

Notes
TLNA Steering Committee Meeting for
McGrath Property Group Proposal for the 1200 N Block of E. Washington
5 Jan. 2015, Constellation Community Room, 10 N. Livingston

Attendees:

TLNA and Neighbors: Patrick Heck, Zach Simmons, Nick Balazs, Adam Schesch, Karen Banaszak, Jeff Reinke, Pat Kelly, Patty Prime, Kathy Nissley, Rebecca Cuningham, Margaret Bergamini, Christine Knorr, Karla Handel
Elected Officials: Alder Ledell Zellers
Development Team: Lance McGrath, Mike Metzger, Joseph Lee

Patrick Heck reiterated the charge of the Steering Committee – to work in a collaborative process with all stakeholders, expressing the hopes and wishes of the neighborhood, evaluating positive and negative aspects of the development proposal and eventually issuing committee findings to the full TLNA Council. Typically, the TLNA Council will then vote on a level of support for the proposal - support, support with conditions, remain neutral or oppose.

Lance McGrath confirmed that they are still planning on this schedule.

- a. Formal Submittal to City – 2/4
- b. Urban Design Commission – 3/25
- c. Plan Commission – 4/6
- d. Start construction – approximately 5/1
- e. Open – approximately 5/2016

Lance and Joseph Lee, project architect, presented proposal updates and new slides since the 9 Dec. neighborhood meeting.

- The proposal is similar to what was presented earlier, i.e, 70-80 apartments (the presented renderings were for 74 apartments), with a partially underground parking level underneath. They are focusing on the 4-floor option that retains about the front third the Patriot Glass Quonset hut. That Quonset hut space that remains would be approximately 4,000 square ft. They prefer this option.
- In the presented drawings, the hatched area is the portion of the underground parking that is not covered by the building. It is meant to be patio space about 5' above grade.
- There would be 15' setback on E. Washington, which is required. Along N. Few, there would an accessible ramp to a small plaza area at the corner of E. Washington and N. Few where the entrance to the commercial space would be. Access to the first floor will be up the ramp or up about 8 or 9 stairs.
- Main entrance to the apartment building would be mid-block on N. Few, also accessed up stairs or the ramp.
- The parking level would have 70-75 parking stalls with the entrance as previously depicted – just off N. Few.
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Patrick Heck distributed a page of summarizing neighbors' comments that were received at the Dec. 9 neighborhood meeting and/or received via email. Two other pages were distributed:

- (1) a letter sent by a group of neighbors who live in proximity to the proposal site, detailing

their concerns and

(2) points from an email from John Feith, who lives on E. Mifflin.

Both those items were earlier distributed to the committee via email and can be found in a separate document on the proposal website. The Feith email summarized various applicable policies/ordinances that will possibly need Conditional Use or otherwise need to be addressed.

The primary Feith point that was discussed was the need to modify Urban Design District-8 if the 4-story option moves forward. UDD-8 currently has a maximum of 3 stories. The Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Plan agrees with that 3-story maximum, whereas the city zoning ordinances for that portion of the 1200 block (Commercial Corridor-Transitional District) allow up to 5 stories. Alder Ledell Zellers confirmed that this would need to be modified by Common Council. The disagreement between the UDD-8 and the other documents will need to be rectified in the process.

Adam Shesch, who owns a 4-unit apartment building directly behind the proposed building, asked how much of the parking would be below grade. Joe Lee said that the water table will determine that, but he estimates 4-5 feet of the parking level will need to be above grade. Adam asked how many feet tall is each story? Joe said ceilings will be 10' on the first floor and 9' for the upper floors. Lance adds that including between floor distances, he estimates 50' to 55' above grade with his best guess being 52'. Adam asked if there will be a parapet adding even more height? Lance said yes, but it will add zero to several feet, depending on the final design. Adam asked if a 3-story option were to be chosen, how tall that would be. Lance said probably about 45'.

Lance said that the setback from the E. Mifflin property lines to the building would be the city-required 20' but that they are going beyond that by adding 16' more for a total setback of 36' to the 1st floor of the building.

