

## MEETING RECORD

*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, February 6, 2024, 3:00 p.m., County-City Building, City Council Chambers, 555 S. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Lincoln, NE.

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Mark Canney, Jill Grasso, Frank Ordia and Michelle Penn; Emily Deeker Tom Huston and Gil Peace absent.

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Arvind Gopalakrishnan, Paul Barnes, Collin Christopher and Teresa McKinstry of the Planning Department; Richard Gruenemeyer; Jennifer Hiatt with Urban Development Department; Brayden McLaughlin with Bridgewater Consulting; Wayne Mortensen; Scott Osterhaus with Olsson; Abby Bettinger and Danielle Prochnow with Sinclair Hille; 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 meeting held January 9, 2024. Motion for approval made by Grasso, seconded by Ordia and carried 4-0: Canney, Grasso, Ordia and Penn voting 'yes'; Deeker, Huston and Peace absent.

### **GRUENEMEYER HOUSE ON 4207 PIONEERS BLVD:**

**February 6, 2024**

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

Arvind Gopalakrishnan stated this project has been before this committee at the last two meetings for advice. The Director of Planning has sent a notice of denial to the applicant. They are officially appealing that decision. It now meets most of the design standards. The applicant has incorporated the size of the structure, materials, the roof pitch and gable orientation, similar to other houses in the neighborhood. The garage has plexiglass panels and no windows. Landscaping around the garage is proposed, along with a tree between the driveway and sidewalk. Fencing on the retaining wall is proposed as well. The setback on the street will match the neighborhood. We have more precise visuals to assess the project. Staff sent out letters to surrounding neighbors. We have received one letter in support and one in opposition.

Canney asked if the proposal today is in response to the Planning Director letter of denial. Gopalakrishnan answered yes. The proposal has changed, but the essence is still the same. The garage is the only structure above ground and setbacks cannot apply. This was the reason for denial.

Penn inquired if the committee chose to deny this application, what the next step would be. Gopalakrishnan stated the application would go to the City Council. Paul Barnes agreed. If this is denied, the applicant could file an appeal to the City Council.

Brayden McLaughlin has been before this committee a few times now and getting feedback. They are trying to fit this project into the neighborhood as seamlessly as possible.

Richard Gruenemeyer appeared. He believes he has been very flexible with trying to accept the changes that are being made. He understands that the committee wants the property and landscaping to fit into the neighborhood a little better.

Canney wanted to show his appreciation for the flexibility. He understands that the applicant is trying to do something different and that it is not easy. It seems like a lot of thought and effort has gone in to getting this application to where it is now.

Ordia believes the renderings have come a long way. He likes this design a lot better. He believes the applicant has tried to address every issue that has come up.

Gopalakrishnan agreed with Ordia. The applicant has addressed the issues that were raised. The setback doesn't really apply to this since the garage is the only structure above ground.

Ordia wondered if there would be any foreseeable adverse effects if this was approved. Gopalakrishnan doesn't see any major issues. From an architectural and aesthetic perspective, they have come a long way to blend this into the neighborhood.

Gopalakrishnan pointed out the letter in support that was dated from two weeks ago. There was also a letter in denial that was received that stated they didn't believe it fit well into the neighborhood. This application was given more time than usual for comments from the neighborhood.

Canney can think of other historic neighborhoods where historic homes have been torn down for something else. This was an empty lot. Just because it is the same size doesn't always make it a good choice. He believes some consideration should be given to the condition of this lot and the neighborhood. He knows that some houses have been torn down in the past and a bigger house was put in, but it didn't necessarily conform to the rest of the neighborhood.

Grasso questioned if there will be an air conditioner and if the applicant had thought about the placement of the condenser unit. McLaughlin responded that the back of the garage seems the most logical location for placement of the air conditioner. He believes everything can be tied in from there. The garage was moved a few feet back to better match the line of existing houses on the street.

Gruenemeyer likes the design of the house. He had no further comments.

Grasso stated the garage materials haven't been addressed yet. McLaughlin stated the preferred product would be Hardie board.

Ordia wondered if additional time should be given for neighbors to submit comments regarding this application. Barnes stated that 22 notices were sent out. This application was already given more time than usual for people to submit their comments. Two responses were received. He noted that the comment in support was from an adjacent owner. The letter in opposition was from across Pioneers Blvd. A 200 foot surrounding notice was given. He doesn't believe giving more time for comments is necessary.

