Sunset Village Community Association**

**Re: Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan, policy regarding future redevelopment of the Mt. Olive Church site, 4018 Mineral Point Road**

**We write to offer our thoughts and some additional text that might be included as amendment to the draft Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan prior to its adoption. In brief, the purpose of this amendment is to provide more information about the “pocket neighborhood” design concept, so that this option may be better understood by all parties (residents, elected officials, developers) and thereby more likely to happen. We believe the concepts presented here to be consistent with the interests of residents as expressed during the planning process.**

Initial drafts of the Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan featured a “Mineral Point Road Institutional Campus” that encompassed the Mt. Olive site, Bethany United Methodist Church, and five houses between the two churches, identifying all as potentially available for redevelopment. In response to neighborhood concerns about the loss of neighborhood character that could result from such extensive redevelopment in a campus format, and indication from Bethany Church that they are committed to their site, the Bethany property and four homes not owned by Mt. Olive Church were instead designated in the final draft plan as part of the “Neighborhood Preservation” area, meaning they are not targeted for redevelopment.

The final draft plan, as submitted to Common Council this spring, reflects accurately the majority preferences of neighborhood participants in the planning process. The plan recommends for the two Mount Olive parcels uses that are permitted under TR-C1 zoning, including places of worship, community centers, schools, daycare facilities, or residential development consisting of single-family homes. General goals articulated by the text are either to maintain a residential-scaled institutional campus or to redevelop the parcels as infill residences, constructed at a scale matching the character of surrounding neighborhoods. One particular example of an appropriately scaled residential project is a “pocket-neighborhood”, described briefly as “a grouping of smaller residences, often around a central courtyard, to promote a compact, close-knit residential development”.

The enclosed text describes the pocket-neighborhood format in greater detail, and describes the opportunities such redevelopment would provide for developers, home buyers, and existing Hoyt-Park area neighborhoods.

### **I. The Pocket-Neighborhood Concept**

Technically, the concept of a pocket neighborhood could be traced back to early agrarian communities, which often were constructed as compact clusters of dwellings around a central square or along a single market road. A plan of this sort served many purposes for emerging organized societies, including defense, religion, and labor exchange. Dwellings sited in close proximity obviously increase daily contacts, and such clusters have played a tremendous role in shaping fundamental patterns of human interaction throughout history.

Dwelling clusters were essential to establishment of cities, but the development of diversified urban economies often precluded close, routine contacts between even immediate neighbors. In the U.S., social isolation was promoted by platting ordinances that most often failed to designate shared public spaces and by the increasingly dominant role that automobiles played in distorting human interactions and community scales. Certainly, particular neighborhood plans that nurtured strong social ties could develop on occasion, though such communities often vanished during post-war suburban flight. A number of surviving pocket-neighborhood “precedents” have been enhanced or restored in recent decades by emphasizing the essential role played by car-free pedestrian areas lying at the center of tight dwelling clusters (**Figure 1**). In some older urban areas, large complexes previously used as factories, schools, or institutional campuses have been successfully rehabilitated to pocket neighborhoods by joining detached structures with newly constructed pedestrian lanes or covered atria.



**Figure 1.** The central garden meadows of Warren Place, an 1878 pocket neighborhood for workingmen’s families in Brooklyn (New York City). Thirty attached row-houses and four detached end houses were clustered around the walkway, which formed a shared central space for promoting daily contacts between residents. In recent years, the project’s redevelopment has prompted the use of the walkway as extended outdoor living space, strengthening social ties between neighbors.

When contemporary pocket neighborhoods are deliberately built within existing urban communities, they most usually are organized around this fundamental feature of a central pedestrian walkway (a “commons”), with motor-vehicle parking consigned beyond the periphery of the dwelling cluster. These projects often reference the defining characteristics provided by several extensive “garden cities” established on the East Coast around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or by Southern California “bungalow courts” constructed as urban infill throughout much of the 1920’s and 30’s. Today’s pocket neighborhoods are usually built in well-established, first-tier suburbs, utilizing infill lots of varied size and shape that often were “left-over” from construction of surrounding single-family homes. The dwellings are commonly built as compact, detached cottages on markedly smaller lots than found in the surrounding neighborhood, with unit densities consequently 4-6 times higher. Cottages are usually designed to contain all main living areas on the first floor, with a sizeable, full-height loft accessed, perhaps, by spiral staircase. Homes usually have 1-2 bedrooms, though projects have successfully included both larger detached units (up to 4 bedrooms) and attached units in the form of row-houses or duplexes. Homes in the dwelling cluster are intensively designed to maximize privacy and efficient use of floor space. Contemporary pocket neighborhoods often are provided with clearly demarcated entrances (*e.g.*, an archway, a drive surfaced with paving blocks or narrowed by planting beds).

