

Alice Dreger's notes on the "Park District Planning Area, former City Center II" meetings, **September 6, 2012 at 7 pm**, and **September 7, 2012, at 9 am**, both at Hannah Community Center. These are rough notes, not a transcript. I've combined the pm and am meeting notes here, as indicated, without bothering to take notes twice on the staff comments if they were essentially the same both meetings (which they were).

At the evening meeting, there were about 75 people including about 10 staff. At the morning meeting, there were about 40 people including about 7 staff. Kevin Beard was in attendance at the am session. I did not see any other council members at either meeting.

The main title slide was called "Park District Planning Area, former City Center II."

**pm** George Lahanas: welcome. This is about our downtown, which is an asset and focal point to our community. It's where we have our festivals and concerts, homecoming parades, our chili cook-off, etc. Going to talk about the past a little. CC2 was a project found not to be economically feasible due to an economic analysis that took place in spring. City staff recommended against continuing in June. City council accepted that unanimously. We are now going forward with the properties owned by the city or DDA. We are at the starting point. We want to know what you envision for that process. We want to check in with you tonight and tomorrow morning. There will be no speeches from council members. They're here to listen. By breaking it up into small tables we wanted lots of input from many people. Our planning department works to give city a vibrant future. I appreciate all of them. Constantly working to make sure EL is a great livable community. I'm going to sit down and listen now. (**am** was similar introduction)

**pm and am similar, melded here:** Lori Mullins: I will do a quick presentation to show what we're dealing with and an overview of what we're talking about. This is the area (see also maps on tables) showing what is controlled by the city and DDA and properties owned by the development firm. [She did not name who owns the other properties.] The properties on Grand River Avenue and Evergreen Arms, those are all controlled by the developer. 303 Abbot is owned by the DDA, as is 314 Evergreen are the other properties on Evergreen. These were purchased for the parking structure designed for this area under the City Center II plan. Constraints include zoning. The area was rezoned for City Center II so that will have to be redone. There are historic district properties on Evergreen areas, as is the street – part of Evergreen and Valley Court Drive are in the historic district. So doing anything there will require Historic District Commission approval. In addition, the land cost is a constraint. The DDA purchased the properties along Evergreen, and \$5.6 million is now owed on those properties. We need to try to recoup those costs over time. We also have infrastructure needs. The area needs parking for private uses but also need for public parking. Also need for infrastructure in terms of underground utilities, sewer and water. Any increased intensity in use in the area will require upgrades. That was previously estimated at \$1.6 million. "Our goal for

RFQ and RFP: to receive public input (on the entire area is our goal, she said at the am meeting) on the vision for the redevelopment of the overall site for incorporation into a Request for Qualifications/Proposals for the City and DDA owned properties." First step after picking a developer based on qualifications, that would be a predevelopment agreement. That's where we work through the feasibility. There would be public charrettes, demonstrate financial feasibility, illustrate design ideas, etc., before entering into development agreement. Timing, we are looking at getting a draft RFQ together, taking those to DDA and City Council, we encourage participation in those public meetings to look at that draft and provide comments. It will be on our website as a draft and we'd like feedback. We'd like to see the RFQ go out by end of October to move at steady pace. Additional stakeholder input needed: reach out to neighbors and friends to get additional input. We accept email comments and we like comments in writing if possible but we want you to keep on coming in. We are here to work together and share ideas today. We want conversation around the context. What do we need to keep in mind? What's going on around the site? Relations to park, downtown, neighborhoods, traffic. We'd like to have everybody draw on the maps and say this is an area we are concerned about noise, or area that is a gateway for the city. Go ahead and draw on the maps on your tables to show what we need to keep in mind. We also care about uses. We have some photos from Madison. Not necessarily what we seek, but examples. What do we want to see? We see here an example of high density student development. Examples of children's museum or downtown urban grocer with craft cocktail bar. Also need to think about public infrastructure. Bikes, cars, etc. And need to think about density and size. Density and size can be managed with things like setbacks of upper floors. We also need to think about how uses go together with density and size. Need density to support what we put in. Also value from redevelopment requires density for things like public parking and [did she say "low" here?] cost of land necessary to attract that kind of use. Tim is going to give parameters of what to talk about.

