

NOTES

Plan Commission Meeting We Make U City

DATE: February 24, 2023
TIME: 3-4:30 pm
LOCATION: Virtual

MEMBERS PRESENT: Charles Gascon, Victoria Gonzalez, Al Fleischer, Ellen Hartz, Mark Harvey, Peggy Holly, Patricia McQueen

CITY STAFF: Mary Kennedy, John Wagner

CONSULTANT: Sarah Kelly, Shelby Oldroyd

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Plan Commission members were welcomed by Peggy Holly.

Sarah Kelly shared the purpose of the meeting:

- To present highlights of existing conditions
- To share the character-based approach to land use
- To gain insight on the direction for the future character and land use work

She emphasized that the consultant team would work to share some highlights of technical analysis and mapping, but that it's also very important to allow time for discussion, so she will work hard to get to that part of the presentation. A link to maps will be sent out after the meeting.

2. Foundation for the Land Use Work

Shelby Oldroyd presented some of the additional mapping that has been conducted since the preliminary existing conditions analysis was shared, including:

- Existing Land Use – Highlights:
 - This map was generated using assessor's data and spot checked by staff.
 - Significant variance in vacancy by ward
 - Major corridors vary in use (Olive primarily commercial and Delmar primarily residential)
 - Single-family residential is the primary land use
- Park Access – Highlights:
 - There are 21 total parks that provide park access to residents that covers most of the City within a ¼ mile radius, and covers almost the entire City within a ½ mile. This does not include informal open space (e.g., open space maintained in multi-family developments like those near Delmar/170), greenways, or parks in adjacent municipalities that University City residents may use.
 - There are 260 acres of parks in the City.
- Historic Sites and Monuments – Highlights:

- Significant historic assets are recognized in U City include 7 National Register Districts, 8 individual sites listed on the National Register, 6 local historic districts and 12 local historic sites and monuments.
- Most are in in the southern/eastern portion of the City.
- These sites have impacts on both existing character and potential for redevelopment and available funding programs.
- Transit – Highlights:
 - The City has 7 Metro bus routes, 138 Metro bus stops, and 2 MetroLink stations.
 - A static map only shows coverage – gives a good picture of where the routes are available, which is mostly in the eastern portion of the City but does not consider frequency of the routes.
 - Access to transit can be a consideration for both future character and evaluation of development.
- Active Transportation Infrastructure (pedestrian and bicycle) – Highlights
 - The City has 8.2 miles of shared use paths, .3 miles of physically separated bikeways, 1 mile of visually separated bikeway. 3.4 miles of mixed traffic bikeway, and 110 miles of sidewalks.
 - Overall, the bike infrastructure is disconnected.
 - Bike and pedestrian infrastructure is most limited in the 3rd Ward.
 - Does not include sidewalks in private subdivisions.
- 2022 Flood Impact
 - Data is from the Stormwater Commission.
 - There are 256 condemned Properties within flood extent.
 - There were 685 inundated parcels.
 - There was significant flooding outside identified FEMA flood hazard areas.
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts
 - There are three districts: RPA 1, which is the Olive/I-70 Commercial Development and the economic engine for all RPAs; RPA 2, which is the Third Ward residential area; RPA 3, which is the Olive Blvd commercial area.

Plan Commission members made the following comments:

- A long term issue for the City is how to define transit stops because even if there is a stop, without regular service the amount of time it takes to travel by transit makes it highly inefficient.
- There are many small lots are in flood plain and we will need recommendations for these properties.
- Should the golf course be included in the parks calculation or not? It would be helpful to see how it would look if it was taken out. It is not used by all but some noted it is used in various ways by community members (e.g in the winter some use it to ski). Others pointed out that it was one of the best 9-hole golf courses in the region. The general consensus was that the golf course probably should not be counted in the parks calculation.
- There seem to be four primary categories of spaces and character
 - 3rd ward housing
 - Olive Blvd. business corridor
 - Flooded areas – the city has addressed primary flood areas along Wilson Ave but others have not been fully addressed
 - Loop Development

- Some feel the trolley has been a negative and has reduced parking, which is problematic.
- While some are concerned about parking and creating appropriate parking regulations, a lack of parking can be a sign of a healthy City.
- Recognizing areas prone to flooding is critical and flooding areas in the city are quite extensive
- What is more important when determining the character of residential development? Size and setback, or use, i.e. single vs. multifamily.
- How do we provide affordable housing and create economic incentives to drive more affordable development? This is not just about the Third Ward and there is no guarantee that as the City changes it will always be a source of affordable housing. The City does not have a policy about mixed income housing and the plan should articulate what the policy needs to be.
- There are many restaurants but a lack of entertainment opportunities in the City (no movie theater, concert halls, etc). Should we rethink Olive as a place for an entertainment district? This could serve as a draw from adjacent areas.
- There is an idea that has emerged through the Chinese Business Assn to consolidate, creating an Asian district in the large parking lot by Mandarin House and the seafood restaurant. This would also be a good place to put a theater, addressing the lack of entertainment.
- Wash U has a development plan for the loop. Should City say “go ahead” and focus on Olive?
- Just across Skinker to Delmar an arcade and other uses are going in. This could serve as a future entertainment district
- The Loop is much more urban and Olive has a more suburban feel. The Loop has different land uses and buildings and access to transit with MetroLink.
- We need to understand and consider Wash U’s plan relative to a broader plan. The Loop isn’t near what it could be, especially the west side.
- Lewis Center, the mixed use building with office and incubator space, is interesting.
- There is a need to focus on bike paths and walking paths, so people to easily get to these areas with amenities. This should include the Midland connection between the Loop and Olive.
- A demonstration project in the bike master plan is a natural connector that could be utilized.
- Midland is a county road so how does U City make changes w/out county buy-in and approval? Olive is a State road so has its own restrictions.
- Olive on the south side extends farther back than on north side. What happens if you consolidate more on the south side? An idea is to create two levels of retail on the south side and concentrate parking on the north side.
- Is there an opportunity to retain space for pedestrian travel near where flood areas are?
- People walk on the street because sidewalks are terrible due to lack of tree maintenance/sidewalk condition. There is very little that can be done to address this short of relocating the sidewalk.
- There are old subdivisions and areas in the Third Ward that don’t have parking – need to address this as part of a master plan
- Olive from I-170 to Skinker - caution people to visualize and look at brand new construction and roads and realize it won’t look like the Loop. In reality it will look brand new, much more like New Haven across river.
- A strategy to preserve character is choosing building materials that look older to make it have a more classic feel rather than the modern development currently happening
- Need to have foresight so there are smooth transitions rather than disjointed blocks of development
- City has lots of parks but many are old.

