

MEETING NOTES

Advanced public notice of the Urban Design Committee meeting was posted on the County-City bulletin board and the Planning Department's website.

NAME OF GROUP: URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Tuesday, December 5, 2023, 3:00 p.m., County-City Building, City Council Chambers, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, NE.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Mary Canney, Emily Deeker, Jill Grasso, Frank Ordia, Michelle Penn and Gill Peace; (Tom Huston absent).

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Arvind Gopalakrishnan, Paul Barnes and Teresa McKinstry of the Planning Evan Gunn and Kit Williams with BVH Architecture; Brayden McLaughlin with Bridgewater Consulting; and other interested parties.

Chair Penn called the meeting to order and acknowledged the posting of the Open Meetings Act in the room.

Penn then called for a motion approving the minutes of the regular meetings held October 3, 2023 and November 7, 2023. Motion for approval made by Grasso, seconded by Canney and carried 6-0: Canney, Deeker, Grasso, Ordia, Penn and Peace voting 'yes'; Huston absent.

CENTRAL AT SOUTH HAYMARKET, 205 S. 10TH STREET:

December 5, 2023

Members present: Canney, Deeker, Grasso, Ordia, Penn and Peace; Huston absent.

Arvind Gopalakrishnan stated that the applicant is proposing a six story building with 173 units of affordable housing targeted for families, with parking currently being negotiated for off-site parking at the Center Parking garage.

Evan Gunn stated that they are seeking approval of the building design today. They applied for NIFA (Nebraska Investment Financing Authority) funding last week. They are proceeding with schematic design. They will be back in spring 2024 for approval of the site scape. They will also update any changes needed to the building. The design intent is planned to remain the same. He showed the updated images for the elevation concepts. After the first presentation to this group, they believe there isn't a lot of room to soften the edge along 10th Street. They decided to do this with brick patterning. They are proposing lighter brick on the north and east, with darker brick on the west and south. That corresponds to the larger mass above. The idea was to create variation on the pedestrian scale. They will be using color strategically to emphasize the front entrance. Windows along 10th Street will be six feet above the sidewalk. He handed out some samples of the proposed materials. Brick and fiber cement panels will be used.

Gopalakrishnan stated that the proposed plans are in conformance with the Downtown Design Standards. He pointed out that in B-4 zoning, you don't need to have parking. The applicant has said they will provide parking in the garage at 11th Street and 'N' Street.

Gunn stated that the streetscape design is in process at this time.

Deeker inquired about the interior courtyard. Gunn stated it will include bike storage, a playground and a dog run. It will be gated off. This will be security for the tenants. The idea is to physically block it off to the public, but not visually.

Penn asked if the applicant has seen staff comments. Gunn talked about it at the last meeting. They responded by breaking up the mass with the balconies and also with vertical circulation. They looked at the color as well.

Grasso noted this was discussed in depth at the last meeting. she believes those attending last time agreed that the applicant addressed a lot of the concerns from a previous meeting. She believes the transparency through the courtyard is nice.

ACTION:

Grasso moved approval as recommended by staff, seconded by Canney.

Peace would recommend using a lighter color for the brick and he would like to see a little soffit. He thinks if this could be done on the side with the darker colored brick, it would be a huge improvement. He believes the dark colored brick and Hardie board are similar in color. He thinks the light brick would be a subtle, but big improvement. He would suggest finding a way to get those out of plane, as was done with the lighter brick.

Gunn believes there might be some opportunities for lighting with the pedestrian area as well.

Motion for approval carried 6-0: Canney, Deeker, Grasso, Ordia, Penn and Peace voting 'yes'; Huston absent.

SIDEWALK CAFÉ APPLICATION FOR THE MILL COFFEE & TEA AT 1040 'O' STREET: December 5, 2023

Members present: Canney, Deeker, Grasso, Ordia, Penn and Peace; Huston absent.

Gopalakrishnan stated that Daniel and Tamara Sloan have applied for a sidewalk permit using the right-of-way. The space would be 9' 4" by 34' 6.5". They are proposing seven sets of 22 inch, two-seater tables. There was a slight miscommunication between the applicant and contractor. Fencing was installed while the applicant was out of town. Downtown Lincoln Association (DLA) has removed three bike racks. They will be reinstalled slightly to the east of the previous location.

