

Local Business Focus Group

University Hill Farms Neighborhood Plan

Attendees:

- Store Manager, Ace Hardware
- Director of Operations, Associated Dentists
- Director of Clinical Operations, Associated Physicians
- Store Manager, Cornblooms
- Manager, Glass Nickel Pizza
- Owner, Glass Nickel Pizza
- President Metcalfe's

1. How long have you worked/owned a business in the Hill Farms neighborhood?

- Associated Physicians has been here for 20 years.
- Glass Nickel Pizza has been here 8 or 9 years.
- I've worked at Ace Hilldale, 3 years and lived in neighborhood for 3 years.
- Ace has been in location for 10 years.
- I've been on location at Associated Dentists for 35 years.
- Glass Nickel Pizza has been located here for 14 years.

2. Do you have plans to expand your business?

- I've considered expanding. But considering our lease, we will be staying in our present location for at least 4 years. I like our landlord and am hoping he will redevelop the area. I considered moving, but the space available was too large.
- Cornblooms has been invited to move to a new section of Hilldale. It will be an expansion and we're still deciding. With the Hilldale renovation, customers will have access to stores from outside. The developer will turn the mall into a "lifestyle" center.
- Associated Physicians has no plans to expand.
- Ace just signed a 5 year lease for its current location. The owner is planning to retire in approximately 5 years. We'll see what happens once he does.
- Associated Dentists will be moving in 35 days to University Avenue, the northwest corner of the neighborhood.

3. Where in Madison do the majority of your customers live?

- **Our clients live all over; but we would like to see more neighborhood clients.** The move could contribute to attracting more local clients. We will have more than 2 times the building space and 60 parking stalls. The City was hesitant to treat our new building as a "retail" business, but we need to be treated as retail in order to get the necessary parking. Our architect, Potter Lawson, wanted to take away some of our signs, but we absolutely need signage. There is

also an issue with lighting in the neighborhood. Our lights need to be off by 11 pm at our new location. The neighborhood wanted lights off by 9 pm. There's a lot to deal with to expand our business.

- Our customers come from all over the city.
- All over, a lot of neighbors, but generally from all over.
- Customers mainly come from Hill Farms or Shorewood.
- We deliver all over, but carry out tends to be from Hill Farms, Crestwood, and Spring Harbor.

4. What should we consider when we prepare the neighborhood plan? What requests have you received from employees or customers?

- **Parking is an issue for us.** The majority of our parking is in the back corner of our site, which is inconvenient for customers. Employees park in the back, but our site gets pretty full because of all of the businesses on site.
- **Parking can be an issue for us too.** I've seen 3 fender benders this summer. I used to share the parking lot with the Manager of the Great Dane – they need more nighttime parking, we need more daytime parking. I'd like to do that again.
- **We have the same issue at the Mall.**
- Associated Dentists and Physicians share employee parking, but I rent from properties on both sides of us. We're parking 30 employees every day, which will change when we move.

5. How important is street visibility to the success of your business?

- We've talked about Midvale having **better visibility**, but you can't really see that we're a clinic. You turn off of Regent and Price. With the huge median down Regent, people can't turn left and get confused when trying to come back around. We get these kinds of comments from patients. Handicap parking is a real issue. We only have two designated spots and need a lot more.
- Glass Nickel looks perfect on map, but smartphones take people to University Avenue when the entrance is actually on Whitney Way. It would be great to have a Whitney Way address. We hear complaints from customers.
- When we opened this location, we really wanted a University address for campus delivery. In terms of carryout, Whitney Way would be more convenient. Signage would help. We don't really have much street signage. **The hill blocks the building.** We need something on the street.
- **We had a similar issue.** I explained it to the board, they gave us two signs.

6. Is there a client base you would like to serve but have not as a result of your location and/or site configuration?

- I'm very happy with our clients. **We have a strong elderly population, students, and professionals. We would like to bring more of that.**

- We always love more business, but space is an issue. Our customer counts are finally back to pre-2008 and we're packed with merchandise. To go any bigger would be shooting ourselves in the foot, considering parking and building space.

7. How are customers getting to your business? Walking, biking, personal vehicle, public transit?

- A lot are taking bikes and bus because of the parking situation.
- Most of our employees live out of town in suburbs, so we get a lot of drivers.
- A lot of ours are walking.
- A lot of people are getting used to walking, riding bikes. If you would ask me 5-10 years ago how it would be today, I would say parking ratios would be 5:1,000 SF of building. Now I would say we're 3.5-4:1,000.
- We can't even live with 4:1,000.
- Our parking ratios are the same, but I'm never going to turn away customer or build parking ramp. Parking ramps can work if done properly, but our customers don't really want to go to a second level. I don't like the loss of visibility on University, but I don't really have much visibility. I would be in favor of losing it to get more parking. New development will do nothing to my parking. Our parking is so infringed. People park in our lot to go to Morgan's. They'll close off the mall so you can't walk through mall, but will be forced to park in a ramp. I think interior of mall has been dead for decades. The exterior has angled parking. Interior malls are dying, people want to park close, move around. Different mall managers have attempted to do things, but interior is as empty as it has ever been. New businesses in the mall will bring more traffic.