- The City's tree canopy is important. Many trees are old and many have been torn down over the years. The City does not have a replacement policy. Climate change will also impact the City's tree canopy over time.

3. Future Land Use Direction

Sarah reminded the Plan Commission of the goal statements that have been drafted, many of which are directly relevant to future character and land use. She shared some basic distinguishing features between a traditional vs. a character-based approach to land use and shared examples. She noted that in some areas the economic development strategy provides some guidance on potential character types. She also showed examples of how some character types could be applied in University City.

Shelby shared highlights from the assets and opportunities mapping that has been conducted thus far, including:

- Many participants marked opportunities for improved pedestrian and bike infrastructure.
- Some saw the Loop as an asset and activity center while others desired improvements (e.g., the trolley, variety of businesses, type of development).
- Participants see parks and recreation as an asset, but many want improved amenities
- People like the residential character in U City.
- Existing or potential activity centers: The Loop, Olive/Hafner, Olive/Midland, Jackson/Pershing, Delmar/North and South, Forsyth/Forest Park Parkway.

Sarah posed the following discussion questions to the group. In light of existing land use and development constraints:

- Where do you most want to see change in the City?
- What character do you want that change to take?
- Do existing land use policies and regulations support the desired character and land use?

Plan Commission members made comments, including the following:

- We should be looking at housing that is single family and consider whether we should be encouraging more of a mix.
- The City should look at Olive for multifamily along with a road diet near the park.
- The City should look at apartments above commercial space that are affordable or mixed price.
- The Clayton Master Plan shows Townhouses and row houses as a buffer to other uses, particularly between single family residential and commercial. It appears that this strategy has been effective there.
- Along Olive the City should preserve the international small business flavor and support mixed use development and affordable housing that creates a distinctive character for that neighborhood. This development would need new buildings. Small businesses and restaurants could survive in new buildings and feature activity centers to draw patrons.
- The "International Area" should be on Olive, west of Olive Gateway
- Natural parks that can thrive on their own are valued in other plans and should be considered in University City
- There is a need for greater opportunities to move within the community as life progresses (e.g. smaller condos and homes for when they first start out, as they age). Price per square foot in the city doesn't change as you move throughout the city or increase the size of houses. It is challenging to draw new residents when the school system is poor and a four-bedroom house can cost \$700,000-\$1,000,000.

- Many houses are old and hard to maintain,. Need to create opportunity to move out that will increase housing stock for younger people who want to move into those houses and maintain them.
- How can the City build assisted living? An example of this is the Village at Windcrest.
- There should be more 55+ active community opportunities - University City currently has none
- The plan should engage the Chinese Business Association. U City has the greatest concentration of Asian businesses compared to neighboring communities and this is an asset.
- Restaurants have popped up within residential areas, such as Taco Buddha, which makes neighborhoods more vibrant. People can walk and meet there. How can we promote these types of spaces across U City?
- We need to look at how to revise limited commercial. Does zoning code support what we want to do? Often times it does not.
- We need to be looking at the flood map and asking what within those areas can be green space. Green space can mitigate issues with water inundation to help some areas along Olive Blvd.
- In the Third Ward where there is lots of vacancy, could area be rezoned to make development possible for seniors, affordable, etc. and properties land banked to allow to redevelop without pushing people out while increasing density? Where there is low density commercial, people want more amenities and services. Many more people are now working from home, which also impacts demand.
- For old housing stock the cost of renovation very high. Ways of encouraging people to invest in homes should be pursued.
- While modern architecture has a place, developers should look at architecture in the neighborhood for cues.
- The City's infill committee needs to be reestablished.
- The Chinese restaurant area also includes other ethnicities and we should be more inclusive in how we talk about it.
- One member presented a map of U City owned properties, revealing that the City owns a substantial number of lots including many on Olive, which could impact future strategies.

4. Next Steps / Adjourn

Sarah gave a brief overview of the next steps, including a request to share additional ideas about character types using an interactive or static map that would be sent out after the meeting and request to participate in and volunteer at the upcoming public workshops.

Plan Commission members made comments, including the following:

- Copies of flyers for the workshop were requested to get to religious institutions at this weekend's services.
 - Mary will coordinate so they can be picked up today.
- We need a call to action as to why people should get involved with concrete examples of what can show up in the plan. Chuck indicated that he would work on talking points for this.

The meeting was adjourned.