Penn believes one end of the space needed to be closed. She inquired if the gate is still being proposed. Gopalakrishnan answered that one side will be a gate and the other side closest to the main door will be open.

Penn believes this is a great place for a sidewalk café. She is excited for 'O' Street to have more.

ACTION:

Penn moved conditional approval as recommended by staff, seconded by Grasso and carried 6-0: Canney, Deeker, Grasso, Ordia, Penn and Peace voting 'yes'; Huston absent.

GRUENEMEYER HOME ON 4207 PIONEERS BLVD – SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE:

December 5, 2023

Members present: Canney, Deeker, Grasso, Ordia, Penn and Peace; Huston absent.

Gopalakrishnan stated that this is currently an empty lot. The entire home would be located underground. The garage would be above ground. This is unlike anything we have in Lincoln currently. The architect is here today and would like to get some thoughts on the preliminary design. As of now, staff would recommend adding some transparency to the garage door and some landscaping.

Brayden McLaughlin understands this project is different. His client wanted an underground house. He initially wanted a berm house. He was interested in the insulating properties. McLaughlin has never tackled something like this before. A lot of the neighborhood design standards can't be applied since the house is underground. One recommendation from the client is for the above ground garage. This is a Menards type prefabricated building. His client likes to restore classic cars. He is assuming cost was a factor in his client's decision. He is open to any suggestions. He showed a property on S. Folsom where the majority of the property is underground. The second example is on the northeast corner of S. 56th St. and Pine Lake Rd. The house was torn down, but the garage was kept. A small home was built on the site. He showed the adjacent properties to this application. A lot of them are cape cod style, post war bungalows or split levels. He could talk to his client about building an actual garage at the front of the property. A circle drive is part of the plan, so people aren't backing onto Pioneers Blvd. He might be able to incorporate some of the cape cod feel to the garage. He is looking for questions or comments.

Penn stated it is hard to see on the plan where the openings are. McLaughlin pointed out where the entrance is for the garage and the house.

Deeker asked if the above ground garage sits over the house. McLaughlin replied no. They would pour a slab or use independent footings.

Canney appreciates the applicant coming in ahead of time for input from the committee. He appreciates alternative ways to envision housing. The problem is doing something new in a traditional neighborhood. The applicant has addressed that a little. He inquired if there is a way to continue the street frontage pattern, to be consistent. He would suggest that the applicant perhaps consider the rotation of the structure on top of the lot. He can appreciate how the neighbors might feel about this.

Peace asked if the owner is purchasing just one of the lots. McLaughlin stated that his client hasn't purchased anything yet. He is trying to do his due diligence. Peace wondered if there would be a common access easement for the one driveway. McLaughlin believes it is an easement. There would be two entrances for the circle drive. That was going to be tackled once the project goes forward. Peace inquired if the adjacent property didn't want a joint access easement, if there was another plan. McLaughlin stated that the City wants a circle drive. The seller is a developer. He tried marketing them as two lots. His client expressed an interest in purchasing one lot. Peace noted that the images presented appear to show a pre-fabricated garage. McLaughlin stated that is just a standard image they received from Menards. If the client is willing, they would like to do something different with the garage. Peace suggested rotating the gable to east/west. He would suggest some false windows to make it feel more like it belongs there.

Ordia inquired if it is a deal killer if the client can't use a building plan from Menards. McLaughlin isn't sure. He believes it was more of an economic standpoint. He is sure it would be less expensive to build. That is just an assumption on his part.

Deeker was looking for a site plan to see where this fits on the lot. McLaughlin noted it would be all within the setbacks. Deeker wondered if that would be aligned with the rest of the neighborhood. McLaughlin believes the garage above ground would be close to matching the setbacks of the neighborhood.

Penn inquired what materials are being proposed. McLaughlin was planning on flex core. Penn asked if potentially, the garage could be moved above the house. McLaughlin believes so.