The central commons provides a car-free courtyard for pedestrian movement through the middle of the dwelling cluster, but may have some form of paved central path for access by emergency and heavy-delivery vehicles. Homes most frequently are built with front porches facing the commons to promote direct interactions along this shared community space (**Figure 2**). The commons also may be linked to other sections of the pocket neighborhood by a series of walkways, forming a network of pedestrian-friendly spaces. Cars are parked outside the commons, hidden from view in garages or bays directly behind homes or along peripheral alleyways. Perhaps above all else, deliberately built pocket neighborhoods are designed to prevent automobiles from dominating residents’ daily lives.

In many instances, a prominent community hall anchors one end of the commons (**Figure 3**). The notion of a community hall serving as a neighborhood’s keystone feature is likely borrowed from U.S. and European co-housing projects, where halls serve not only to support social and business meetings, but also to provide kitchen/dining facilities for daily community meals. In contemporary pocket neighborhoods, the community hall may occasionally be used for dining, but more probably provides extended living space for social gatherings with neighbors and/or outside guests. Other concepts of community structuring are often borrowed from co-housing projects. These include food production in a community garden (perhaps in one section of the commons),

introduction of mixed housing styles to the center or periphery of the dwelling cluster (detached homes plus row-houses, duplexes, or apartments), and application of environmental sustainabilities to a neighborhood's construction and maintenance (*e.g.*, use of recycled building materials and pervious pavements, creation of drainage-swales/rain-gardens, installation of geothermal-energy systems for the entire neighborhood and passive/active solar-energy-capture systems for individual dwellings).



**Figure 2 (left).** Central commons of a deliberately built pocket neighborhood near Seattle, viewed from the front porch of a facing, detached cottage. Front porches and a system of pedestrian walkways connecting the project's peripheral areas promote use of the commons as a center for social interactions. A commons is typically landscaped in great detail, with residents usually sharing in its planting and maintenance.



**Figure 3 (right).** Community hall located at one end of the commons in a deliberately built pocket neighborhood. Halls may serve varied functions, ranging from a space for occasional social gatherings to a facility for regular dining, depending on underlying community organization. Motor vehicles are parked beyond the periphery of the central commons, preserving the space as a pedestrian-friendly, shared space for interactions with neighbors and friends.

**Developers' advantage:** When developers effectively incorporate pocket-neighborhood design features described above, environmentally sustainable homes of reduced scale are provided at higher densities on smaller lots. This lowers construction costs *per* individual home, and quality designs lower buyers' subsequent costs for routine maintenance and energy consumption. These factors allow a broader variety of housing options, which attracts a healthy mix of buyer ages, income levels, and household sizes. As a result, pocket neighborhoods meet a demand for quality urban-infill housing at a lower relative cost to builders.

**Homeowners' advantage:** A well-proven market has developed for pocket-neighborhood homes among singles, empty-nesters, elders, or young families seeking safer environments for child rearing. Pocket neighborhoods expand housing options particularly for 1- or 2-person households, a demographic now constituting over 60% of the U.S. population. These homes also can be readily adapted to meet needs of the disabled or of those wishing to establish co-housing communities. Pocket neighborhoods generally appeal to buyers who seek greater daily connections with community and nature, and to those who accept both the restrictions and benefits of living small. Anecdotal evidence suggests that after 5 years' occupation, pocket-neighborhood homes can re-sell at 2-3 times their original price.

**Neighborhoods' advantage:** Pocket neighborhoods can increase a community's housing diversity and affordability, helping to limit urban sprawl. At the same time, pocket neighborhoods can effectively blend with surrounding single-family residences, thereby preserving the existing neighborhood's character and enhancing property values.

