



Agenda Item #: 7

Project Title: 2007 Roth Street Lot 1 - Alder Referral, Multi-Family, Senior Housing Residential Building. 12th Ald. Dist.

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Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Christian Harper, Shane Bernau, Juliana Bennett and Amanda Arnold

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

At its meeting of November 30, 2022 the Urban Design Commission made an **ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION to the Plan Commission to not approve** a senior housing residential building located at 2007 Roth Street. Registered and speaking in support were Michael Siniscalchi, representing JSD Professional Services; Marc Ott, representing Lincoln Avenue Capital; Jamie Cali, representing JLA Architects; and Kevin McDonnell, representing Lincoln Avenue Capital. Registered in support and available to answer questions were Melissa Huggins, Kyle Brassler, and Matt Haase representing Lincoln Avenue Capital. Registered in opposition but not wishing to speak were Rebecca Leidner, Kay Hagerty and Kristin Chambers. Registered in opposition and available to answer questions was Joan Bell-Kaul.

Updates to the plans reflect input from neighborhood associations, stakeholders and other groups. The streetscape of this development is proposing an informal crushed granite pathway on the northwest corner of the building, ornamental trees along that pathway with bench seating opportunities for residents and the public, situated to overlook the conservancy across the street. Ornamental trees and a prairie seed mix have been added along Coolidge Street to bring that conservancy into the development. In working through the design process with Friends of Hartmeyer it became clear that building placement should be slightly off to give the conservancy room to breathe. They have added walk-up entries to first floor units where appropriate to further enhance that pedestrian feel. The unique shape of building is due to the need to take in all the programming parameters, maximize the affordable housing count, provide a porte cochere drop-off for the senior tenants, and add further detail to the private third floor courtyards. Parking is all above grade due to the soil conditions leftover from Oscar Mayer. More vibrant color has been added to the material palette, fiber cement accents and different datum lines. They are proposing a mural art installation on the parking wall that faces the former factory.

The Commission discussed the following:

- The overall siting and orientation doesn't really read as an extension to the natural preserve area, it seems really suburban. The neighborhood plan talks about street-oriented, pedestrian-friendly, aesthetically pleasing street design, well linked pedestrian pathways, creating a sense of place, traditional neighborhood elements, I don't really see any of that. This is TR zoning, Traditional Residential and seems really institutional to me. This is a huge missed opportunity. This pretty much misses the mark.
- I like this much more than the version we saw last time, thank you for adding some elements of color; that goes a long way. I'm really appreciative of these courtyard areas, though I could easily see these facing the other way; you may be able to see Lake Mendota if it opened in the other direction. It's nice to see something like this with large drifts of plants that are native and attractive to pollinators. I see that as a nod to what's across the street with the wetlands, which I hope will be developed in a nice way that makes it more accessible to people. You

mentioned this railroad turning into a bike path; I deal with trains on the various crossings in this part of the city all the time, I never see trains on this stretch here at all. Is it currently in use?

- I read most of the official report that considers this area to pass muster from various environmental standpoints, but if any major dispersing of the soil was to happen there would have to be oversight by DNR and DHS. Is building on a slab going to avoid that problem?
 - The site has the trifecta of things to work through: contaminated soils that are at different levels, groundwater at a certain level, and compaction soil. From an economic standpoint putting a full basement in would be so costly. All the soil will be remediated and monitored.
- I see the institutional look, it's a big building without a lot of street level activation. As far as materials it seems very haphazard with the application and the change of one to another. For example on P. A208, too many materials and how they are applied, but to the right of the porte cochere is vertical siding, is there a way to establish a rhythm that follows-through rather than changing every time you turn a corner? Having the vertical siding above your datum line above the fifth floor, you're not providing setbacks but trying to replicate the feel of one. Maybe bringing that brick above the porte cochere all the way up, trying to get a rhythm by removing a material or finding a more consistent pattern. It's a little messy looking and confusing right now.
- You need as many canopy trees as you can get on the site. It would help soften and be authentic in bringing that park-like setting over.
- I concur with the thought that this is a bit out of context. It stands out in neighborhood plan: new infill development should incorporate traditional neighborhood design elements. This is a pretty funky area in my opinion and should reflect the existing architecture in the area.
- Is there a reason why we don't have ground level entrances for street activation?
 - We did add them where it made sense for the internal units. The site is flat and it's a slab on grade building, it doesn't have walk-ups with stairs.
- I have to agree, this is better than what we saw before. We could mess around with the colors more, I do like that it's kind of broken up a bit. It's on the right track, it's going to be a lot better than what is currently there.
- In the courtyards, is there anything besides planting and walkways? The southern one terminates and dead-ends; you're up high, what do you do in those courtyards and how does it benefit the tenants? I like the species selected but is anything else happening in there? I could see residents getting value with easy access to outdoor space like a walking circuit.
 - The north courtyard is active for walking, there are tables and chairs, seats, a smoke bush for verticality, a game area. The southern courtyard is labeled as a relaxing courtyard with tables and chairs, mostly socializing.
- I would say the northern one is more successful. The southern one wants something anchoring that end, some sort of destination, it doesn't have the benefit of the plantings to move through. Could be fine tuning to that southern courtyard.
- Overall I agree that this feels very suburban, especially when reading some of the previous planning documents for this site, envisioning something that really addresses the street, more homey-like than an apartment with just a single drop-off main entry access. That's only emphasized by what's across the street becoming more of an amenity to these residents. Something still doesn't feel quite right there. The way the courtyards fit with the massing of the building are beneficial to the residents, my concern is still the western façade. If the porte cochere weren't so central or there was any other presentation of the building on the street.
- It is a blank slate, and that's where I think it's a huge missed opportunity, considering the zoning, the neighborhood plan and the Oscar Mayer Plan recommendations. I don't think this will come back to us.
- (Secretary) Correct, an advisory recommendation could include conditions that the UDC would like to see, including site design and modifications to the application of exterior materials.
- Why did it get kicked back to us? It was a special request from the Alder? I don't recall seeing any specific concerns.
- (Secretary) Based on initial conversations with Alder Abbas, his main concerns were the architecture and siting. But I don't know where he is sitting with the current plans.
- I'm still trying to understand your comment on a missed opportunity.

