

Summary of Argument in Support of Merchants and Neighbors Who Want the Current Zoning for Downer Avenue Enforced & the Preservation of the Existing Downer Surface Parking Lots

Public discussion of the proposed development plan has been limited to the controversy over the 11 story condo. The numerous public meetings cited by the proponents have focused on how the 11 story condo will affect the nature of the residential community surrounding the Downer Avenue business district. There is compelling merit to the argument that the 11 story condo will have adverse and possibly devastating effects on the neighborhood.

But an even stronger argument against the plan is the detrimental consequences that the plan will have for the street level retail merchants. Those merchants will be adversely affected by two aspects of the plan that were not publicly announced until December 18, 2006 during a public meeting at which the alderman announced that no changes would be considered for the plan. The alderman structured that meeting so that the opposition was limited to 15 minutes.

The aspects of the plan that will adversely affect the merchants are: 1) the elimination of the open, visible, easily accessible, inexpensive, and safe surface parking that is now available in the City owned and controlled lot at Downer and Bellevue, and 2) the addition of a medical surgery facility in a building that will provide no patient parking.

Now that the merchants understand the true nature of the plan, they are speaking out in opposition. Letters objecting to the sale and elimination of the Downer and Bellevue parking lot have already been sent to the Mayor on behalf of Sendik's, Downer Hardware, the Chancery, The Original Pancake House, and the Bellevue Barber Shop. More such letters are expected.

The loss of the open, visible, easily accessible, inexpensive, and safe surface parking will put the street level merchants at a major competitive disadvantage with other nearby shopping districts, particularly Oakland Avenue in Shorewood. The merchant=s letters to the Mayor make compelling arguments on this point.

The merchants are also concerned that a medical surgery center (what will effectively be a mini-hospital) is incompatible with their neighborhood service oriented businesses. Their concern in this regard is supported by the zoning code that does not permit a medical facility in this business district unless a special use exception is granted. There is no reason why the general prohibition against a medical facility should be relaxed in this case. Rather, the fact that the developer is eliminating the existing parking spaces that now exist on the entire second floor of the medical facility building is a stronger reason why the prohibition against medical facilities should be enforced. Medical facilities need large amounts of long term convenient parking for their patients. (Note the large parking structures at other medical facilities). That parking is usually in structures that are incorporated into or adjacent to the medical facility. Here the developer is eliminating parking that is currently available in the medical facility building.

The letter from Downer Hardware to the Mayor provides a good statement of the problems that will be created by changing the Downer Business District into a medical complex.

The City thoughtfully created the zoning plan for Downer. There is no reason to discard that zoning plan.

Major changes were quickly made in this development plan last month. The plan needs to be sent back for even more changes that address the concerns of the merchants. These concerns have not even discussed until now.

It is not only the neighbors who need to be saved from this plan. The street level retail merchants also need protection.