

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF NORTHVILLE
PLANNING COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION
December 18, 2017**

DATE: December 18, 2017
TIME: 7:00 PM
PLACE: Northville Township Hall
44405 Six Mile Road

APPROVED: January 30, 2018

CALL TO ORDER: 6:41 PM by Vice Chair Zawodny

ROLL CALL:

Present: Richard Allen, Lisa Anderson, Tim Guerriero, George McCarthy, Jayne Watson, Tim Zawodny
Excused: Eric Lark

Staff: Jennifer Frey, Township Planner

Approval of Minutes: None

Other Minutes: None

Correspondence: None

Brief Public Comments: None.

New Business

1. JPUD17-003 The Village of Northville

Representative: John Ackerman, Atwell Group
Location: 47500 5 Mile Road (former Scott Correctional Facility site)
Request: Planned Unit Development (PUD) Amendment
Action: Discussion only

Members of The Village of Northville development team present this evening were:

- John Ackerman, Atwell, Southfield MI
- Brian Wenzel, Atwell, Southfield MI
- Brian Colburn, Norr Architects, Detroit MI
- Anthony Ricciuti, Norr Architects, Detroit MI
- Shaun Gignac, Norr Architects, Detroit MI
- Zach Weiss, Beztak Companies, Farmington Hills MI

Mr. Ackerman made some introductory comments regarding the purpose of tonight's study session, which was to have an open, candid discussion regarding the proposed amendment to the PUD for The Village of Northville. The goal was to gather information, and to return to the

Planning Commission at the next available meeting with a plan that would reflect tonight's discussion.

The development team emphasized the following points:

- The PUD plan was the result of several years' work. The original developer REDICO was a successful seasoned developer. Even so, when the original plan called for retail to be interior to the site, REDICO had not been able to obtain any Letters of Intent.
- The market was driving the development in a different direction. The challenge was to balance the spirit of the conceptual plan with what could actually be accomplished.
- Changes were made to the plan as a result of the December 5 meeting; the applicants were seeking further input to continue to move forward. Changes thus far included:
 - a. Removal of carports on the commercial side of the lofts. There were still carports on the northern side.
 - b. Garage spaces for the lofts had been reduced from 7 2-car garage spaces to 10 1-car garage spaces.
 - c. Improved framing of the entryway.
 - d. Removal of the clubhouse, with loft services being placed in the 1st floor commercial locations.
 - e. The Loft area had a greater sense of dimension and play.
 - f. Density in the loft area had been reduced back to 190 units.
 - g. More landscaping had been added.
- The intent of the boulevard was to provide a mirror image on the north and south side, in terms of massing, scale, and corridor development.
- Retail did not want to locate where they could not be seen. While the Township might want retail on the interior of the site from a design point of view, it was likely any retail there would remain vacant or have repeated vacancies. Retailers wanted Beck Road exposure, along with exposure from 5 Mile and Beck Road.
- Interior commercial would include professional offices for accountants, dentists, etc.
- Every retail space on the drawing had a Letter of Intent except the large market/grocer space.

Comments from the Commission included:

- The development team had changed a lot over the past 1.5 – 2 years. The Township had not wanted the retail to drive this development. The goal had been for the village concept to drive the design.
- Also, the goal had been for the overall parcel to be a destination place, with integration of live, work, retail, commercial, shops, restaurants, grocery/market. The village concept included integrated pedestrian pathways and avenues reaching to the park, providing a natural, meandering experience as pedestrians walked along the street.
- There had been real excitement about the village concept, including international companies that responded well to this environment for people brought over from Germany, Japan, etc.
- If the final result was a built subdivision with a strip mall, there had been a collective failure.
- Right now the plans did not reflect that original vision.

In response to comments from Vice Chair Zawodny, Mr. Ackerman said that great villages were not forced. Many villages were villages before zoning laws, but were created from an

earlier time, and included a high volume of residents living in close proximity, often with limited parking that did not meet code, and very reduced speed limits, something not possible along Beck and 5 Mile Road.

Commissioner Watson asked for more information regarding the thought process that went into this latest plan.

Mr. Ackerman said that when the developer changed, people with experience in retail development were brought on board. One reason why it was important to keep moving and secure retail tenants was because the original agreement called for a penalty if the site was not developed within a certain amount of time. They did not have the luxury of waiting for the market to evolve. Mr. Wenzel added that they had to balance what was and what realistically could be on the site.