Penn reviewed the letters. She doesn't believe some of the comments are applicable. One note encouraged the owner to plant more landscaping. She would recommend that to the applicant.

Grasso doesn't want the applicant to think that this committee has issues with an underground house. This is an empty lot. It is a blank slate in the middle of town. She believes it is the responsibility of the committee to make sure something nice is built in its place. We want to make sure this is done in a well-designed way and maintained well. That would be what you want in any neighborhood. The design of this has definitely gotten better. It is hard to say this is a great option for an empty lot. That doesn't mean to put in a house that looks like everything else on the street. It is hard to put into words.

Gruenemeyer is planning to talk to a landscaper and do more plantings. He has someone lined up already.

Grasso wondered why the applicant wants an underground house. Gruenemeyer stated that the house he lives in now, he lives in the basement. He lived with someone before and they have moved out. His mother was getting up in age and had some medical issues. She has since died. He just likes living in the basement. It is much cooler below ground. He doesn't want to spend so much money on energy for heating and cooling. Comfort is his goal.

Grasso asked about the intent with the landscaping and what the applicant wants it to look like. Gruenemeyer stated that most of the landscaping will most likely be behind the garage. He is hoping to do as little maintenance as possible. He likes the design of the driveway. He is hoping to put in a pond in the back and perhaps, add a potting shed. He enjoys having a garden.

Penn thinks this has come a long way from where it started. She feels like this is to the point where you could drive down the street and people wouldn't know it isn't a house. She appreciates that the applicant is thinking of doing solar. She thinks the door is more appealing. She doesn't think there is a lot this group can deny now. She believes the applicant has done what they were asked to do. This is a unique property. She doesn't think everything in the neighborhood has to be the same. She believes she could approve this.

Canney agreed. He believes the entire lot doesn't need to be landscaped. Perhaps some consideration could be given to some short plantings along the driveway. The applicant is activating an empty lot. They are doing something new. Not all neighborhoods have all the houses line up. He is leaning towards approval. Gopalakrishnan noted the setback issue has been fixed. Canney has no problem given that.

**ACTION:**

Canney moved approval as recommended by staff, with an amendment for the applicant to explore softening the driveway edge in the front with landscaping, seconded by Penn.

Penn likes the added front character and would like the applicant to stay with something similar to what is being shown. She likes the aesthetic on the front being shown today.

Barnes noted the committee is voting on what is being shown today. The applicant will go for a building permit based on today's approval. Gopalakrishnan will review the plans.

Grasso believes the committee needs to be very conscientious and thoughtful of what this will look like. She thinks there are things that can be done to the garage and even the entrance to the house, to soften this up. She wanted the applicant to be thoughtful and think about different ways to make this not look like a ramp to nowhere.

Canney suggested the applicant give added attention and sensitivity to the lighting. Perhaps there should be some consistent lighting. Maybe there could be a front porch light or something by the door. He believes it needs something to light up the driveway without making it look like a freeway.

Grasso worries going forward, the applicant has been given a big responsibility.

McLaughlin stated there will be a front door sconce and one by the entrance to the door down the ramp.

Ordia was curious about the mail box. Grasso would ask the US Postal Service. Gopalakrishnan noted that most of the postal boxes in this area are attached to the house.

Motion for approval as amended carried 4-0: Canney, Grasso, Ordia and Penn voting 'yes'; Deeker, Huston and Peace absent.

**PIONEERS MIXED INCOME ROW HOUSING:**

**February 6, 2024**

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

Gopalakrishnan stated that the blight study will be at City Council on February 12, 2024. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is involved in this. This is on the corner of S. 46<sup>th</sup> Street and Pioneers Blvd. It will consist of three and four bedroom interlocking row houses. The project includes twelve dwelling units in three separate buildings; one six-plex multifamily building, one four-plex multifamily building and one duplex. The exterior elevation include a combination of fiber cement siding, fiber cement rainscreen cladding, aluminum clad wood windows, fiberglass for the main entry doors, motorized insulated steel doors for the garages, and impact resistant and laminated asphalt shingles with ridge vents. Seven of the units will be permanently affordable housing and reserved for buyers earning 65% of the Area Median Income. The landscape plan shows trees planted along Pioneers Blvd. and S. 46<sup>th</sup> Street, along with other shrubs and plantings. This is in conformance with the Neighborhood Design Standards.

