

March 2, 2012 Newsletter Article on 800 block redevelopment

A [new proposal](#) for a Metcalfe's grocery store on the old Don Miller car lot on East Washington Avenue is generating excitement in the neighborhood. And it is putting pressure on the ULI development company to either get something similar going or step aside. Currently, ULI is first in line to buy that property from the city. They were awarded the right to develop the entire 800 block by way of a controversial closed door RFP process last fall.

ULI is planning a 5-year phased development. Their focus has been commercial buildings that would lure high tech employers to the area. The prospect of high paying jobs is the reason they were selected because the city has been putting forth a lot of effort to create an employment center in that area. ULI has indicated they have two high tech firms on board now along with a retail tenant. They will be using the next couple of weeks to beef up their plan in order to ward off another RFP.


In an odd twist, the Metcalfe family back in December approached ULI about building them a store. When ULI rebuffed their proposal, the Metcalfe brothers brought in their own development firm, CD Smith, to put forth their own full block proposal. Now it is the Metcalfe family rebuffing ULI's attempt to bring them back to the table. The Metcalfe proposal includes an urban vegetable farm on the roof of a 60,000 sq. foot grocery store envisioned for the corner of N. Livingston and East Washington Avenue.

The city must decide if it should respect the process that put ULI first in line, or reopen the RFP to allow the Metcalfe's and others a chance to submit new plans. Many in the neighborhood were upset over the nature of the original RFP process, saying it was a secretive process in which the neighborhood was shut out.

And there is a third developer with yet another proposal. Developer Sandy DeWitt would like to build a European style hotel across from Breese Stevens Field. His proposal is for a 100 room, community oriented hotel with a restaurant and bar, public meeting spaces, and a Japanese garden under a glass atrium. He said there would be a wide range of room styles from hostel type dormitories with community kitchens all the way up to higher end suites. He believes the hotel, which he would own and calls The LaFollette, would fill a growing niche of urban hotels that cater to the creative class looking for something different.

Meanwhile, on the [700 block](#) of East Washington, the mixed use project proposed by Otto Gebhardt is winding its way through the city approval process. That development includes a 12-story mixed use tower with 200 apartments and a community garden on East Mifflin. Gebhardt is hoping to break ground in June.

lafollette_hotel.jpg



The LaFollette Hotel as proposed by developer Sandy DeWitt on the corner of East Washington and North Paterson. Features include a “slow food” restaurant and coffee bistro, meeting and entertainment venues, rooftop terrace with solar panels, kitchen garden and water management facility; Japanese garden between towers, and two ground-level seating areas, one with fire pit and water fountain to compliment Breese Stevens field across the street