

D-R-A-F-T
Mill plaza study Committee Minutes
Wednesday, September 19, 2007
Durham Town hall – Council Chambers
4:30PM

Members Present: Dave Howland (Chair), Julian Smith (Vice Chair of Committee), Crawford Mills, Douglas Bencks, Chuck Cressy, Thomas Newkirk, Perry Bryant, Lorne Parnell, Deborah Hirsch Mayer

Members Absent: Edgar Ramos, Mark Henderson, Warren Daniel

Also Present: Patricia Sherman (AIA Representative) and Patrick Field at table, Members of the Public: Robin Mower, Ed Garcia, and Representatives of the Three Design Teams: from LaValle Brensinger Chris Urner, from JSA Tom Ingebritson and Fabiana Orlando, and from Team Durham/Midnight Oil Bill Schoonmaker was present from approximately 4:30 to 5:30pm.

1. Call to order by Dave Howland at 4:33pm.
2. Welcome and overview of Agenda by Dave Howland.
3. Approval of the Agenda
Julian Smith moved to approve the Agenda and the motion was seconded by Crawford Mills. The motion was unanimously approved by the Committee.
4. Approval of the Minutes from August 22nd.
Julian Smith made a motion to accept the Minutes with the following changes:
In the list of those present for the meeting every one after Patrick Field and Patricia Sherman were in the audience.
Under item 7 – “Dave Howland” should be inserted rather than the typo “;k”
Under item 9 –Substitute “on Durham Point” for “near Durham Point”.
This motion to accept the Minutes so amended was second by Crawford Mills and unanimously approved.
5. Public Comment
Robin Mower thanked the Mill Plaza management for having some dead trees and dead limbs at the Mill Plaza cleaned up. She also wanted to raise the issue of safety in any proposed parking structure, both in terms of it inviting graffiti and vandalism, as well as concerns of assault particularly for young women at night.
6. Update on Latest Developments
Patricia Sherman spoke about the interest of RKG Associates (Richard K. Gsottschneider) in doing economic studies of the Plaza redevelopment site. The study

would focus on looking at a balance between scale and value, whether this site warrants higher value and possibly lower density or highest density but lower value. The contract being proposed would involve putting together a matrix looking at square footage versus different kind of uses and looking at what might produce the highest value. Dave Howland noted that the ranges of square footages were taken from the three designs. Chuck Cressy wanted to clarify that these numbers do not include the parking garage, and Patricia Sherman clarified that they do not. Patricia continued that the highest value building would actually be a hotel, as it has a relatively small footprint and the same value per sq. foot for each floor, unlike other combinations of retail, commercial and residential. This kind of information from RKG would lend itself to providing more specific guidelines for the design teams.

Crawford Mills inquired if the matrix would include public buildings, and Patricia Sherman responded that it would.

Patricia Sherman - The second part of the contract with RKG would look at financing options, including TIF.

There followed discussion about TIFs and other possible financing structures.

Patricia Sherman – The information from this analysis by RKG would provide concrete information to keep the process moving forward for the design teams and the Town. RKG is also open to changing the contract if needed.

Patrick Field – This economic study is good value for the cost, and as a local resident RKG has an incentive to do this project. The cost would also be split three ways.

Julian Smith – Clarified that RKG stands for Richard K. Gsottschneider, and he is a local resident.

Dave Howland – The contract with RKG would cost \$15,000, and be split three ways by AIA, Mr. Pinto, and the town of Durham, with the Durham money to come from the UDEG grant.

Chuck Cressy – Raised an issue of competition between retail zones in the Town, and wondered if RKG will take that into consideration, specifically if the town hall is relocated to the Plaza, and the current town hall site is turned into retail.

As this line of discussion was related to the next topic discussion moved onto item 7.

7. Discussion and Endorsement of Proposed Agreement with RKG for Preliminary Economic Analysis

Following was an in-depth discussion about the proposed agreement with RKG. Concerns about the scope of the analysis were raised, and questions about the flexibility

of what can be included in the contract with RKG. It was discussed that there was some flexibility but that any changes would need to be run by RKG. The issue of timing was also raised, wondering if it would make sense to do other studies prior to this analysis.

Further discussion centered on the idea that the RKG analysis would be a way to get things moving and fits well with the design team schedule established so far. Concerns about Mr. Pinto's willingness to help pay for this and other studies down the road were raised. It was noted that Mr. Pinto would definitely need to be consulted about this proposal.

There was also discussion about possible funding for conservation efforts for College Brook through the Conservation Committee, as it was thought they might have access to monies that might be used for these kinds of purposes.

Crawford Mills suggested getting RKG's resume or CV up on the website to let folks know who he is. There was general assent to this suggestion.

Patricia Sherman asserted that the planning needed to shoot high and that the RKG analysis would be a good choice to do this and the information from this analysis would keep the design process moving along.

Patrick Field observed that instincts are conservative in looking for economic reality and that there is risk associated with this step and the process. He also recognized that there is a desire to aim high in developing this project.

Dave Howland iterated that the Committee's endorsement of this proposal would be a signal to the town manager and Mr. Pinto that the proposal is ready to go forward.