The patio spaces above the parking level are meant to be active space. Some might be private, accessible from a particular unit only, other areas might be open to the apartment community, e.g., the larger space in the middle.

Karan Banaszak from Curtis Court asked about bike storage. Joe Lee said they are required to have dedicated parking in lower level and will have at the city-required amount that is determined by a formula. They will also try to place racks outside for visitors. Mike Metzger of the McGrath Property Group, added that their 640 West building (at 640 W. Wilson) has a dedicated bike room and they will explore adding that to this building. Bike parking will be close to the entrance/exit and easily accessible.

Adam Shesch brought up the parking issue saying that he disagrees that one parking spot per apartment will be sufficient. He doesn't believe that many tenants will be carless and wonders what percentage will be biking or using all the time. He also thinks that any restaurant in the Quonset hut will create parking needs that are not being addressed. Zach Simmons, who lives on N. Few, says his roommate, who works at Epic, doesn't have a car – he bikes all the way to Epic when weather permits and then buses from the square. Mike Metzger said that McGrath apartments are seeing fewer cars amongst their tenants.

Rebecah Cunningham, who lives on E. Mifflin, said that neighbors are interested in units being

larger therefore attracting more families. Lance said that they expect a diverse mix of tenants. He added that currently they want to have four 3-bedrooms and a mixture of 2- and 1- bedrooms as well as studios for the rest. It was reiterated that the building will be rentals only, i.e., no owner-occupied.

Margaret Bergamini, who lives on N. Few, said that she's on the city parking/transit commission. She described the express buses that run from the square to Epic. She added that Epic will finance even more express buses to Epic if Metro can agree to do it. She noted that many further-out employment areas are seeing bikers from downtown, e.g., to Middleton Industrial Park, so she believes that the trend is towards fewer cars.

Joe Lee then described the architectural features of the latest renderings – he thinks there has been some big advancement. The design uses warehouse/loft styles with masonry and large windows. There is large-scale brick on the bottom, from the ground through the first floor. The upper floors are brick, with some durable (and less expensive) fiber cement board on stepped back portions of the top floor. The balcony walls may also use non-brick. Jeff Reinke, who lives on Curtis Court, asked what the back and east sides would be. They will be similar to the other sides, i.e., brick with the stepbacked portions non-brick.

Pat Kelly asked if the corner units at N. Few and E. Washington are the – bdrm units. Joe said that those are currently 2-bdrm units, but it those locations could change.

TLNA President Patty Prime, who lives on Sidney Street, asked if all units will have outdoor space. Joe Lee said yes –they would have either balcony or patio space.

Joe Lee said that the above ground portion of the parking level also provides good vertical separation between the street/sidewalk and first floor units. The vertical separation provides better privacy and safety – its function is .not just for parking

Jeff Reinke asked if they did the 4th Ward Lofts condos on W. Main St. Lance said yes. Jeff said he likes the features and architectural touches there and encourages them to do something similar. Lance agreed.

Patty Prime asked if the retail space rent would be competitive with commercial rents near or on the square. Lance said no, they would be much cheaper. Patty says an office might work in the space. Lance agreed, saying their office might move there, but it al depends on the square footage they end up with in that space. They recognize that for retail it might be tough because of the entrance not being street-level. They are open to the neighborhood's suggestions for commercial space occupants.

Alder Zellers asked what they would use for HVAC given that Magic-Paks are usually looked down upon by UDC. Lance said regular split furnace and a/c, no Magic-Paks. Ledell also asked if they would have an exhaust fan for the parking level. Lance said yes, that would be city-required. They don't yet know where that will be located or how large it will be – the size is code-driven. The fan noise can be a problem, so they will need to be attentive to that.

Karen Banaszak asked where the garbage dumpsters will be located. Lance said they will be inside the parking level near the entrance. They will be manually pulled up the ramp to the exterior to be emptied, so the actual dumping will take place near the parking level entrance outside.

The project currently has 1150 sq ft for first floor commercial space. The apartments drive the financials so they will be flexible on finding a business is flexible. Jeff Reinke asked if would be only one business. Lance said it all depends on how the project evolves – right now the commercial space is just an empty box.

