

Radiance, Sept 10, 2012

Union Corner Proposal Review Committee Members,

The Radiance group met to review and discuss proposals on Saturday, August 25, 2012, including Community by Design, Gorman & Co., Livesey Co./Stone House Development. The *Union Corners - Committee Questions to Development Teams* of Aug 31, 2012 reveal an appreciation among committee members of many principles Radiance shares and we appreciate and respect that care in review. The three main development groups each provide attractive features and impressive teams.

The primary critique is the need for integrative space (live-work, other) fronting all streets and pedestrian spaces and containing parking structures within. We know our neighborhood residents will make arguments for reduced parking, especially following the announcement of high-speed bus routes along East Washington Avenue. We strongly support that discussion, understand the need for limited onsite surface parking and agree with the desire to reduce parking demand.

In addition, our general concerns are that the proposals were dominantly suburban in design – some more, some less than others, and that the site calls for a strongly urban, even industrial look to some components. This is in match to both the history as a factory site, the east side as the industrial core of the city and the multi functional utility of space many hope can occur here. What people voice repeatedly are concerns that without careful attention, the site will end up looking very pretty but contain dead space after primary work hours and become ‘a very dangerous, pretty place’.

**1. Build Out Density** – Radiance members are concerned about the lower levels of density proposed for the site by other developers. Even if current market research only supports a restricted level of development at this time, we believe it is a mistake to build without a plan for sufficient eventual build out to a more dense scale. We believe the attraction of highest speed Internet cable in the city running along East Washington and the gateway location, as a vibrant neighborhood core will attract users. The plans we see do not seem to allow for growth within the space from the proposed modest densities to more intensive use fitting an industrial urban infill site.

**2. Green Space Issues** – The questions of the committee demonstrate an understanding of the failure in most plans to grasp a balance between vehicular dominated streetscape, safe streets space and a functional and dedicated pedestrian zone where the community ‘in place’ and from adjacent areas can intersect. The Gorman proposal specifically, seems to have no significant pedestrian space that does not have some level of vehicular travel within the business core of block 2504 Winnebago. A portion of the Community By Design concept urban park could work very well if the platforms represent artist built spaces or allow for individuals or groups of artists and

craftspeople to create unique live-work space in innovative small structures (small buildings as sculpture and function).

There is only one place where mature trees survive on the site and those trees must be protected (adjacent and immediately south of traffic circle). The space is now transected by a bike path and provides the only natural shade. It is used as a gathering and picnic grounds and is not big enough for a major building. It should remain undisturbed. Some proposals call for a train station exactly where these three trees exist and that is unacceptable.

3. **Stormwater** – Many good stormwater practices are discussed in the Gorman proposal specifically, and they remain invisible to the site inhabitant. Hiding these features is a suburban approach. An infill urban approach features environmental practices up front as teaching and demonstration tools. Urban residents want to see their systems exposed and evident. Livesley-Stonehouse demonstrates their depth of knowledge with the site planning process by handling stormwater as a feature.

4. **Solar** – Very little attention is paid to solar alignment in most of the designs. Radiance believes that solar alignment and street grid integrity can mesh effectively and we encourage the committee to push for better placement of elements to maximize these benefits. Community By Design has several buildings that align to the north-south pole. Solar as a resource is mentioned in plans, and similar to stormwater issues, the community in an urban infill development at this site will prefer to see these treatments as visible emblems of their values in environment. Therefore, solar panels as visible sun shields and building surface are important for incorporation into final design.

5. **Live-work affordability** – What we come to understand is that most new urbanism plans have included live-work spaces as integral to design but that market forces keep them from being affordable, so live-work does not materialize. Without that level of streetscape and community function, the neighborhood lacks the enlivened character that live-work can bring. Radiance believes it is critical that affordability be built into live-work options. Whether that is better done with a large shell as proposed by Livesley-Stonehouse to be subdivided by individuals or groups, or some smaller repeating shell structure containing basic kitchen-bathroom facility and allow the tenant/owner to complete the interior space is a question for others, but surely that is the direction Union Corners needs to go to ensure affordability in live-work space, and live-work is critical to success. I'm not sure if this is appropriate for our locale but here is a link for container building images and something similar may prove affordably adaptive for this space:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=container+buildings&hl=en&prmd=imvns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=DxBOUJbBBsjq2QXxrIDIAw&sqj=2&ved=0CDMQsAQ&biw=928&bih=545>

6. **Signature Building at East Washington Avenue, Milwaukee and North Street** – This corner calls for a signature building or building face. It is a unique site within the city with the reveal as one approaches the site and as one rounds the corner is

important to sense of place. The stock UW Clinics building style may be a signature look for them but it is much too suburban a look for Union Corners. That said, a dominantly glass envelope see-through concept may work very well in the location. Many in the community strongly welcome UW Clinics interest in the site and they can display their logo prominently toward the East Wash incoming traffic on a better face. Radiance provides one example of a building mass providing a face with major cutouts at street and upper levels to allow integration with street and area activity.

7. **Rail Station Placement** – Please avoid approval of placement where the existing mature trees remain.

8. **Community Gardens** – Community garden features are important to every community and this site provides unique constraints. Several developers show these gardens near the rail line and this is feasible if there is distinct barrier between new constructed gardening soils and existing soils. The community learned through the McGrath proposal process that while most of the site was cleaned, the risk of residual small contamination may persist and no one wants that liability. Furthermore, it is our understanding that the contamination along the rail line could not be removed because of the displacement issues with the subsurface high voltage electrical structures beneath the rail and rail traffic itself.

9. **Roof Gardens** – Radiance asks that all flatter roofed buildings be built with the capacity to hold roof gardens, whether they are installed initially or not. It is important that the capacity to place roof gardens exists for the benefits roof gardens do add to community. Links for some of that material was in presentation docs, Aug 21, 2012.

10. **Gray Water Recycling** - please incorporate gray water recycling system options into buildings for maximum water reclamation to be used for water features and irrigation.

We thank the city staff and committee members for the opportunity to present our ideas within the committee format. We hope our discussion points contribute positively to a successful outcome for Union Corners.

**Radiance, 09102012**