

County Road E & Bellaire – Community Conversation
September 17, 2018, Redeemer Lutheran, 6:30-8:30 pm

PRESENTATION

Councilmember Edberg provided an overview of the agenda, summarized the three Rockwell paintings (Freedom of Religion, Freedom from Fear, Freedom of Speech) and established the ground rules for the meeting. He then provided a summary of the street intersection's background and challenges. He explained that, in most cases, future developers would be required to commission a market study, a traffic impact study, a parking analysis and a sewer and water analysis. The City would engage in a corridor study, fiscal impact analysis and grant opportunities. He pointed out that the population has plateaued, while the number of people per household has dropped from 4.05 to 2.35, and the median age has risen from 20.6 to 40.6. The vast majority of apartments were built prior to 1990. There is a lack of apartment units in the 80% median household income range. The Four Square Flats project was estimated to be an 18 million dollar development. Such a project would have reduced the taxes on a median value home by \$3.20 annually. Conversely, removing all four corners from the tax rolls would increase the taxes on a median value home by \$0.14 annually, with an approximate additional 15% increase in property taxes to purchase all four corners at once.

Councilmember Edberg than open the conversation with four specific topics/questions:

1. HOW URGENT IS OUR DESIRE FOR REDEVELOPMENT?

Quentin Carlson, E County Line Road – He asked whether the value would drop if the properties were re-guided from commercial to residential and whether the City can change the zoning. Councilmember Edberg responded that the effect of re-guiding the properties is unknown, but the drop is likely quite a bit.

Community Development Director Kane stated that rezoning is typically initiated by the property owner and they are not likely to be interested in down-zoning to low-density residential. If the City initiated such a change, it would likely be at the property owners' opposition, but it is possible. After a public hearing, City Council would make that determination.

Ron Christy, Spruce Place – He wondered why the properties have sat vacant for so long. Shouldn't they have been condemned due to broken windows and vandalism? Councilmember Edberg stated that he is not sure that is a legal option. Kane confirmed that the City does not have that power. The property owners are up on their taxes, and the buildings are secure. Many efforts have been made to get them to be more active about selling the properties, however, the situation usually results in an auction house selling multiple properties in a package, which is not conducive to attracting a local buyer with a local solution.

Someone suggested that one of the properties is delinquent on the property taxes as of this morning.

Steve Freund, Bellaire Avenue – He does not feel a strong desire to have a development, but it is a difficult question to answer without knowing what the development is. He liked picking up his morning apple fritter. He would rather leave it as it now, He has become used to them being nice and quiet and does not see them as blight anymore.

Jennifer Fink, Jay Lane – She stated difficulty in understanding the difference in tax revenue. If the project meets the zoning criteria, can the City not deny the proposal? Kane responded that yes, that is correct, the City

cannot deny the project if the proposal complies with the code. However, it is highly likely that most uses will require some sort of variance, and then the city has discretion.

Scott Zieman, Martin Way – He asked how likely it would be to get a Culver’s like at 694 and White Bear Avenue. Kane replied that large chains look at traffic counts. They like to be near interstate freeways and their exits. The challenge is that the traffic at Century Avenue and County Road E is three times the count than it is at this intersection. The City has not been approached by any national retailers or restaurants at this site.

Karen Prettyman, Glen Oaks Avenue – She asked what was happening at the corner that The Wildwood Center was located on. It relates to her thinking about these corners. Councilmember Edberg stated that the City is mostly built out, so a majority of our economic development will be some aspect of intensification, as with the bowling alley and The Waters Senior housing. Kane added that the two outbuildings are under different ownership than the shopping center. The owner is in the process of creating vanilla boxes in an attempt to attract tenants.

2. HOW IMPORTANT IS A FOUR CORNER SOLUTION?

Councilmember Edberg senses that a four corner solution is best based on what was learned from the developer. If one is developed, three other blighted corners remain.

Myrna Carlson, East County Line Road – She felt that it is important to develop all four corners, perhaps with one level townhomes. An association could do yard work and there is a shortage of single level townhomes.

Resident, Glen Oaks Avenue – There’s often a long line of cars picking up children from the charter school, another school, St. Anne’s, is down the street, and of course there is Matoska. We cannot forget that there are four elementary schools in the immediate area. We cannot make a solution without considering the children.

Resident, Spruce Place – Proposed one level townhomes for seniors. That would be a great fit, especially with the surrounding schools.

Gary Schroeder, Hillside Road – He asked if development can be promoted by developing the corner that the City owns first. Perhaps the City can give that corner away for a dollar. Councilmember Edberg responded that the City purchased the lot with the intention of getting the cost of purchase and demolition back out of it. We have a fiduciary responsibility to our citizens to not just take their tax money and give it away.

Deanna Steiner, Rolling View Drive – She stated that there is more than just monetary value. She would like to see a commitment to some green space. She thinks the beautification would encourage others to be near it. There is not a whole lot of community use type spaces on this side of town.

Jennifer Fink, Jay Lane – She felt the value of all four corners to a development would be great and we could work with the developer to create greenspace on one of the four. She would hate to see the loss of the value of a non-four corner solution. She suggested row townhomes at slightly higher density that perhaps could be affordable.

3. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE THERE?

Jackie Ek-Pangerl, Jansen Avenue – She likes the idea of one-story buildings because the lots cannot get any bigger. She is concerned about lighting.

Deanna Stiener – She wants housing, just smaller. She is only opposed to the density and the height of three stories. It is the highest point in Ramsey County. Housing is fine, but has to be the right fit with type and size.

Sue Arcand, Hoffman Place Apartments – We need more affordable housing in White Bear Lake. There is lots of new senior housing, but most cannot afford to live there. Parking is not overflowing on street at Hoffman Place, so she does not think it would be an issue with a similar development here.

