

AGENDA # 4

City of Madison, Wisconsin

REPORT OF: URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

PRESENTED: November 17, 2021

TITLE: Planning Division staff update on the
Greater East Towne Area Plan (66918)

REFERRED:

REREFERRED:

REPORTED BACK:

AUTHOR: Kevin Firchow, Acting Secretary

ADOPTED:

POF:

DATED: November 17, 2021

ID NUMBER:

Members present were: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Christian Harper, Tom DeChant, Rafeeq Asad, Christian Albouras, Craig Weisensel, Shane Bernau and Russell Knudson.

SUMMARY:

At its meeting of November 17, 2021, the Urban Design Commission **RECEIVED AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** on the Greater East Towne Area Plan. Bill Fruhling, Principal Planner gave an overview of the process and draft plan.

The plan boundaries are Mendota Street on the west, both sides of E. Washington Avenue, to the Interstate and down through Starkweather Creek, over 785 acres in total. An overlay on the Isthmus shows the scale of the development area and gives context to the plan. The Comprehensive Plan land use map for this area calls for regional mixed-use (mall), general commercial (big box type stores), and provides a framework for whatever comes next with the decrease in auto-oriented development. The area is seen as a collection of places focused on mobility, getting through and to the site by walking, car, bike, transit, while also connecting it and weaving it into the pattern of the neighborhood and surrounding context. Making this a place for everybody with community wealth building is a core principle, while also centering nature, sustainability, social/economic/environmental resiliency. East Towne has the Starkweather Creek watershed natural area that provides a lot of amenity. This area is going to change, and while we are not quite sure of the pace of it, we want a flexible plan to respond to changes in those different areas. There is a fair amount of question about what will happen to the office demand in the future; this plan provides a good framework but also provides enough flexibility to adapt to those changes as time goes on. Staff is projecting full build-out will take several decades, and anticipate approximately 9,500 dwelling units or about 16,000 people. They are proposing taller building heights, particularly along the Interstate, and taller buildings closer to E. Washington Avenue. UDD No. 5 was created in 1995, and will need broader boundaries when staff moves to update the district. Staff anticipates this item being introduced to the Common Council on January 4, 2022 where it will be referred to various boards, commissions and committees, with an anticipated adoption in February 2022.

The Commission discussed the following:

- What are the steps to incorporate this plan into the Zoning Code?

- More recent plans have been asked to proactively rezone property. A proposed map in the plan would show what recommended zoning changes would be to implement this plan. Officially mapping some streets reserves it and prohibits any building permit from being issued, currently there are three short segments of streets that will be critical for other things to happen as this moves forward.
- Heights shown are maximum, are you suggesting minimum heights?
 - Minimum of two-stories across the board in the guidelines. There is a recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan that there be a viewshed study done to preserve key views of the Capitol, skyline and lakes. We took a look at that, the mall is in a lower area with a ridge along the Interstate, you would still have views from those areas. We looked beyond the Interstate from publicly accessible points (streets, parks, open spaces), that informed our maximum building heights. We concluded because of existing street patterns and development, the areas that exist or are planned publicly accessible do not have a view of the Capitol now, so building heights were not impeding those.
- High Crossing Boulevard, does the plan see that as an important connection to the other side of the Interstate? Pedestrian and bicycle experience there could be improved.
 - One of the recommendations is for a comprehensive study of E. Washington Avenue, there's a lot that can be improved aesthetically, functionally, safety-wise, but there will be a bigger study in the future that will address some of those streets that are part of that system.
- Bike connectivity, how does that correlate to the Starkweather strip? Has CBL been contacted, any input or reaction to this?
 - Yes there's a map in the plan with a number of paths proposed into the space.
 - CBL has been involved in this plan, they're overriding comments had to do with the concern that this will send a message that the mall is going out of business, which would not help them attract tenants. They acknowledge that retail is evolving and want to maintain maximum flexibility.
- Access to nature, walking trails, I like the urban plaza and how it connects to Starkweather to the south. Encourage the plan depict some of those things around Starkweather and not just about connecting to it, also about movement along it. Regarding the views, I seem to recall you catch glimpses of the Capitol from the Interstate, I don't know how that dovetails with the height map. I've always found that to be compelling, I would want to make sure that we're planning around that and considering that.
- Lots of wonderful ideas, appreciate the detail you went into of walking through the various elements. Enjoy the mission or vision of trying to define the place and what the experience will be. Place could be more plural than singular; developments taking decades to come, does the place wait for that to come or is there an opportunity to create a secondary east-west or perpendicular approach where the place could start to build-out in those areas and the mall could be the destination until the urban plaza is built. More greenspace for outdoor eating.
- UDD No. 5 guidelines have provisions for added earth berms to protect residential areas from noise. Does this plan have any considerations for that?
 - This plan does not. Since that UDD was established there are now State requirements about buffering noise from Interstates. It also takes into account topography and elevation of the noise source.

ACTION:

Since this was an **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION** no formal action was taken by the Commission.