Canney appreciates the potential of the garage being toward the front. There is a pattern of trees on the street. That is a traditional element of the neighborhood. He asked if there is any opportunity to continue the pattern of street trees in the site plan. McLaughlin stated that with the driveway turnaround, they wouldn't be able to plant a large tree. They could have a couple of smaller trees on the property line. Canney stated that some vertical element in there would be a benefit.

Deeker noted that perhaps there could be some flexibility from the City on how wide the concrete needs to be. She agrees that some trees will help with the visual.

Ordia would like to see trees incorporated into the site plan.

Deeker would change the roof pitch to east/west.

Peace inquired how many items in the neighborhood design standards this does not comply with. Gopalakrishnan replied quite a few. There is no front porch, exterior stairs are not allowed on the street façade, there are no steps above grade, the height is lower than the adjacent houses, entrances and windows, amongst other things.

Peace inquired if any neighbors have been asked to comment on this design. Gopalakrishnan stated that the neighbors will receive notification when the appeal is denied. There hasn't been any notification yet. This is just an informal briefing for information and input.

Grasso understands that the applicant is here preliminarily.

Gopalakrishnan stated that with the formal process, the applicant would come back with a revised plan. City staff would check which design standards aren't met. The Planning Director would deny the application. The applicant could appeal before Urban Design Committee. That is when the notification letters would be sent.

Grasso thinks this is a tough one. It is setting a precedent. She is all for doing something different and alternative housing. Aesthetically, the issue is how it fits in the neighborhood. First and foremost, a metal garage from Menards isn't her first choice. She looks at the drive that goes down into the garage. She wondered where is the porch and openings. Those are things that indicate you are part of the neighborhood. She thinks there is a way this could be done more aesthetically, but it will cost a lot more. She would not be comfortable with this in her neighborhood.

Penn concurred with Grasso's comments. She thinks the Menards garage has got to go. She herself has had to deal with the standards. The front porch, steps, windows, to be able to ignore all that is an issue with the neighbors. She would be a definite no on this. She looks at the codes and thinks the egress and other codes have been met. It doesn't mean it is something that would be overall acceptable. A site plan and better design are definitely needed.

Peace agreed with Grasso and Penn. He would like to know how many waivers are needed. You can get caught up in trying to design something that doesn't meet all the standards, but still have a good design. He believes that using the process of appealing to Urban Design Committee should only be for when those design guidelines are holding you back from doing something great. To re-emphasize, to have the garage as the only visible component of this house to the neighbors and the street, you need to come up with something that is architecturally a lot more. It needs to be something that contributes to the neighborhood.

McLaughlin believes the applicant is interest in using underground for energy efficiency. He is hearing that the prefab garage is an issue.

Canney would keep the setback pattern of the street so it looks more friendly. He would encourage any way to green up the space. Street trees or vertical elements would help soften the view.

Ordia suggested a survey of the neighborhood character,

Deeker would encourage asking the client how they are integrating themselves with the community. How do you present yourself? You want to give the visual of being part of the neighborhood. She would also want to know about security. This just doesn't have the same character as the rest of the neighborhood.

Canney believes it might be good to talk with the neighbors as well, to hear their opinions first.

Penn would suggest looking at some new urbanism ideas for some aesthetically pleasing garage ideas. This will take some convincing on her part.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Paul Barnes had some conversations with the City Attorney's office on what needs a vote and what doesn't. Specific items like the appeals process need notification and a vote. Sidewalk cafés are one of those items. They are in a different section of the Lincoln Municipal Code. There is a requirement for review by the Outdoor Dining Committee and staff. The other piece that is a little more vague is advisory review. There is a request for input and feedback before the final recommendation. When it comes to TIF (Tax Increment Financing) projects, staff typically wants that vote and comments in a more formal fashion. That is not necessarily as clear in terms of advisory review. Sometimes there isn't a quorum and it is a TIF project, but it moves forward. Items that need a vote are carried over. He would prefer a vote on everything, so the decision is clear.

There was a discussion on recommendations and voting procedures.

- Gopalakrishnan stated that the next Urban Design Committee meeting is scheduled for January 2, 2024. He inquired if the members would like to move the meeting to January 9, 2024. There was a consensus to move the meeting to January 9, 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.