Allen Rivard, Glen Oaks Avenue – He likes the townhome idea too and added that perhaps it could be housing for disabled veterans.

Mike Lundberg – He stated that his parents own the building to the west of the SuperAmerica. A four corner solution has not been out there that long. He hopes that a future solution includes something such as an autonomous vehicle service company.

Frank – He proposed Cup and Cone 2!

Jeff Brown, Orchard Lane - Cup and Cone has recently been creating police activity and too much traffic. Maybe a smaller, local donut shop like Grandma's. Would the City want to help something like that?

4. HOW ACTIVE A ROLE SHOULD THE CITY PLAY IN REDEVELOPMENT?

Councilmember Edberg contended that this intersection is a failure of the free market capitalist system. There are some things the City cannot do. But, we can give away property, if that's our appetite, we can approve tax increment financing, or assist with acquiring County or state funding. How much do we want to pay to not have this issue?

Steve Freund, Bellaire Avenue – He was shocked by the Four Square Flats proposal due to the density of it. He would like to see the City follow our current plans, which are good. He asked why staff did not tell the Four Square Flats developers that they were way out of the ball park. Councilmember Edberg responded that developers are allowed to propose whatever they want, but the City never had an opportunity to respond. Further, because the intersection was such an eyesore and a priority for our community, it is not staff's place to tell the developer they cannot suggest an idea.

Unknown – Something about ball games and the school's parking lot. Something should be done about the overflow parking. Perhaps the lot from the school could be used. Councilmember Edberg reported that the City typically does not dictate to the school that it needs to redevelop the ball park into a parking lot.

Diane Joseph, Bellaire Avenue – She asked is the City has the ability to install a stop sign at the school parking lot coming out of the school. Councilmember Edberg informed her that residents can make that request. The traffic review committee will review and respond.

John Joseph, Bellaire Avenue – He noted that the last three times they resurfaced Bellaire, they have narrowed the street, so that is why it seems so cramped.

Beth Rosenthal, Hillside Road – She has observed the decline of south White Bear. It is in terrible shape. Councilmember Edberg stated that homeowners are responsible for their own home upkeep. However, he has seen a lot of redevelopment and remodeling including Festival, YMCA, White Bear Marketplace, Culver's and Sunrise Shopping Center. He is not identifying in the same way.

Deanna Steiner, Rolling View Drive – She explained that she had tried to rent out Spruce Park but was told that the City had to shut down those facilities due to vandalism there. Ebba Park is a disaster and it is overgrown. These are the only two parks unless you cross a major road to Matoska. She agrees with Beth that there is deterioration. Perhaps the City could help to remodel the buildings to bring in new local businesses into the spaces. She believes that small businesses just cannot get the financing and the City could help with that.

Councilmember Edberg replied that subsidizing businesses is not typical. The south side is aging. It was built 50 years ago. The historical way of thinking is that we want effective, safe, and functional, but low tax. We could borrow the money, i.e. sell bonds, to provide assistance. He asked if there is a shift in the community's thinking to use our tools for non-public purposes. What good, for whom, and at what cost?

Joe Dawson, Prairie Road – He hopes that we will stay alert to the danger of the blight spreading. As the highest point in Ramsey County, there are functions for which altitude is an asset, such as a water tower, a cell tower, and more. They may not necessarily be as a principal use, but if such facilities were incorporated into a project, it could be an asset.

John Skupa, County Road E – There is a real potential here as the lots are very visible. Whatever happens should be well thought out and all complement each other, possibly with a coordinated design. He proposed a mix of Cup and Cone, bandshell, water park, farmer's market, and green space. The City should develop their corner first.

John Slade, MICAH – He recognized the great City staff. Central light rail corridor has mixed use and he thinks we could find a way to make it happen. There are about 900 homeless school kids. The City's role should be for the public good. If density is to be increased, it should be done for the kids. The City should consider a density bonus for affordable housing.

Gary Scheroer, Hillside Road – He voiced environmental concerns on all four corners, asking if there are any brownfield funds available. Perhaps the City could take a role in cleaning them up. Kane explained that there will be a lot of funding available, once development is pending. However, it is only when a project is under contract that we could go after those funds. There has to be a proposal in order to determine what level of clean-up is needed. It is not viable to complete the work until a development is presented – that is when clean up can take place.

Nan Carlson, lives across the street – Perhaps the City can market the properties for the owners. We need to make it a place people want to come to.

Lady in the blue shirt – She asked why the City can't tell the oil companies that they need to clean the sites up. Isn't it the oil companies' responsibility to clean up their properties? Kane stated that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, or the State, is responsible for enforcing clean up. However, the City has pushed to get the

tanks removed. In terms of clean up, as consumers we pay a tax every time we fill up that goes into a Petro Superfund for site cleanup. Therefore, we all pay for the cleanup, not the property owners.

Same lady – She wondered if there is anything we can come up with that is youth focused, in which case we could ask the company to donate the property and they could write it off as charitable.

Ward Woodrich, Cranbrook Drive – He asked if the southwest corner was ever cleaned up. It used to be a gas station before it was the landscape business. Councilmember Edberg stated they were not sure.

Carol Lux, Oak Court – Most of the residents were not sent letters regarding the Four Square Flats proposal. They have lost trust in the City by only a few people getting the letter from the developer.

CLOSING

Councilmember Edberg closed the meeting by stating there is now both a mailing list and an email list. Please sign up to be on the email list either with Sam or Anne, or at the table just outside the sanctuary. The powerpoint presentation will be posted to the City's website, and eventually the notes will be posted there as well. Feel free to contact him, best by email not phone.

Great conversation. Thank you!