

5/04/09

Friendship Shopping Center Planned Unit Development
Case 08-15

Statement in Opposition by James Pickman
Wisconsin Newark Neighborhood Coalition

I am James Pickman. I reside on Macomb Street, two blocks from the proposed development.

I would like to sum up most of the issues raised by opposition parties and by some supporters, and suggest a way to expeditiously resolve our differences with the applicant.

From early on, we have been deeply concerned with the applicant's positioning of its proposal as all or nothing – either accept the project as proposed or you're characterized as obstructionist and against a new supermarket. The developers and their publicists have excelled in propagating this sharp dichotomy.

But in reality, that's not the case: Everybody is for an improved supermarket and the return of a vibrant Wisconsin Avenue streetscape.

However, legitimate and serious concerns have been expressed by both opponents and proponents of the project, particularly about parking and loading deficiencies, as well as traffic impacts. And the public benefits and amenities applicant describes are not "significantly greater" than a matter of right plan would provide nor proportional to the zoning changes requested. These are all concerns that you, the Zoning Commission, can fix...or can order the parties to resolve under a tight timeframe.

Here's what we believe is the appropriate framework for a development that will receive overwhelming community support and quickly achieve a new supermarket:

POINT ONE: The South Block plan for a large, new Giant and new street front commerce should proceed, but only with modifications to fix the severe loading and delivery problems by:

- Moving the Idaho loading facilities north, towards or onto Newark Street -- away from the Idaho Avenue homes.
- Expanding this relocated delivery area to accommodate all new South Block loading.

POINT TWO: Spillover onto residential streets and adverse traffic impacts can be prevented with additional parking, better loading, effective traffic mitigation, and less residential density. This can be accomplished by:

- Removing two floors of North Block apartments to free up parking for that

block's commercial customers and employees. The resulting three-story building will assure that the project is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan, and can still include affordable housing.

- Providing adequate loading and delivery spaces on the North Block to prevent use of public space by delivery trucks.
- Excluding new apartment residents from Residential Parking Permit eligibility to prevent additional parking on already congested local streets.
- Providing for substantial "community parking" -- considerably more than the 30 spaces applicant has offered -- especially for existing businesses whose customers and employees have depended for years on Giant's parking lots.
- Requiring an effective plan for traffic mitigation before any new project is approved, and escrow of at least \$500,000 for mitigation of unanticipated impacts, as stated by the ANC as one of its conditions.

POINT THREE: It is important to maintain the neighborhood shopping center. The possibility of six or seven new restaurants -- as applicant's proposal would allow -- added to the five already existing, would transform the area into a restaurant/entertainment district, causing even more parking and traffic problems. The local neighborhood character can be maintained by:

- Retaining the Macomb-Wisconsin Overlay, but allowing up to two additional restaurants in the new development, each roughly the size of Café Deluxe.
- Requiring the applicant to develop and implement a plan to attract neighborhood-serving businesses, including long-term affordable rents and appropriately configured spaces to assure that existing and other local businesses will be able to locate in the commercial space when the development is completed.

We believe this package of modifications will solve the loading and parking problems, address likely spillover, mitigate traffic impacts, and maintain the local neighborhood shopping center. The result will be a development we can support, one that would become a welcome and fitting addition to the community and the city.

Commissioners, this is in your hands. You can fix the application by Commission order, or you can direct the parties to fix it. But what you shouldn't do -- if I may respectfully suggest -- is to approve the application as proposed.

Thank you.