8. What should be included in the neighborhood plan that can improve your business' services?

- It would be fantastic if construction could be done at off peak hours.
- Traffic, bring traffic. For example, Target announced they will build 80,000 SF next to us. We called our neighbors, they predicted 10 – 15 % loss in sales. We actually went up 5%. Target brings traffic. The more things you bring to this neighborhood – mixed-use, density, traffic – the better. We're all merchants. The reason we're at Hilldale is because we're all next to each other. We all feed off of each other. The more people at Hilldale and living in the Hill Farms area, the better off we'll all be. People going to Target now used to go to West Towne. They now go to Target and Hilldale.

9. Describe needs, trends and potential opportunities to improve the neighborhood/area.

- Families are important to us. Just reinforcing the familiar nature of this neighborhood is important.

- I think there is a lot of **space in Rennebohm that could be made into community gardens**, prairie. Community Gardens usually support themselves.
- **No big boxes**. I'm not interested in Walmart, wasn't interested in Target, now I am. It depends on the type of development. Mixed-use, density, community gardens, public artwork is important. Rennebohm Park space is somewhat underutilized.
- I lived in the neighborhood and the **park is still underutilized**. I think they could host more events at the band shelter. The butt end of apartments is not the prettiest sight to see. **Community gardens would be great**.
- Bring the **farmer's market to the park**.
- There are three farmer's markets – Downtown, DOT, and Hilldale. Why not join forces? It's like Sentry and Kohls, they want the other to go away. They want to be more neighborhood-centric. They could make a community shelter and create one long farmer's market for all three.

10. Do you tend to think of Garner Park as part of Hill Farms?

- When I think of NYC and its park systems, they will have a park with trees and a burger vendor in the middle. Maybe it works there. If there was a really good eatery in the, anything that draws traffic, it would be great.
- Add a splash pad.
- **I would like to see restaurant/bar in the area**. We miss Irish Waters across the street.

11. Do your businesses have a strong connection or experience with renters?

- Renters, not so much. We have **mostly families because renters are transient**.
- We see hundreds of renters per day.

12. How does your business interact with the senior population?

- Love them.

13. How are seniors getting to your businesses?

- **Shuttle**
- **Walking**
- Hill Farms is unique mix of renters, homeowners, and seniors. **I would like more families, homeowners**, people like that. I don't think a mix of people is detrimental. If you're a renter, you can still go different areas and still go to my store. If I had a wish, would **want more condos and 3 bedroom homes**.
- We're light on children in our practice and have more elderly people working for us.

- In terms of demographics, renters are lower income. Just in terms of spurring the economy, I would lean towards families instead of renters. I love the elderly.
- I agree. I like the mix of people. I would like more of the young professional population for Cornblooms. For example, people who work out at Epic.

14. Are young professionals coming to Hill Farms?

- Mostly at the Weston Place.
- It would be interesting to see who will go into the new apartments. I believe they're three stories high.
- Epic is primarily moving Downtown, they love the Downtown. They come out to Hilldale, but don't live around here.

15. Do you see more families renting in this area?

- We get a lot of families from graduate students, but they're here for residency and our neighborhood is targeted for that, not for people who are staying for long periods.
- My fiancé is a realtor and has sold a lot of houses in this area to young couples. There are a lot of smaller, more affordable homes in these neighborhoods. **The population is slowing turning over.**
- **I don't see families moving into 3 bedroom condos. I can see families moving into a townhouse,** but I don't see them in high rises. I've lived in high rises and have seen families living there. The kids can't wait to get out of there.
- I lived in Sequoya Commons with a small child and it was very hard. The shifting of bringing kids up elevators, climbing stairs is difficult.
- Neighbors don't like kids in condos.
- I now live in a Westmorland in house surrounded by families. There's not much rental there.

16. Do your businesses have any relationship with Van Hise/Hamilton?

- Oh yeah, we donate to a lot to sporting teams, clubs.
- We do a lot I just don't know what it is.
- **It would be nice if businesses could share and if we have a Hill Farms Business Association.** We're thinking that after we move, if we have renters, we can have a meet and greet for local businesses.
- What will happen to old clinic?
- No one has rented it yet.