

NOTES FROM THE MAY 5, 2011 LPC PREVIEW PRESENTATION OF ACHESON COMMON

The preview presentation by project architect Kirk Peterson is the second preview that he has given the Commission, the first being almost one year ago on June 3, 2010. Dustin Smith of Equity Residential opened the presentation with an overview of the scope of the project. His comments included commitments to:

- Actively look for alternative sites for the brown shingle residential buildings and fund their relocation;
- Work with a spatial planner to keep Ace Hardware open during construction;
- Endorse and coordinate with the SOSIP for downtown streets, including upper University Avenue and Walnut Street;
- Promote energy efficiency goals for all improvements (many “green building” features and LEED standards to be followed);
- Transit Oriented Development concepts for reduced parking;
- Provide a range of unit types (202 projected);
- Create new retail demand that will increase sales and business tax revenue for the City;
- Contribute to the Housing Trust Fund; and
- Facilitate jobs creation (use of both union and non-union construction subs);

In his introductory comments on the project and the changes made since the earlier preview with the LPC, Kirk Peterson called particular attention to the following points:

- He will be working with Landscape Architect John Roberts on open space and planting detail (private areas only);
- New building code allows 5 story wood construction over ground floor structural;
- The existing Bachenheimer Building (not part of scope) essentially separates the project into two parts (MacFarlane/Kinkos properties and the Acheson/Ace/Walnut Buildings);
- The one story crepe building is actually an early addition to the Acheson Physicans Building (it was an old cigar shop);
- Interior of the ACE building will be demolished (did measurements – the stairs are great, but must be taken down; the hope is to find a way to bring them back);
- The Acheson Physicans Building has little surface for it’s volume – so it will have larger units (it also contains the oldest continuously operating elevator west of the Mississippi; project will retain it as an interior feature but add a code compliant elevator);
- Presentation included a “theoretical” UC Building being proposed as eight (8) stories at the corner of University and Oxford as well as aerial perspectives of the site in context with the adjacent, taller UC Buildings, which made the point that the Acheson Commons project is less tall and more refined in scale and massing.

Commissioner Comments and Discussion with Architect:

After complementing the Architect on the overall positive nature of the refinements made since the earlier preview presentation, the LPC comments and ensuing discussion with Kirk Peterson are summarized as follows:

- LPC should take the lead with Landmarked properties and comments from DRC should come back for consideration by LPC;
- Concern for setbacks as way to add upper story additions to the historic buildings generally focused on 2145 University (Sills/Ace Hardware at University and Walnut

- Street);
- Concern for setting a precedent for facadism and intensification by other projects in the downtown area (potential is for less detailed, clunkier massing)
 - The addition to 2145 University (Sills/Ace Building) should have increased set backs.
 - PETERSON: Provided considerable information on materials and detailing. On the issue of “false historicism,” he made the point that none of the additions or renovations proposed are intended to fool anyone. The discussion should not be about False Historicism, only about Good and Bad Historicism.
 - HALL: The Ace building is a small but important LOW landmark. The height on top that extends into a giant mass to the north is unfortunate. Work on this approach. The new buildings are too tall (compete with Backenheimer). Achenson Physicans Building does have some lovely interior spaces other than the elevator and there is hope that some of the interior character may be maintained.
 - WINKEL: Staff should inquire about the bay window code issue (Peterson had stated that they were told that bay windows projecting over the public right-of-way are no longer allowed by code). On the distinction between historicism and false historicism, the question to be asked should be what would these additions have been made of if they had been done at the turn of the twentieth century. Ground floor materials will be critical (refurbishing the old), but the more difficult is how the new materials for the additions will mix with the old. The rendering for the Ace building isn’t as embellished as the elevation suggests. The pediment at the corner seems a bit too repetitive.
 - WAGLEY: The Walnut side of the addition to 2145 University is pretty blocky, but it also sits on top of a historically bland wall (the warehouse side of Ace Hardware). It’s not the front of the building and wasn’t intended to be such. Making the upper addition lovely will accentuate how blank that wall is. It is a conundrum comparable to how the east facing elevation of the addition has been broken up.
 - OLSON: Should push for bays on Walnut Street. They would be an excellent way to provide interest, shadow, detailing and character. There is much attention to detail, not “false historicism.” The Secretary’s Standard for Contrast does not have to mean “glass modernism.” One of the most important land use issues is to insure that existing businesses have the option to continue their leases. The western elevation of the Bachenheimer was made handsome. It is now hidden. Perhaps the other elevations, particularly on Walnut Street can be done with the same care.
 - PARSONS: the air space helps buildings live independently. ACE building lacks this on the west elevation, which seems to be the least pleasant alteration. Perhaps there should be no stepback on the Walnut Street side. Also, I am not sold on the false window openings on the west side of the ACE building façade. Another question is, given the absence of an adapted Downtown Area Plan, what can we do to encourage additional height, which may not conform with current zoning and which might benefit the massing of the project?

Recommended Joint LPC/DRC Subcommittee:

In closing the discussion, the LPC requested that Design Review establish a special subcommittee to work with an appointed LPC subcommittee to facilitate integrated recommendations for further refinements to the Achenson Commons Project. The LPC then formed a subcommittee made up of Commissioners Steve Winkel, Carrie Olson, and Austene Hall.