## II. Conceptual Designs for a Pocket Neighborhood on the Mount Olive Parcels

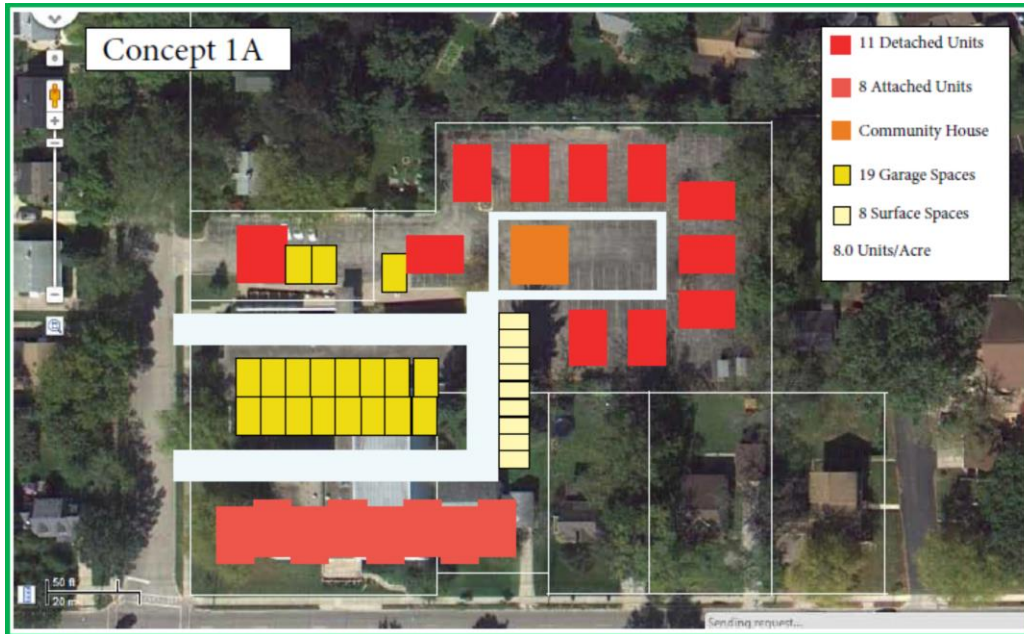
We wish to promote establishment of a deliberately built pocket neighborhood on the two Mount Olive parcels (Focus Area N). We strongly believe that constructing a well-designed pocket neighborhood on this site would meet and enhance many key recommendations and priorities listed in the Hoyt Park Area Joint Neighborhood Plan. A pocket neighborhood would **strengthen the integrity and overall composition of existing neighborhoods** by maintaining the character of single-family residences found on either side of the Mineral Point/Speedway corridor. At the same time, a pocket neighborhood would offer a **broadened range of housing types and densities** in this focus area, suited to a **variety of income levels, age groups, household sizes, and**

**physical abilities.** More specifically, pocket-neighborhood homes would supply high-quality housing on a major bus route to **seniors and empty-nesters** (nearly 27% of population in the Hoyt Park area is 65 years or older) and to the **disabled who require ground-floor accommodations.** Establishment of a pocket neighborhood would constitute a valid **initiative for promotion of home ownership.** A deliberately built pocket neighborhood on this site could provide a new stock of dwellings that have **quality architectural design,** high standards of **energy conservation** and **renewable-energy utilization,** and multiple systems for **on-site stormwater management** (currently, well over 1.5 acres of this site is covered by either roofed structures or impermeable pavements that prevent effective management of runoff).

