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Memo

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MAY 17 2016
DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING & ZONING

To:	Scott Gustin, Senior Planner
From:	Eric Farrell
Date:	May 17, 2016
Re:	329 - 375 North Avenue

Thank you, and Mary and David, for meeting with Owiso and me on Tuesday, May 10, to review our application.

I realize you were at a disadvantage attempting to capture the essence of what we are trying to accomplish from the scant materials we first submitted. Owiso dropped of additional information on Friday and we continue to resolve our presentation materials as the first meeting date with the DAB on May 24 approaches.

As you now know, Burlington College announced yesterday that it intends to close its doors effective May 27, 2016.

This very sad news for our community will have a significant impact on our development plans in that we now have to repurpose the 29,500 sf college building (Condominium Unit #2).

However, it does present a new and exciting opportunity for our planned neighborhood; the opportunity to attract a wider range of retail, restaurant, service and commercial uses that will strengthen the North Avenue corridor, in support the existing and new residents.

Our Design Process

I have assembled a very strong and well-known local design team in Duncan-Wisniewski Architecture, TJ Boyle & Associates and Civil Engineering Associates.

We studied the project site for over two years, exploring several options for how to approach the development, considering the severe topographic changes from North Avenue to the lake and the diverse natural environment that exists.

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The plan we are presenting reflects our extensive investigations coupled with the City's and the general public's stated desire to maintain significant open space and connectivity to the waterfront, while providing significant housing opportunities.

In this regard, I have attached additional materials to showcase the depth of the design-development we have achieved in preparation for our Sketch Plan application. We believe the size and scope of this new neighborhood required a more comprehensive presentation at the outset to capture the essence of the experience the new residents and general public will enjoy.

One our overriding goals was to create pedestrian pathways that invite and welcome the existing residents across North Avenue, as well as the general public, into the neighborhood. This includes a fully accessible (i.e. < 5% grade) connection from North Avenue to the Burlington Bike path.

Main Entrance Presentation

In answer to the first of your comments; the lack of a substantial building on the northwest corner of South Street, so-called (to be named later), and the retention of the existing surface parking in that location.

The College building has been served by this parking lot for several decades, the retention of which is critical to the success of the commercial uses we hope to attract to this building. In economic terms, the absence of convenient, surface parking, proximate to the main entrance will represent an insurmountable obstacle.

Notwithstanding this preexisting condition, we also share your desire to mitigate the visual impacts of the parking lot, as viewed from North Avenue, and to establish a meaningful structure to strengthen and hold the corner, i.e. an attractive "front door" to our new neighborhood.

For this reason, we are proposing a new structure we call "The HUB". Although not finally resolved, the Hub will incorporate CCTA's bus stop and one, or more, other vibrant (albeit small) uses that can provide a service, as well as an opportunity for public art to appropriately anchor the corner. The Hub will be connected to a new addition to the former college building, by a trellice and landscape sitting walls, thereby completing the screening of the parking lot from North Avenue in a functional and attractive manner. By way of example of public art, we are considering a "bee tower" connected to the structure to diversify its public interest and connection to the natural world.

We believe this concept at the main entrance will serve to appropriately ease visitors into this new neighborhood, where the built environment will be dense and urban.

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Building Setbacks from the Street

The new buildings along the proposed public street are set back approximately 15 to 24'. Although there is no universal design standard for the relationship between building separation (i.e. facing across streets) and building height, in our case the ratio averages about 2:1 In some cases, these setbacks allow us to establish street-level entrances to ground floor units without compromising the quality of life within those units.

Buildings Along North Street (so-called)

The northern public street connection completes the loop through the neighborhood, as required for secondary and easy access by emergency service vehicles. This street serves more as a "service road", then an entrance. It abuts the City-owned Lakeview Cemetery and therefore has no practical visual impact on neighboring properties. The north street also provides grade access to multiple levels of structured parking and service components of the buildings.

Building F anchors the intersection of the north street and North Avenue. The ground-level units have a direct connection to the public sidewalk, enlivening the streetscape and enhancing the pedestrian experience.

Building E is connected to Building F as you travel west along the north street, with two access points to the structured parking below. From Building E, the building elevation is reduced to the ground-level parking behind the Orphanage, before connecting to Building I. This significant break between buildings has the effect of Buildings E and I presenting as separate structures along this secondary street. Building I screens a required service area, and access to additional structured parking beneath Building I, from the prominent pedestrian "Green" that lies west of the Orphanage.

All of the conditions stated above demonstrate the role of the north street as a secondary access road, providing a much-needed connection to support services and parking, while preserving the core of the neighborhood for pedestrian traffic, recreation and visual enjoyment.

The intersection of the north and west roads is anchored by a 3-story structure that includes ground-level structured parking and a 2-story gymnasium above. This is a relatively inert corner, overlooking the City Cemetery, and providing access to Building Q. This corner is north of the of the main pedestrian corridor through the neighborhood and thereby serves a subordinate role.

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Site Grades and Structural Parking

One of the primary goals of the development of this site was to take advantage of the severe grades for access to multiple levels of structured parking beneath each building. This serves to significantly reduce the overall lot coverage and enhance the aesthetics and pedestrian experience within the neighborhood.

The elevation of the project site ranges from elevation 228′ along North Avenue to approximately 160′ at the west edge of the meadow, before descending down to the Burlington Bike Path, a drop in elevation of nearly 70′. From a design standpoint, the only practical strategy for weaving substantial buildings into these severe site grades is to orient them across the slope of the site such that the buildings served a "retaining walls", allowing the neighborhood to "step down" the hill from North Avenue to the Public Open Space (meadow).

The Green

The Green is the main pedestrian focal point of our neighborhood. Since our first engagement with Burlington College four years ago, the maintenance of a visual corridor from the Orphanage building to the lake has been a priority.

This view corridor has a hierarchy starting with small recreation green spaces west of the Orphanage tied to a courtyard south of Buildings E and F, surrounding the main entrance to those buildings.

From the Orphanage level, the corridor steps down the grade by way of greenhouses and community gardens onto a more expansive Green lying between Buildings H and I, from which you cross over West Street (so-called) onto another (less-formal) green through which the accessible recreation path connection meanders down to the edge of the (newly-acquired) Public Open Space.

The Fitness Center, located on the ground level of Building I, will open onto and overlook the Green and serve the needs of the new neighborhood, as well as the existing neighbors across North Avenue.

An off-leash Dog Park is also conveniently adjacent to the Green, in support of our pet-friendly policy.

Public Access

The public will enjoy a fully-accessible route through the "green corridor" from North Avenue to the Lake, including a public elevator transitioning down from the Orphanage level to the main Green and beyond.

The intention of this access through the "green corridor" is to invite and welcome the existing neighbors across North Avenue, as well as the general public, into the new neighborhood and to reinforce the longstanding connection to the waterfront.

We will expand upon the information contained in our application and accompanying materials in a power-point presentation to the DAB and DRB and other meetings to follow.

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attachments