Julian Smith and Patrick Field clarified that if the Committee endorsed the proposal with RKG that Todd Selig would be able to allocate the Town's proposed share of the contract costs without going to the Town Council.

Tom Newkirk moved to approve the proposed agreement with RKG. Crawford Mills seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

8. Discuss and Provide Feedback to Design Teams

Patrick Field - Introduced the Agenda item, letting everyone know that the design teams were donating more time, and that generic, broader advice would be useful to move things forward, and that the design teams would also be able to ask some questions. Patrick Field also made note on a flipchart of many of the following comments. A summary of the notes will follow at the end of this Agenda item.

Hard copies of the design schemes presented at the public workshop on Saturday, September 7th at the Oyster river High School, were distributed to the Committee members and audience.

Patricia Sherman suggested going straight to questions if everyone had seen these before.

Patrick Field asked that the design teams' members present reintroduce themselves. The design team members present presented themselves.

Dave Howland and Patricia Sherman briefly recapped the major similarities and differences of the schemes. Following was a discussion in which questions about the overall density of the designs were raised, with some people appreciating the level density shown and others being a little taken aback by the proposed density. Particularly the density of housing was of concern, as in some of the designs the maximum number of housing units could double the Faculty Rd. population. It was noted that this would also provide vibrancy and life to the downtown area.

Concerns about parking and traffic given the proposed increase in density were also raised and explored, both in terms of the available storefront level parking spaces, as well as the overall flow of traffic through the development and downtown area and how this would impact consumer patterns. There were concerns that proposed changes would not fit current business practices. There was also discussion about how proposed changes could advantageously change how business is done rather than be a detriment, including pedestrian access and shopping, and making the stores and the Plaza itself a destination.

Perry Bryant suggested that a design based on everything, retail, commercial, residential, etc., being included in one large structure would save on the amount of space needed. An associated parking structure would provide access to each level of the building, there would be more open space and plenty of room for a large buffer zone around College Brook. This design would also simplify traffic patterns. A green space could even be created on top of the structure.

Patrick Sherman asked the design teams to explain why they took the approach that they did. Comments from the design team members suggested that their designs sought to reduce the perceived scale of the project and to promote a more neighborhood kind of feeling.

Crawford Mills offered comments to the teams and left the meeting at 6:12 pm.

Doug Bencks offered that the Library does not need one of the specific locations given in the designs but wanted a place of prominence as a key part of the Plaza. It was clarified that the Library does not necessarily need to be surrounded by green space, but needs easy access to it.

Dave Howland thanked the design teams for their hard work, summed up many of the comments made and urged Committee members to send feedback and thoughts via e-mail if there was not time tonight.

Summary of points written on the flip board:

1. concern about density and resulting traffic
2. concern about total of housing units and impact on area
3. concern about parking for the grocery store, specifically parking at the store level, would like 90 dedicated spaces
4. concern that parking control would be an issue if parking was more limited
5. suggestion to increase pedestrian traffic to offset the above concerns
6. suggestion to have a pick up place for groceries in front of store, so people could park farther away
7. suggested creating a gathering space for winter months
8. question if grocery delivery was possible, as a suggestion to alleviate parking needs
9. suggestion to have one big building with everything inside with green roof
10. suggestion to have residential units face the brook, retail face inward to ease view concerns from Mill Pond Rd. and to maximize the quality of housing there
11. concern about student housing, does not like the idea, suggest family housing
12. likes how the designs pull Main St. down, integrating them is good
13. library should have prominent place if not on the most valuable corner
14. traffic flow is important
15. need to balance carefully the mass, density, scale and value
16. concern about housing by Chesley Drive corner, especially if student housing
17. concern that the proposed housing units would double the houses in the area from Main St. to Mill Pond, Oyster River

9. Dates – Setting Calendar

Dave Howland - The next regular meeting is Oct 17th, and RKG hopes to have their final report done by the first full week in Oct. It should be possible to discuss the report at the next meeting.

The next Public Workshop was moved from Oct. 29th to November 4th in order to accommodate design team and Committee schedules.

10. Other Business

No other business.

11. Public Comment

Ed Garcia suggested that it may make sense to provide access for fire trucks and other safety vehicles through Chesley Drive, possibly having a locked gate with keys for safety personnel.

Robin Mower –Liked Perry Bryant’s idea about green rooftops no matter the size of the garage or building. Cautioned about the scale of density, noted that something on the scale of Holloway Commons would be too large, and would change the nature of the site drastically. Voiced general concern about having housing units by Chesley Drive, noted that it was not popular especially if it was to be student housing. There was a general concern about student housing in general.

120 to 130 houses between Main Street and Mill Pond and Oyster River Road would be doubling those in the area.

Would the Committee like to ask Town Council or the Economic Committee to attend the presentation of the report from RKG.

Speaking to the philosophy of “build it and they will come” – Kaleidoscoop is an example of where this worked. There was a general concern about compromising vibrancy by having too much density.

12. Adjournment

Julian Smith moved to adjourn, Deborah Hirsch Mayer seconded the motion, and the motion to adjourn was unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 6:37.