- It's a blank slate, we see a number of large apartment buildings connected by parking lots and internal streets. In my mind, they have better creation of a sense of place, better linked pathway connections, this is very institutional, but the adopted plans talk about street oriented pedestrian friendly design, traditional neighborhood design elements, maximizing street coverage, this should go back to the drawing board. It's more fundamental than saying "that window or that color," it's a design direction.
- Could we move to approve with the recommendation that they provide a more activated streetscape that meets the neighborhood plan?
- The approval and some of the things you mentioned may be difficult unless we specifically go unit by unit, street by street saying exactly what we want in terms of materials, design elements, we really can't do that. We're here to review the project as designed. It's the recommendation that would best help the Plan Commission understand the recommendation of this Commission.
- Can the motion be a motion to advise that the UDC has the following concerns?
- (Secretary) Ultimately the UDC is making an advisory recommendation to the Plan Commission to either approve or deny the application based on comments or conditions that would make it better. Any sort of findings should be based in those background documents.
- (Firchow) There is some flexibility in how to structure the motion. It could be a list of comments and recommendations, not necessarily an initial/final as you would on other projects.

A motion was made by Bennett to recommend approval, seconded by Harper.

Discussion on the motion:

- This could have been something a lot more dynamic, but I can't pretend to know all the ins and outs of what's involved in putting together a project like this. While it's possible to meld the goals of having those types of developments with exceptional design, I think it's a lot harder than it would be if these were just regular market projects. I don't see any scenario where this is going to be started over again. It's a decent looking project, reasonably attractive and well put-together. It would be fine to point out some of the finessing of some of the design and material elements, a few landscaping details, this half of the project should probably move forward at this point.
- I'll make a friendly amendment to the motion to approve with the caveat that the designers address ways to respond to the adopted neighborhood plans, specifically providing more design context to be responsive to the surroundings.
- Amendment accepted.
- (Secretary) That doesn't provide a lot of direction. The neighborhood plans talk a lot about street activation, traditional design elements. Keep in mind it's a recommendation to the Plan Commission to approve and should provide as much clarity as possible.
- This is a much needed development, in a perfect world it would be great to have a more activated street design, and I hope this discussion spurs the designer to look at meeting more of those neighborhood elements. I don't want to tell them to quit and go back to the drawing board.
- I'm struggling with this being the first of many developments starting to fill in the Oscar Mayer area. We're compromising the neighborhood plan out of the gate, some of this has to do with the bottom line of number of apartments on a lot with so many cars and geo tech restrictions. Part of it is also what we've put in there as far as our height limit, the density, I don't know how you would achieve all of what we're saying and still have that density. At the same time I've seen very creative affordable housing that is much more urban feeling, this feels like it could be out at East Towne. The design team is trying to serve a lot of masters here and still make a profit. If we want this kind of density this is the kind of development we're going to get.
- The plans came first, it's not as though the project was there and the plans were imposed upon them. My comments were based on what the City and citizens thought should happen there.
- I agree, it doesn't have that feel. Maybe that's the preference for senior living, one controlled entrance, it's safe.

- (Firchow) Zoning has been established as TR-U2, which is a relatively intense district. The question isn't necessarily of density.
- There are traditional neighborhoods that have high density, it's a matter of maximizing the street façade coverage and being pedestrian friendly. Those are not necessarily inconsistent with the underlying zoning.
- I'll rephrase the amendment to state motion to approve with the suggestion that the following design changes be explored: multiple entrances be included on the building, manipulation of the façade and different building materials more responsive to the existing surroundings.

The motion failed on a vote of (3-2) with Bennett, Arnold and Harper voting yes; Braun-Oddo and Bernau voting no; and Goodhart non-voting. Four votes are needed to approve.

Discussion continued as follows:

- An advisory recommendation could be such that you request that the Plan Commission refer it back to UDC with the following conditions. It would be up to them to do that.
- (Secretary) If that's the approach, ultimately the Commission needs to offer comments or conditions that need to be addressed, including a recommendation for referral back, which the Plan Commission may not take that up so it may not come back.

Action

On a motion by Bernau, seconded by Braun-Oddo, the Urban Design Commission made an **ADVISORY RECOMMENDATION to not approve** the development as proposed with the following comments:

- That the Plan Commission request a redesign that responds to the neighborhood plans and includes an architectural design that carries forward traditional neighborhood design principles, and a site plan that responds to street activation in a more urban format and that is less suburban.
- Traditional neighborhood design is architecturally more of a pedestrian scale at the ground level in materiality, and also mass and void articulation that activates the street, specifically along Huxley.

The motion was passed on a vote of (4-1) with Bernau, Braun-Oddo, Arnold and Harper voting yes; Bennett voting no; and Goodhart non-voting.