**pm and am similar, melded here:** Tim Dempsey: We appreciate everyone coming. More than rsvp'ed at pm so it will be a challenge. We have facilitators from MSU and East Lansing's staff. No idea is bad but please be quick and succinct in sharing. We will spend 20-25 minutes doing table work and then 20 minutes reporting out. Your facilitator should identify themselves at the table. They are city staff from Planning, Code, Public Works, etc. They are not all experts in the details of this project so we're trying not to make this a question session as much about ideas and visions. If there are questions we'll try to manage those at the tables. We ask a volunteer at each table be the recorder. Working at the maps, everyone can do that. Someone needs to report out, and that should not be the facilitator. We need to move expediently. Work on context, uses, and density. I know a number of people here represent neighborhood association boards. Please take this information out and share it. Report back to neighbors. We do ask that if you're going to share information and want to use a direct quote, ask permission for that. We have a media table. We just ask that courtesy because we want an open forum with frank discussion so we encourage that. There are no bad ideas and we want everyone to

have a comfort level and not to have people's ideas plastered around if they're not comfortable with that. So I'll ask everyone to get started.

**At the pm meeting, at this point the microphone was grabbed by Steve Osborn:** I'm reading from the 5<sup>th</sup> of a list of important questions from community leaders. I'm a registered architect and community leader. We have enough people here to make substantive contributions to the eventual comprehensive plan on East Lansing. Rather than focusing only on RFPs, what could we do to expand the scope of tonight into useful contributions to deal with city-owned properties and privately-owned properties, bearing in mind the Red Cedar Golf Course area, we have developers planned to come here and discuss their ideas for between the cities. I think we need to get in step with those kind of forward-looking developers.

**At the pm meeting,** Tim Dempsey replied to Steve: That's why we're going to start with context. We're also going to be an update as we go into this fall and next year, we'll be updating our comprehensive plan and we'd like greater community input.

[At this point, at the pm meeting, people worked at the tables until 8:00 pm, which was about 20-25 minutes discussion time. Same thing essentially happened in the am meeting.]

**pm:** Tim Dempsey: Asked groups to summarize what they talked about by category of context, uses, density/size. Quick report of 1 minute per table.

**am:** Tim Dempsey: (same thing but less time constraint because fewer tables/people; in this case, tables reported out on all their ideas at once.)

**pm:** Ideas from citizens on context:

Table 1: Pedestrian walkway, small parking lot, businesses, condos, hotel. Context: overall development in downtown with attention to neighborhoods. Protect the church and parks in the area. Issue of what is owned by the city. How will these things be sustainable?

Table 2: Protect and promote Valley Court Park. Make a corridor instead of a wall to connect these things.

Table 3: road extended and rework to make reasonable corridor. Uses of Valley Court Park expanded. Ice rink seasonally? Bring in more of the community. Expand the senior center that is there up, rather than out. Allow more of community to be involved in that area.

Table 4: Recognize unique needs and assets of a university community.

Table 5: Different road to take people around and make plaza a pedestrian plaza. Make Valley Court Park the gateway for the vehicles, keep the park as it is. Have grocery and drug store that is walkable, so people can leave cars and walk all around. De-congest Abbot. Market downtown, biking walking downtown. Better bike lanes. When downtown is walkable, have to be careful to support all year around like when the students are gone. Ithaca, NY, found it wasn't sustainable when students were gone. Need residential community to support downtown all year around. Not too big buildings. Span the generations so that if you grow old it

won't be difficult or unfriendly. Combination of needs of all ages and types of people who move into the area.

Table 6: Walkable space all through area. Current Abbot streetscape is a lot of zero-setback. Better to have patio spaces. The bike lane south of Albert disappears. Bike lanes should be available throughout.

