

From: Donna Neal [mailto:neal.donna@mbco.com]
Sent: Monday, February 11, 2008 11:42 AM
To: planadmin
Cc: historicpreservation
Subject: Downer DPD 070963
Importance: High

I urge the City Plan Commission to reject or at minimum defer a decision on the proposed change in zoning from GPD to DPD on the basis that this is a major modification to the GPD and by no means constitutes a "minor modification", and open the process to serious and thoughtful public comment.

The proposal represents a substantially different plan than approved by the GPD:

- A seven-story hotel on Downer Avenue – there was NO new construction on Downer Avenue in this block in the GPD. This is huge structure for this location, and will dramatically change the nature of the historic commercial district. It should not be entertained lightly, nor without substantial public and neighborhood comment.
- Demolition of an historic building in a City Historic Commercial District – NEVER discussed in any public forum, certainly not part of the GPD. At minimum, the façade of the building is certainly worth keeping; it's in at least as good condition as the rest of the building. But the larger issue is that the proposed building is completely
- 2 towers not 1 – an 11-story hotel/condo complex in the GPD on Stowell/Webster; this proposal has an 11-story condo complex with townhouses on that space, PLUS a 7-story hotel on Downer Avenue itself.
- At the last public meeting on December 18th, 2007 there was no mention of a hotel, nor was there any plan to build new construction east of the alley.
- When the GPD was approved in February 2007, new construction encroached across the alley, but NEVER extended to HISTORIC Downer Avenue.

Based on the divergence of the current proposal from the GPD, it is clear that there is still room for modification of plans. Citizens and relevant organizations should be consulted and input solicited. For instance, the proposal should receive input from the Water Tower Landmark Trust. WTLT members, not just the board, deserve to have a chance to discuss the plans with the developer before the plans receive final approval by the CPC.

I would also respectfully suggest that the City Plan Commission take advantage of the time provided by deferring this decision to assure itself of the financial viability of the developer as well as the quality and aesthetics of the proposed construction.

- Joel Lee has testified in court that New Land Enterprises was not able to secure financing for the \$5MM parking structure on the corner of Downer and Belleview without his firm's involvement. This complex represents substantially more investment, in times when financing is even more difficult to access. A BIG watchout for the City and the neighborhood.
- The parking structure currently under construction at Downer/Belleview is an obvious statement of the quality and aesthetics we can expect of the developer without appropriate diligence from the CPC and other City agencies. It is clearly being done at least cost possible and is entirely out-of-keeping with other structures in the Historic District. Even construction workers on site are volunteering apologies to the neighbors for the unsuitability of the building. Let us not make the same mistake with the rest of the DPD.

I would suggest the Commission to separate the Mulkern Building renovation from the remainder of the development (hotel, condos, townhomes) if it is important to move ahead with that aspect of the development, so that the appropriate amount of time can be made for public engagement on the rest of the proposal, which I expect will be much more controversial, given its dramatic divergence from the GPD.

Respectfully,

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