Patrick Heck asked if the first floor of the back would be the large stone bricks as depicted for the Few and Washington first floors. Yes, that is their current plan. It is not likely to be brick.

Pat Kelly asked if there will be an onsite apartment/building manager. No – they don't have onsite managers at their other properties, which are not much different in size from this proposal, and have no problems. Pat asked if they will continue to own the property. Lance said yes, they are long-term investments. He does bring in investors, but he tells them it not a project that will be flipped. Hopefully, the principal investor appreciates this. Pat asked if there is no onsite manager, what happens when there is a problem. Lance said Mike Metzger, who manages all their properties could be called. He also said that police could be called. They haven't had any noise complaints in 5-6 years – they do not have that type of tenant. Neighbors tend to know each other. Lance said that in his experience, condos were worse for complaints. Pat said that police won't come, so neighbors would like a direct line – Mike Metzger agrees – he said they can phone him anytime.

Karen Banaszak asked why anyone would want to live in an apartment that faces E. Washington. Lance said that if on higher floors, the view will be good. Rebecca Cuningham said that their porch sees a lot of sun, so she appreciates facing that direction, but she wouldn't want to live on E. Washington. Mike Metzger said that at Settlement Place, their property on Sout Blair, is less than 8' from the road (which has a lot of E. Washington's traffic on it) and tenants seem used to it.

The images of a possible replacement for the front of the Patriot Glass Quonset hut was shown – an entirely glass front. Nick Balazs, who lives on N. Ingersol asked who the tenant of that building would be. Lance thinks they will come up with the concept for the space, but if they found a tenant early in the process, that tenant could influence the design. The billboard depicted in the image is currently there, but it should disappear soon. That billboard and another on the property have leases that expire in April 2015. Adam Shesch said that he hears everyone talk about a small restaurant patronized by local people but the Sunday WI State Journal article talked about a tavern – he wants to know which it is. Regardless, would they accept a limitation of beer/wine only with a closing time of 10pm? Lance says they don't want a bar-time crowd, so they are open to discuss this. They also don't want their tenants disrupted, so don't want a late-night establishment.

Adam added he wants to know how they will handle the parking problem that he thinks the restaurant will create.

Rebecca Cuningham talked about her impression of the opinions of her 1200 block of E Mifflin neighbors. Some weren't as attached to the Quonset hut, so were wondering what the 3-story (which she said is actually 3.5 floors due to parking level) would look like? Would there be more green area? Lance said that if they remove the 4th floor, it will move to the area where the Quonset Hut would be sited and it extend further back towards the property line.

Pat Kelly asked if they could make the Quonset hut area an even taller building, thereby keeping

the remainder of the structure lower. Lance said he can't build more than 4 floors because the building techniques change, hence cost go up too much. There is a 35-50% construction premium on going above 4 stories. Pat agreed that the 3-story version really is 3.5 and the 4-story version is really 4.5. She prefers taller on E. Wash and lower in the back – the current proposal is just too big.

Jeff Reinke said he appreciates saving the Quonset hut, but prefers the 3-story option even if the building footprint is bigger. Lance said that saving the Quonset hut is good from streetscape perspective – it is creative, unique and will catch peoples' attention. It will also provide a visual gap if future development occurs on the property next door. The City will likely sell the property next door, so the gap would breakup the streetscape.

Adam Shesch said that he still disagrees that most of the restaurant patrons will arrive by foot or bike. They will take the E. Mifflin parking spaces that already hard to get. They will be from places outside the neighborhood and drive. He would rather have a breakfast/lunch/coffee-shop that extends into the building. Lance said that they prefer the 4-story version. Pat Kelly asked why it has to be either or. Lance answered that it is a matter of economics. They need a certain amount of apartment square footage to make it work.

Alder Zellers asked how many people would be in the restaurant. Lance said it would not likely be a full service restaurant, but it is all TBD. Nick Balazs asked about the condition of the Quonset hut. Lance described its history and said it is basic, but interesting. There are some water problems in the roof where the two sections meet, but they can fix that.

