

**Excerpt from the July 3, 2007 Planning Division Report
on the rezoning for a medical clinic on the southern portion of the Meriter property**

Consistency with the High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan

As noted above, the Planning Division feels that the addition of a small medical office building and clinic at this site can fit within the context of the institutional land use recommendation found in the High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan. Although the proposed clinic is intended to provide medical services to the wider surrounding community, the use is generally compatible with the existing adolescent psychiatric residential treatment facility that would share this large property, and the clinic will probably have limited impacts on surrounding uses due to its relatively small size. However, staff feels that the proposed clinic use may begin to signal shift in the direction of this site from its historical use for relatively low-intensity, specialized medical-institutional uses, first as a substance abuse treatment facility and more recently as an adolescent psychiatric hospital, to more commercially oriented uses such as larger clinics or general medical office buildings.

Planning History

The High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan, adopted in 1997, recommends the Meriter property primarily for Institutional uses, with open space uses recommended along the northern, southern and eastern edges. "Institutional" use was not precisely defined in the neighborhood plan, but it was applied to this property specifically to reflect the existing residential substance abuse treatment facility. (This facility had recently been closed due to changes in the programs for treating substance abuse.) The neighborhood plan also noted that in the event that the property was not needed for the current use, the alternative uses representing the least change would be other similar institutional or institutional/residential uses, such as a school or retreat. Residential uses were also recommended as another possibility. General commercial uses were not recommended, although it was suggested that some types of office uses might be appropriate. These recommendations were made in the context of a large, relatively isolated site with a substantial planned open space corridor on three sides, rather than in the context of future development as an urban activity center.

At the time of adoption in 1997, the High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan also recommended a wide Y-shaped open space area intended to provide an attractive corridor for recreational trail linkages between Dane County's Badger Prairie Park to the south, Madison's Elver Park to the northeast, and the University Ridge Golf Course to the west. This planned corridor, which would also accommodate the Ice Age Trail segment connecting Badger Prairie Park and a planned trail to the west across the golf course, was adjacent to the Meriter on the north, east and south, and included small portions of that property along these edges. As part of an intergovernmental agreement between the City of Madison and the City of Verona, mutual commitments to seek to implement this same permanent open space corridor included the recommended creation of 300-foot landscaped buffer zones along portions of the McKee Road and CTH M frontages.

Due to very significant increases in land prices, it became impossible for the public to acquire the lands located immediately to the east of the Meriter property recommended as part of the Ice Age Trail open space corridor. These lands were subsequently proposed for residential development as part of the Ice Age Falls subdivision, and the High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan was amended in 2001 to change the recommended use for a large portion of these properties to residential, although narrower corridors continued to be recommended as open space to retain the ability to provide the physical trail connections.

When the Meriter adolescent psychiatric hospital was approved by the City in 2003, it was determined that the proposed facility fell under the "hospital and sanitarium" definition as a permitted use in the R4 District, and that was the zoning applied to the site. The proposed psychiatric hospital was also considered consistent with the general parameters of what was considered to be "institutional use" for the purposes of the neighborhood plan. The term "institutional" is not defined in the neighborhood plan, though it is generally understood that the term typically applies to uses such as schools, churches, and certain governmental facilities like a community center or public safety facility. Institutional uses are generally considered to be neither residential nor commercial in character, but in general, hew more closely to residential zoning districts than commercial zones. For example, schools, churches, hospitals and governmental uses like fire or police stations are permitted in the lower density zoning classifications R1 through R4.

Consistency of the Current Medical Clinic Proposal

A medical clinic or office building, however, would first be permitted in the O-1 (Limited Office-Residence) zoning district, which begins the transition from the less intensive residential zoning districts into the increasingly more intensive office, commercial and manufacturing zoning districts. Although allowed in a variety of zoning districts, larger institutional uses are usually identified separately from residential classifications in neighborhood land use plans, in part due to the nature (use, scale, etc.) of those uses, which may have development-related impacts that less intense residential uses do not, such as increased traffic or need for buffering from certain types of uses. In most neighborhood plans, and in the Comprehensive Plan, locations recommended for development with more-intensive uses such as clinics, hospitals, and medical office buildings are generally designated as Employment, Office, Commercial (or sometimes Mixed-Use) districts, rather than as Institutional districts.