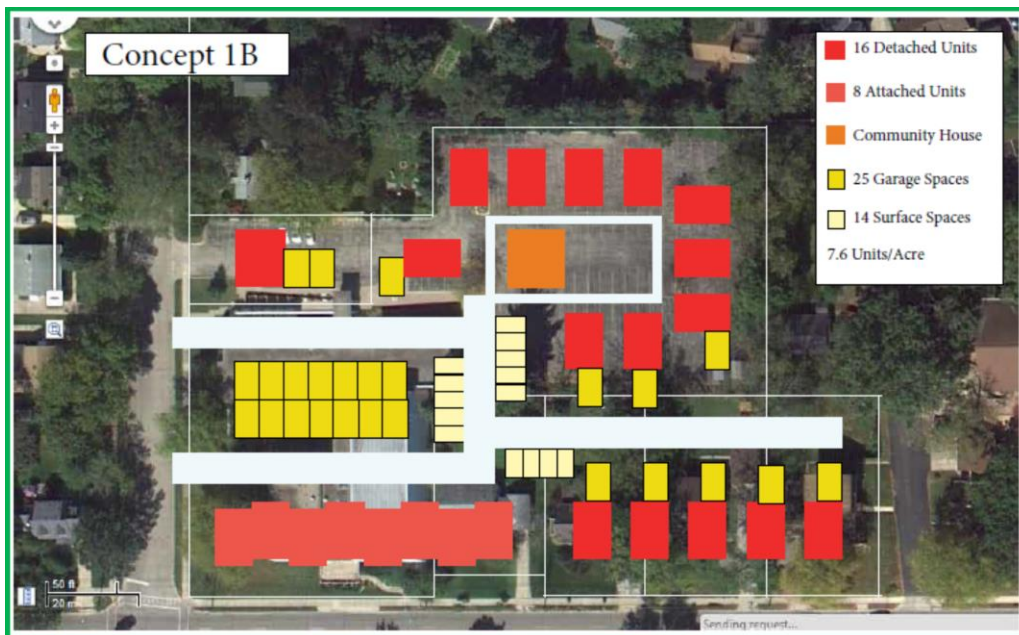
In the course of preparing the neighborhood plan, discussions among participants at times centered upon whether the Mount Olive site is suited for pocket-neighborhood placement, given its odd shape, predominance at the center of a block of older single-family residences, and vehicular access limited to Westmorland Blvd. As we have explained above, however, these site characteristics are very typical of contemporary pocket neighborhoods. To illustrate the feasibility of placing a deliberately built pocket neighborhood on these parcels and to prompt further considerations of our proposal, we have prepared a series of preliminary plans, included below. These plans are conceptual, but feature realistically scaled designations of areas for individual dwellings, public spaces, parking bays/garages, vehicular lanes, and pedestrian paths. Each plan provides one covered garage *per* living unit; past experience dictates that protected parking is essential for successful pocket neighborhoods in northern climes. A feature common to each plan is inclusion of a series of eight attached rowhouses facing Mineral Point Rd. on the southwest corner of the parcels. These rowhouses, suggested as 2-3 stories in height, are included because we anticipate a resurgence in demand for this type of dwelling in first-tier suburbs, we wish to mix housing styles within the project, and we see a developer's additional economic advantage in offering such housing to the market.

The four plans illustrate variations of two separate concepts: 1) providing either one or two vehicular-access drives entering the project from Westmorland Blvd., and 2) either limiting the project area to the two Mount Olive parcels or expanding to include the current single-family residences at 4014, 4004, and 3926 Mineral Point Rd. We have no indication at present that inclusion of the additional Mineral Point properties would be feasible for this pocket neighborhood, but wish to illustrate alternative plans made possible when the area of redevelopment is increased by *ca.* one-third. By themselves, the two Mount Olive parcels cover 2.37 acres. The three additional Mineral Point properties would add an extra 0.81 acres to the project. As indicated in **Figures 4–7,** the plans would provide for a housing density of 6.6–8.4 units *per acre.*