Table 7: We were concerned with traffic at Albert and Abbot, and Grand River and Abbot. Those are often nightmares. We were concerned with pedestrian foot traffic. Near campus so attractive for what students need. If they can come off campus and enjoy it that would be good. We were curious about status and cost of student housing. Appropriate to put city-managed student housing?

Table 8: Biggest concern was need for better connection to MSU on the west side of Abbot. Also concerned about walkability. Need to integrate and compliment area attractions, including new art museum.

Table 9: Integration and expansion of the park, that is a valuable resource.

Pedestrian-friendly region. For the future, keep in mind Albert Avenue as important thoroughfare and how that could be made into more than just a cut-through for cars and parking lots.

Table 10: Connect green space from Valley Court. Hotel. Maybe a "Chinatown."  
Pedestrian friendly and with bikes.

**pm:** Ideas from citizens on uses:

Table 10: We covered that in our last report.

Table 9: East Lansing cultural center. Aesthetics important. Corner is really ugly right now and it is a main focal point. Create a centerpiece. Something similar to City Center 1, mixed use, not overpowering.

Table 8: student housing, restaurants, entrepreneurial space, mixed use.

Table 7: Expanding the park. Farmers' market downtown. Low-cost senior housing near campus. Mixed use housing and commercial development. Structural and aesthetic design is critical. Right now it is awful to look at.

Table 6: Whatever uses are for the site, they have to be financially feasible.

Residential is important to that area and we think there is demand there. A market study would be good. What we see in Madison we like. In terms of retail, market, bars, restaurants. There has to be enough parking to support what is there. The uses need to work with non-city-owned properties. Unclear how that will work in. Doing a corporate campus maybe to bring high-tech office jobs to downtown EL. They could be across a big-10 university and that would stimulate retail.

Table 5: Core closed to traffic. If motel or hotel, then boutique hotel with good restaurant. Why has Chandler Crossing failed? Friends are downtown and that's where they meet. We want to avoid having a place that [missed this]. Market and outdoor meeting places for friends, strangers, young, old. Set-backs make for a much more attractive streetscape than a towering building. Plazas, seating places. People-watching spaces needed.

Table 4: Alumni housing community, game day condos. Retain park land.

Entertainment districts, goods and services.

Table 3: A lot of same ideas. Alumni housing interested us. Opening up the corridor between downtown and the park, creating a connection, places to gather. Bike

spaces. Pay attention historic character. Market and restaurant, farm to table market and restaurant. Transit to it and around it. Elementary school?

Table 2: Senior housing as a big issue. Also mixed uses but not on a scale that is overwhelming. Movie theatre and grocery store and also restaurants.

Table 1: Small parking structure with pedestrian walkway through up Evergreen. Housing with retail corridor. Hotel or high rise but underneath retail and boutique type things. Market, theatre (for film). Try to bring people across the city after they visit the Broad. We overlapped with context and uses as a lot of people did.

**pm:** Ideas from citizens on density:

Table 1: Urgent care would be useful. Streetscapes matter. High end retail and restaurants. Multi-use. Housing. Want it to look upscale like downtown Old Town and Ann Arbor, or Grand Rapids. Somewhere you want to come. Not someplace unfriendly to students, but friendly to the other city people.

Table 2: Parking was a big issue and we think it should be distributed and underground. Control the height and density of development in the area.

Table 3: Need density to drive use, so there has to be housing. Clustering it perhaps, so not the whole footprint is used. An open connecting corridor.

Table 4: We didn't have a lot of time to discuss this, but we talked about shape. Look at the aerial photos, there are a lot of non-city owned properties that are at issue.

Table 5: Against tall buildings. Want to attract tech companies to uniquely-designed structures. Need for small office space? If they are there, they might eat downtown and might even want to live there. Noise comes with living downtown. Structures can increase insulation and be more sound proof.

Table 6: We think high density is important. Barnes & Nobel went out of business and a lot of vacancy. There are not enough people downtown. The current paradigm doesn't work. If there's a market maybe there should be a 10 or 15 story building if it makes sense. Green space can be respected.

