

Minutes

TWNA – Special Meeting on State Street properties

June 28, 2007

Steering Committee Members Present: Kathy Buchholz, Stan Carpenter, Carlyn Conway, Ken Fulgione, Jeremy Gragert, Rick Kayser, Sue Kayser, Jim Massey, Mary Mickel, Susan Miller, Bob Schwartz, Catherine Sinkewicz, Maria Henly

Others Present: Paul Hoff, Jeff & Ellen Nelson, Mike Rindo, Terri Stanley, John Hibbard, Paul Miller, Curtis Goodson, Craig Falkner, Craig Hughes, Sheryl Hughes, Ron Keezer, Margaret Becher, Jenny Fesenmaier, Laura Jensen

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Chair Stan Carpenter.

Stan welcomes Cary Osborn from local real estate development company AHMC Asset Management, based in Eau Claire, doing business in cities, in West Central Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

Cary said that it was unusual that three adjacent State Street properties would be for sale at the same time (1406, 1408, & 1500 [Buffington Home]), and that the properties interested him because of potential for a mixed-use of the properties. Cary repeatedly stated that his vision was to “preserve the integrity of the properties for the next 100 years.” The properties are zoned R2 (duplex or single family) and could become rental property without rezoning. Cary also said that the area could serve as an entrance or “front door” to UWEC. Cary passed out packets of maps of the property area with information about AHMC.

John Hibbard said State Street has long been the entrance to the city for many people coming to Eau Claire and that he does not want it to look “institutional”, and that he does not want front yards to be parking lots.

Cary said he does not have a specific plan for the properties, but could picture it as a mixed use “lifestyle center” that could possibly support housing and entertainment (gave the example of a coffee shop), an area where one could “live, work, and walk to jobs.”

Terri Stanley said families need to be attracted to the Third Ward, and rental property would not do that. Stanley said there was a danger in rezoning to allow other types of uses because AHMC may not be the owner in the future and the properties could fall into the hands of anyone.

Concern was raised about parking and increased traffic. Cary said any parking would be underground or a cooperative agreement could be made with UWEC. Cary said whatever use was created would be low traffic.

Cary was asked whether AHMC had experience with historic properties. Cary said no.

Cary said that he had a design company from the Twin Cities called Urban Works look at the properties and he said the company found potential in them, especially the Buffington house. He said Urban Works saw potential for UWEC to create an entry-way to the university.

Cary said that he knew he could not do a project by himself, and would have to approach the neighborhood for input, saying he wants everyone to be part of the process.

Mike Rindo was asked if the university was still interested in the properties. Rindo said: "If these properties remain available the university may be interested. We are looking for a front door, because we don't have one."

Cary said he is not working with the university on plans, and any purchase or use of the property by his company would not be in collaboration with UWEC. UWEC's interest in the properties is separate.

Stanley said that zoning is the only control the neighborhood has over the properties.

The economic feasibility of businesses on State Street was questioned, and Cary said he did not know either.

Cary said he is concerned about the area, and that is why he is here. He said he is a resident of Eau Claire, attended UWEC, and has lived in the Third Ward in the past. Cary said it was a contingency that he go in front of the neighborhood.

Maria Henly said that large old homes available in the past have eventually been bought and it is a matter of time before a family will move in. Maria said: "The university has a front door – they turned it into a parking lot. The university has used their power against us. Their front door is a parking lot – that was their choice. The university is a scary proposition for all of us."

A conditional use permit was brought up, but it was stated that it didn't work for the white house on Park Ave. & McKinley. Ken Fulgione said that property was just sold to a person who is now moving in.

Mary Mickel said she does not want rezoning, and said that was likely the consensus of the group.

Cary said he is willing to have people from the neighborhood help work out a plan with him. Cary said three or four people from the neighborhood would be welcome to work closely with him, and that he would extend the same offer to UWEC.

Terri said she is familiar with Urban Works and said they do not preserve old homes.

Stan said the neighborhood residents can email him their comments regarding possible plans for the properties and zoning issues, as well as if they would like to work closely on plans. Stan would be in contact with Cary.

When asked when he was intending to make a decision on the properties Cary said he will buy or not buy very soon, but would give no more information saying it was a private matter. Cary said that AHMC wants to be part of something great with everyone in the neighborhood.

Cary left the meeting at 8:15 P.M., saying neighborhood residents could feel free to contact him at any time.

Stan said: "If we are not a part of the process, we can get hurt by the process." Stan said to contact him if anyone is interested in working with AHMC on possible plans.

It was said that any participation in planning could be a long process, and would occur only if AHMC chooses to buy one or more of the properties.

It was noted that the neighborhood's comprehensive plan calls for looking into the possibility of mixed-use areas being created in the Third Ward.

Stan said the Steering Committee should meet in July to discuss this further.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 P.M.

Jeremy Gragert, Note-taker