Margaret Bergamini said that poor maintenance of Trachte buildings, which are similar to the Quonset hut, means that at least some of them will be torn down. She has been in the Patriot Glass building and knows there are maintenance issues, but is savable and has potential to be a unique space. She likes the idea of saving it.

Joe Lee and Lance McGrath presented their shadow studies. They have images for the summer and winter solstices at noon. All images show two versions – one for the “proposed setback” and one for the “allowed setback”. The proposed applies to their current proposal whereas the allowed depict shadows if the minimum setback dictated by the City. Rebecca Cuninghame asked if they could make images for later in the day when shadows would be longer. They agreed to produce those and send them to the Committee.

Adam Shesch said he was concerned about how big the building be when looming over his building's backyard. He wants to know what it will look like from that perspective, his back door. what would it look like? Patrick Heck asked if they could produce massing studies from those visual perspectives. Others asked about the perspective from the corner of N. Few and E. Mifflin. Joe Lee agreed to produce those and send them to the Committee.

Pat Kelly reiterated that she feels it is going to feel massive and out of proportion to the neighborhood. She likes the Quonset hut, but doesn't want a tall building. The rest of the block along E. Washington is going to be built up and the heights will all creep up. Alder Zellers said that she agrees that the Quonset hut is unique, but it is a tradeoff. If Common Council changes UDD-8 to allow the 4-story version, precedent does matter even if the change is only for this proposal. It does increase the pressure to allow other buildings on the block to allow more than 3 stories, but the change would not explicitly do so.

Karan Banaszak agreed that the Quonset hut is interesting and a question mark. She worries that the parking entrance and exit is right across from the neighbor's front porch on N. Few. Headlights will shine directly on her front porch when exiting the parking level. When the Avenue Bar was redoing their parking, they had the same problem on Curtis Court. The Avenue Bar was kind enough to have entrance-only on Curtis Court and exit-only on E. Washington. They protected the neighbors. She asked if they can something about that for this proposal. Lance said they would look into it.

Margaret Bergamini said she appreciates the concerns about the back of the proposed building being nearby the houses on E. Mifflin. She lives in the bottom a two-flat that she owns and the neighbors are only 7' away. There even back porches facing that direction. Despite being so close, she doesn't feel that the neighboring structure is looming over her. Her porch is 12' back from the property line and while she understands the concerns, she doesn't think it is that bad.

Adam Shesch reiterated that he is concerned about the traffic and parking issue. He thinks that the City should allow traffic to exit onto E. Washington as they do on West Washington. He also thinks that similar 4.5-story structures on W. Washington dramatically dwarf the nearby 2-story buildings that also have attics. He thinks this is similar to what will happen to Curtis Ct. and E. Mifflin.

Pat Kelly asked if submittal of the proposal to the City can be delayed to work through the issues brought up by her and her neighbors. Lance said they want the apartments to open by May of 2016 because May is when the rental market demand increases. Pat said that the process could go quicker with full neighborhood support.

Adam Shesch said he was overly tense at the neighborhood meeting. He thinks that the neighborhood is fragile and that we need to do everything we can to keep Lapham School open, i.e., keep appealing to families with children. That is fight from the past that will be repeated – whenever there is a decline of school-aged children, the School Board will try to close the school. Lance agreed and said that their project should help attract more children. Adam suggested that they need more large bedrooms. Zach Simmons said that currently there are no children living on the proposed building site, so it will be an improvement. Adam ended by saying that he is appealing to the development team to work with the neighborhood. He also passed around a summary of his objections to the proposal. Adam's summary is available on the proposal website.

The committee then discussed what their next steps would be given that desire for Lance to formally submit to the City on 4 Feb. It was decided to have another meeting on Thursday, 15 Jan., at 7:00pm in the Constellation's Community Room. Patrick Heck will confirm the location and let everyone know.

It was agreed that the development team will not be present at the 15 Jan. meeting. The committee will discuss any new drawings that are sent out by the McGrath team prior to the meeting, e.g, additional shadowing studies and perspective renderings. Additionally, the committee will need to decide upon a summary of findings to send to the TLNA Council since they are likely to vote on their level of support for the proposal at their 12 Feb. monthly meeting.