The High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan suggests that, in the event that Meriter chose to dispose of the site, the property could also be appropriate for school or retreat uses as alternative uses of the property in keeping with the institutional land use recommendation. The plan also suggests that the location might be appropriate for residential development given the institutional/ residential history of the site. General commercial uses were not recommended, though some office uses may be appropriate. As described below, subsequent staff commentary provided at the time the Urban Service Area was amended indicated that residential uses would probably be the most appropriate alternative use. However, given the limited scope of the O-1 zoning district requested and the somewhat limited scale of the medical office building proposed Planning Division staff generally feel that the discussion of potential office uses as possible alternative uses in the neighborhood plan as adopted provides some basis for this application to proceed, although the proposed clinic might not be the use that would be most consistent with overall objectives of the plan.

Excerpt from the High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan
Adopted December 2, 1997

Institutional Mixed-Use Areas

The Hodgson, Qureshi and Meriter properties have been identified as low density and institutional/mixed-use areas. These three properties including the Raymond Road right-of-way which divides the Hodgson and Qureshi property total about 100 acres. The Meriter property is partially developed with the now vacant New Start Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Facility. Meriter has indicated that they are in the process of evaluating the entire parcel for a variety of uses but do not consider the property to be surplus. In the event that Meriter determines that these facilities and lands are not needed for their use, alternative future uses need to be considered. The alternative use representing the least change would be some other similar type of institutional or institutional/residential use, such as a school or a retreat. Since the site was used for residential purposes, residential development would also be a possibility. General commercial uses are not recommended within this mixed-use area, although some types of office use might be appropriate.

The primary consideration in evaluating potential alternative uses for these properties is the impact that these developments would have upon the use and enjoyment of the recommended Ice Age Trail Junction Area Open Space and Recreational Corridor, upon the joint efforts of the City of Madison and the City of Verona to create and maintain an open space buffer areas along the roadways crossing this corridor and extending through five points, and upon the low density residential uses already established in the vicinity. The Ice Age Trail Junction Area Project Plan was adopted by Dane County in 1993, and the lands recommended in that plan as highest priority for public acquisition for open space uses include the northern portion of the Meriter property itself, as well as the property immediately to the east. The plan also recommends that the remainder of the property be acquired as a secondary priority or that a conservation easement over the property be acquired. The plan recommends that lands only be purchased from willing sellers. The New Start buildings are a relatively low density, low impact development, quite compatible with the proposed open space corridor. Factors that will be important in considering alternative uses include: the density or intensity of development, potential traffic generation (automobile and pedestrian), the visual impact-particularly when viewed from the trails and view points within the open space corridors, and compatibility generally with the recommended residential and open space uses on surrounding lands.

Development within this area must be considered in context with the open space recommendations for the area. Access to development, while discussed in the transportation section of the Plan, will most likely be provided by County Trunk Highway PD and not at the current access along Raymond Road at the five points intersection. Cluster development on these properties can be anticipated since it is recommended that the 300 feet adjacent to County Trunk Highway PD and County Trunk Highway M be maintained as open space and planted with a variety of deciduous and carnivorous trees and shrubs to provide a continuous open space along the Highway PD corridor.

Excerpt from January 9, 2003 letter to Dane County Regional Planning Commission regarding potential more intensive uses on the Meriter Property

The *High Point-Raymond Neighborhood Development Plan* recommends the Meriter property for continued institutional land uses. The proposed residential treatment facility is consistent with this recommendation. Given the site's relatively-isolated location at the edge of the City and its adjacency to the planned Ice Age Trail open space corridor, additional low-intensity institutional uses similar to the currently-proposed facilities would be considered generally consistent with plan recommendations, although Meriter has indicated that they have no current plans for development on this property beyond the new facility presently proposed. In the event that the institutional use were to cease at some future time, the only alternative use likely to be considered appropriate at this location would be relatively low-density residential development. However, any proposal to develop non-institutional uses on this property would require prior approval of an amendment to the neighborhood development plan, and the potential impacts of any change in recommended use would be carefully evaluated at that time.