Canney would switch out the proposed trees along S. 48<sup>th</sup> Street. They appear to be Kentucky Coffee Tree. He would recommend making it a podless tree. He would switch those with a London Plain Tree. Kentucky Coffee trees get huge. On the back side of the living space is patio/courtyards. He would recommend making sure there is water for the planters and potentially electrical outlets for lighting.

Barnes believes those are good details. The applicant and architect is present today.

Wayne Mortensen was very proud to share this proposal. It is a product of higher standards than they are generally allowed in affordable housing. It is their hope to recruit people that want to engage with their neighbors. There are five affordable homes and seven market rate. There is some internal subsidy as well. There were many sources to get this project across the finish line. It is their goal as an affordable oriented developer that the affordable units are the same as the others. The only difference is the finish package is slightly less defined on the affordable units. They will be partnering with a land trust so the five affordable units stay as affordable units. They are happy and excited to be the first affordable units in this area in quite a while.

Scott Osterhaus wanted to give a rundown of the site plan. There was some mention of alleyways. That is on the north side of this project. The garage units on the four plex and duplex is on that alleyway. The six plex takes access to the garage units off the alleyway. Additional parking for the site is on the east side. Regarding Canney's landscaping comments, they have talked to Parks and Recreation. The plat is through a final review. He believes there is an opportunity to change some things. There will be drip irrigation in the planting areas. There is a sidewalk on Pioneers Blvd. now. They are anticipating that will be replaced. There are connective sidewalks on their property.

Canney thinks this is a handsome project. Knowing that part of town, he believes it will provide a nice edge from single family to multifamily. He thinks it is great.

Penn wondered what will be done between the two-plex and the four-plex. Osterhaus believes there will be an artistic sculpture in that space. They are partnering with Lux on a piece. It might be just north of the right-of-way. There will be a tree lined walkway. There will be amenities for dog owners as well.

Canney asked if this space is intended to be for public use. Mortensen stated yes, it will be for the public.

Danielle Prochnow wanted to recall the vernacular with the surrounding buildings. She stated they are proposing a Hardie siding and Nichiha architectural wall panels for the set back portions. They are looking at an option to use real cedar if the budget allows. The goal was to be as inclusive as possible. There are two unit types that will be offered. They will be two stories tall with a basement. They have also talked about adding solar panels above the guest spaces. They are looking at ways to create some more green as the budget allows.

Canney assumes numbers have been run on the parking overflow lot. He doesn't know about handicapped parking. He inquired if there is any street parking in the alley. Osterhaus noted that parking requirements for a duplex are different than the parking requirements for the multi-family units. They have gone through

the parking. As far as handicap parking requirements, there is accessibility through the garage in certain units.

Penn asked about the plan. Prochnow pointed out where the Nichiha panels and cedar will be. Penn asked about the condensing units. Prochnow noted they will be affixed to the building.

Grasso noted in looking at the site plan, she sees a raised porch. Prochnow stated that is due to the deepening of the grade. Grasso thinks this looks great. She pointed out there are a lot of materials here that require a lot of maintenance. Mortensen noted that the homeowners association would be responsible for a lot of these things.

Canney likes the feel of the front porch and patio. He questioned if a vertical screen was explored. Prochnow could explore that. Canney believes it would create some privacy.

Grasso commented that the lighting is a really good design. Big porches and planters are a nice design as well. Exterior lighting should be something to look at. Prochnow agreed.

Canney pointed out that there might be an opportunity for some lighting in the pass through. This would be good from a security standpoint.

Building design, landscaping, neighborhood integration and blight and substandard conditions

**ACTION:**

Canney moved approval as recommended by staff, taking into consideration all committee comments regarding building design, landscaping, neighborhood integration and mitigation of blight and substandard conditions, seconded by Grasso and carried 4-0: Canney, Grasso, Ordia and Penn voting 'yes'; Deeker, Huston and Peace absent.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

- Barnes stated that TIF is in a neighborhood design standards overlay. That is a base. We don't have TIF design standards yet. He wanted to point out in the previous case, in absence of TIF design standards, the Urban Design Committee has authority and power to comment on all those things that were commented on. All of these aspects need to be considered. He wanted to reiterate that. In absence of TIF design standards, staff looks to this committee for guidance.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.