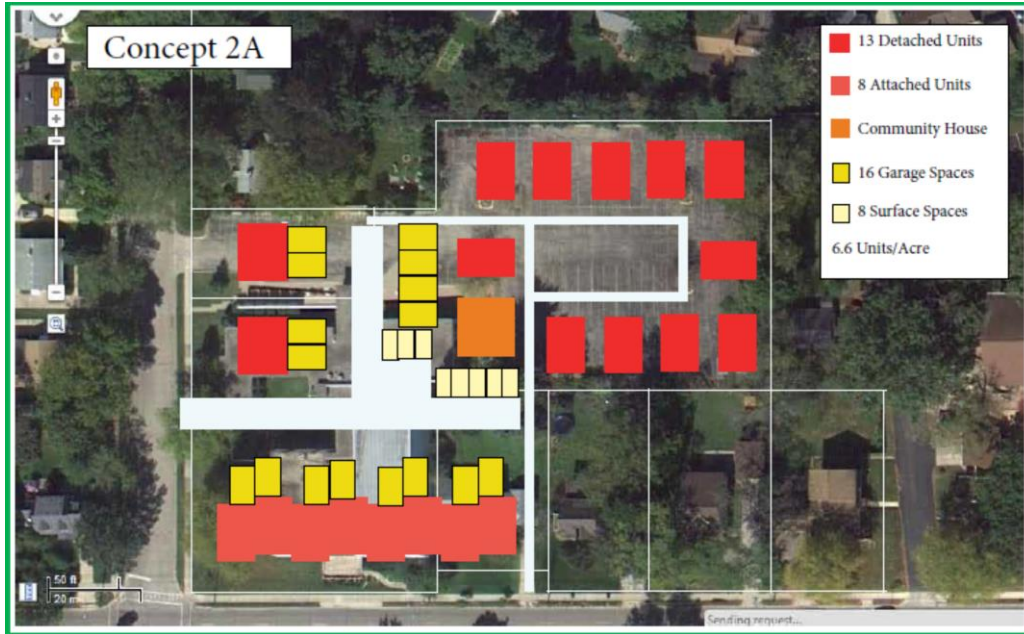




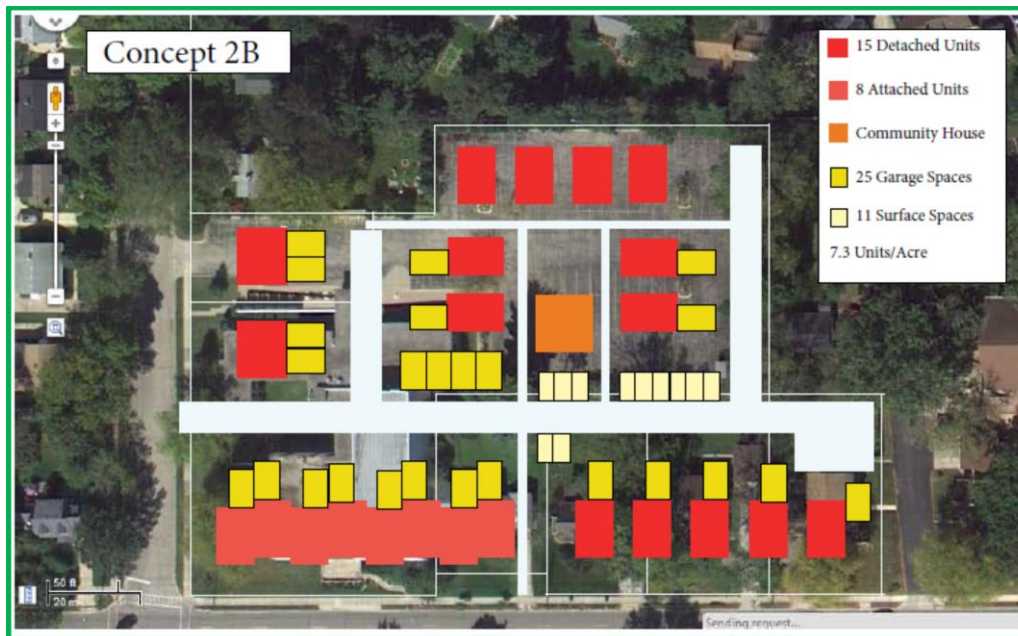
**Figure 4.** Proposed pocket-neighborhood plan limited to the two Mount Olive parcels, with two separate vehicular entrances off Westmorland Blvd. Eight attached row-houses are included on the north side of Mineral Point Rd., and one duplex is placed in the northwest corner, facing Westmorland Blvd. The traditional cluster of cottages around a car-free commons is sited in the northeast corner. Included in the plan are covered garages for each of the twenty housing units and eight open bays for guest parking. This plan generates a housing density of 8.4 units *per acre*.



**Figure 5.** Proposed arrangement of a pocket neighborhood project expanded to include three additional parcels along the north side of Mineral Point Rd. As in the previous proposal (Figure 4), eight row-houses are placed along Mineral Point Rd., and a duplex is sited in the northwest corner of the project. Two separate vehicular entrances are maintained, and one lane is extended to reach the rear of five additional cottages along the north side of Mineral Point Rd. The number of open parking spaces is increased to 14. A housing density of 7.6 units /acre is achieved in this plan.



**Figure 6.** Proposed pocket-neighborhood plan limited to the two Mount Olive parcels, with only one vehicular entrance off Westmorland Blvd. The single entrance allows an additional duplex unit to be placed in the northwest corner and allows moving eight of the garages to directly behind the row-houses on Mineral Point Rd. The number of cottages placed facing the central commons is increased to eleven, and a pedestrian pathway directly connects the commons to Mineral Point Rd. In this proposal, housing density is 6.6 units *per acre*.



**Figure 7.** Proposed pocket-neighborhood plan expanded to include three additional Mineral Point Rd. parcels, but maintaining the single vehicular entrance off Westmorland Blvd. Two vehicular lanes branch off the entrance drive, passing behind cottages to the east and west of the central commons. Pedestrian pathways are extended to link the additional vehicular branches and replicate the direct access to Mineral Point Rd. illustrated in Figure 6. Five additional cottages are sited to the east of the eight row houses, and two duplexes persist in the northwest corner along Westmorland Blvd. In this proposal, housing density is 7.3 units *per acre*.