Vice Chair Zawodny asked for more clarification. Mr. Wenzel addressed the *village concept*. Again, this concept required a very high density. It was very difficult to create a new downtown, or an idealized vision of a village.

Commissioner Watson strongly suggested looking at successful village-concept developments, and working with ideas that had proven successful in other locations.

Further discussion included:

- Parking – the retail and market would need a certain amount of parking, and to that end a parking lot would be required. However, there were some things that could be done to soften the parking, including moving retail buildings closer together to discourage driving around them, pulling the hotel in closer to the retail businesses, and to encourage an urban streetscape. Also, the parking did not need to be designed for Black Friday or Mother’s Day, but rather to meet the everyday parking needs of the retail there.
- Open space percentages needed to be met
- The greenbelts along Beck Road and the northern property line remained unresolved. The developers suggested meeting setback standards; the original PUD called for a 95-foot greenbelt along Beck Road and a northern setback of 118 feet. This was a major change. The developers believed greenspace within the development was superior to large greenbelts along the perimeter, in terms of providing greenspace as an amenity to the Village of Northville residents.
- Regarding retail development, retailers in the scale of 2-3,000 square feet were slowly becoming nonexistent. There needed to be an appropriate mix of uses, shared parking, with overall uses that were active from day to night. The hotel was a good example of this.
- Regarding retail development, even though 5 Mile Road was the least attractive frontage, hotels wanted to face 5 Mile Road, and retailers including restaurants wanted to face the 5 Mile/Beck Road frontage. They wanted visibility.

From the audience, a resident spoke who identified himself as a President of a Homeowners’ Association who met regularly with 3-4 other HOA presidents, all within 2 miles from the subject site. They wanted retail. They had not wanted Meijer when that was proposed, but they did want a good strong retail anchor.

Commissioner Watson asked how the retail space was being marketed. Were interior retail spaces being marketed enthusiastically? Mr. Wenzel said that successful retailers did not want to be creative so much as they wanted to follow their model, which included visibility from major roads.

Discussion continued:

- The grocery store/market could have an interactive space in front, such as Westborn Market provided at its locations.
- It was pointed out that Georges Senate Coney Island on Haggerty had no visibility, yet was always busy.

Commissioner Watson remained unconvinced that the village concept as originally envisioned could not work. There were changes that could be made to the undeveloped space that could be true to that vision. Integration of parcels north to south, along with integration of residential and retail space could still occur.

Commissioner Anderson felt it was important to work with the general concept as presented, and not require completely new plans. The biggest flaw from her point of view in the plan presented December 5 was that the cumulative effect of all the concessions being requested was overwhelming. The developers had presented a reduced greenbelt, increased stories of units, increased density, lack of compliance with open space, and in general had shown a massively overbuilt site. Also, parking islands should not count as open space.

Mr. Wenzel reiterated that they could get to required setbacks, but could not probably get back to the 95-foot greenbelt as originally proposed.

Vice Chair Zawodny said the large greenbelts had served a real purpose – they had provided a buffer from neighboring uses, and provided a sense of vista to the residents of the Village.

The developers asked for further direction from the Commission.

Commissioner Watson felt the village concept had been lost. It still seemed like the retail was a group of floating buildings in a sea of asphalt.

Commissioner Watson pointed out that the carports were not approved on the original plan. Township Planner Frey agreed. Mr. Ackerman said there had always been a desire for one covered parking space per unit.

Commissioner Allen felt that some changes made in the plan, specifically the removal of the carports from the retail/commercial area, along with some improvements in pedestrian pathways, represented a movement in the right direction.

Vice Chair Zawodny summarized the concerns of the Commission as:

- The Commission generally found the hotel use as acceptable, though it should meld with the uses next to it, including sensitivity to front door placement and how that fit into a general pedestrian scheme.

- The lower, more spread out lofts needed more study. The Commission was not convinced that the tradeoff of less greenbelt for the lower lofts was beneficial. Perhaps the residential could drop back from Beck Road.
- The pedestrian network needed to be more integrated and welcoming.
- Densities and parking requirements for the retail needed to further refined.
- The southeast corner gateway should have more presence, as should the northern gateway as well.
- The entire project needed more integration, with more attention paid to the spirit of a village development.

Vice Chair Zawodny ended discussion and called for adjournment.

Adjournment: 8:45 P.M.