

Yessa, Peggy

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Sent: Friday, July 30, 2010 9:00 AM
To: Yessa, Peggy
Cc: Lynn Pitman; Michael Florek; Brian Soloman; Rummel, Marsha
Subject: STATEMENT ON CITY PLANNING AND PROJECT APPROVAL PROCESS

STATEMENT BY DUDGEON-MONROE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

RE: CITY PLANNING AND PROJECT APPROVAL PROCESS

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It seems every time a complex and politically controversial project takes a long time to be decided by the cities process, someone, usually people in the development community, call for a streamlining of the process. They also claim that neighborhoods are given too much power and that the process needs an overhaul. The Edgewater process seems to have gone as it should- with historic considerations being taken seriously and overridden by a super majority, with TIF considerations being examined closely and carefully by the council and with the ultimate decision being made in a democratic fashion. Why do you consider this a problem? The proposal was bold, controversial and merited the questions and deliberations it got!

That said, our neighborhood has reviewed one of the many submittals by development interests to the process- DMI's report- and since at this time there is no city report or resolution, we have decided to offer some comments on some of the issues raised.

1. We do not believe that Madison is hostile to development. We think Madison is hostile to surprises that boldly propose radical changes to the appearance or use of property when these are made outside the context of an advanced, participatory planning process. Compare Edgewood or St Mary's initial attempts to their more recent attempts. While not perfect, both have radically changed with neighborhood support.
2. A project liaison- a single point of contact could be an effective way to manage larger projects. However, the designation of a liaison should not interfere with a neighborhood's efforts to educate itself about the project and its impacts through contact with city staff.
3. We agree that a different process might be effective for smaller projects – but the definition of “smaller” is critical. Many “small” projects may still be large compared to the surrounding neighborhood, and would have significant impact on a neighborhood. Depending on the request, some minor conditional use changes could also have real neighborhood impact. Nonetheless, ideas such as using subcommittees of the plan commission- 3 members -- to review certain minor conditional uses could help. The down side is that citizen volunteers would be asked to do even more than they do already. A review and culling of the conditional uses listed might also reduce the commission's workload and the delay in getting approvals.
4. Notification of neighborhoods may seem unnecessarily slow to those leading a development project, but early notification is in the developer's interest. Even with a 30 day preliminary notice, neighborhood associations may be challenged to communicate and educate the neighborhood on the issues that may exist around a development project. Our board meets once per month. If we are notified 2 days after the meeting for a project to be reviewed by the city in 45 days, we may have trouble meeting deadlines due to the voluntary nature of our organization.

Care should be taken that multiple referrals not be arbitrarily limited, since the number of referrals might also reflect the complexity of a project, and a broad range of legitimate input that should be taken into account.

5. DMI's idea of an annual review of the "accountability" of committee members is a bad one. It is an invitation to intimidation and presumes that there is a right answer that committee members will be evaluated against. We have these committees to give different perspectives and to give the right answers. Divisiveness is not bad; it usually is a good reflection of competing choices. This idea should not be considered! This also applies to chairs- covered later in the DMI report.
6. DMI proposes that every committee be advisory to the council. But not all decisions go to the council (e.g. CUPs). For that reason, some committees need to retain authority. But let that authority be subject to appeal to the council. But that brings us to the issue of super majorities needed to over turn the committee. **We believe super-majorities are appropriate and desirable when the committee in question has members with professional-type expertise in the subject of their work-** Landmarks and UDC come to mind. You have created these committees to be stewards of some specific aspect of development. We submit that this expertise should be respected and only overturned if on balance, other issues suggest the efficacy of a compellingly different outcome. Keep the super majority vote. In the Edgewater- without taking sides, the process worked- the Landmarks committee did their stewardship and the council did theirs- 14 of their 20 members found that there were compelling reasons to ignore this finding.
7. The idea of a "professional" review of city staff is unrepresentative. . While we have disagreed with city staff, it is not our place to evaluate their job performance nor is it the place of the development community. If you do seek some evaluative information, input from all stakeholders, not just the development community, should be solicited. Perhaps neighborhoods could also evaluate the developers after the process. City staff has expertise and experience that should be available to all stakeholders – including residents and neighborhood associations. This could be jeopardized if staff recommendations cross over into advocacy for a project.
8. There is a proposal to permit the replacement of a committee chair if his or her evaluation comes up badly. Please do not implement such a program; it is intimidating and biased beyond any sense of fairness.
9. Page 9 has an implied criticism of the neighborhood planning process he underlying tone is that some of these plans might be parochial and do not reflect the broader city's best interest. In fact, the neighborhood planning process is vital to maintaining the livable, engaged neighborhoods that are so necessary for the city to thrive in the long term. The neighborhood must live with the impact of a development project long after the actual project is completed, so it is only appropriate that the plan be driven by resident input. . The process could benefit from more resources and communication with city staff, to broaden the understanding of possible approaches toward neighborhood development and planning issues. Plans could have certain process requirements relating to participation by the neighborhood business community, city staff and others and if met, should be subject only to council and mayor approval.

DMI wants to have some way of approving neighborhood associations as representative organizations. Neighborhood associations are voluntary groups composed of people who care about their neighborhood and want to become part of that community, and/or are motivated by some project to become active. They may invest significant amounts of time and effort to do so. . As such, they represent an important perspective. The range of interests represented by any one organization, including DMI, may not include every variation, but that does not make the organization's perspective invalid. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these proposals and issues.