Table 7: We didn't talk too much about density. Private areas on Grand River and southern part of city owned land should be 3-5 stories not more, area near park lower density.

Table 8: higher density development. Downtowns are big and have tall buildings. More dense near Grand River.

Table 9: Not too much density in one spot. Integrate rapid transit. Investing in the location. Don't have to chase density. If we're going to lose money, let's lose it on something that is for our community, not just lose it on developers. Movie theatre? Bike and walk friendly is important.

Table 10: Moderate density. Higher closer to Abbot.

**am tables reported all their ideas at once:**

am Table 1: Neighborhoods, People's Church, MSU, downtown. Reminders: future BRT corridor which CC2 will interact with. This will be the gateway to EL from Lansing or the highway, so this represents the soul of EL and the attitude. So one of our panelists said we need a 100 year plan. We are passionate about entertainment. Movie theatre? Movie theatres here already losing out. Foreign and independent

films? Digital venue? Relocate NPR there? Housing that accommodates multi generations. Student community, keep MSU graduates who want to live here, grandparents who want to live near grandkids. All these people would need parking. So we thought idea to accommodate multi-generations – fresh water aquarium, children’s museum. We could lose money so let’s make sure it is an area we all like and can be proud of.

Density: Pros and cons of building tall buildings. We can’t have what we want without bigger buildings. So mixed uses, stepping back buildings. Then we ran out of time.

am Table 2: Preserve parking ideas. Address parking needs. More bikes and bus use? Strategic bus routes going to more public places? Safety of bikers is a concern. Talked about sidewalks and safety. Incorporate all transportation modes and options. Groceries, a bakery, large diversity and variety in the stores. Draw people downtown, if more directed to students? Should be directed to year-round citizens. Visually we talked about taller buildings around the outside and lower in the middle of the site. Visually, a park like atmosphere with paths and greenery. Focus on beauty and aesthetics. Renovation in the buildings that have potential to be renovated.

Uses: Maybe a medical component, doctors’ offices, with residential, loft-condos, apartments. Empty nesters or alumni housing.

am Table 3: Pathway to the park. A pleasant way to get from downtown to park. Ease into the neighborhood with lower density near there.

Uses: Big thing is mixed use development but has to be sustainable. Not closings all the time. We don’t want to pull everything out of elsewhere to have empty stores elsewhere. Grocery, even small, is a need. Hardware would be good. More housing close to university is always a need. But proposals presented for Red Cedar and such, you could have so much housing that you’re pulling from all over the city, like in some respects the development up to the north did. Now people up there might get isolated. Restaurants, hotel, movie theatre, restaurants. We had a nice table with business people and students and neighborhood people. Relative to density and size, staggered heights seem like a good idea. Make sure thinking about whole process.

am Table 4: We echo virtually everything said. Market, Trader Joe’s, Whole Foods, mentioned a lot. More green space. Band shell. Movie theatre. Parking or parking ramp necessary? We were split on this question. Market, walkability, all that necessary.

am Table 5: We talked about a lot of the same things. One unique thing was discussion of how this will effect the health of the community. Can we get people outdoors, moving? The green space could conflict with or compliment the green space of MSU. Will people from campus go there? Relationship between red and blue properties – these are clearly interdependent, so how does this work out? The blue properties are hardly visible from the main roads, so how do you develop the public without the private being developed in concert? Concern about houses up on

Evergreen. Creating an urban grocery would be great for everybody except the people who own it and won't make money on it. Community input is important on next stages.

am Table 6: Making everything walkable. Emphasizing ability to use bikes downtown. Compatibility with existing church. Parking is a big concern for everyone. Interested in protecting the green space and parks. Emphasizing importance of that. Also connecting to existing structures from there. Uses: Grocery, Whole Foods, Trader Joe's. Senior residential housing, especially focused on middle income where we thought there would be a large growth area in the future. One discussion was about a movie theatre. Maybe one that is small and different from the ones that exist elsewhere. Children's museum. Pet clinic, medical office to provide services to people in the area. Parking. Mixed use. Discussion of option for teens – computers, gaming. Discussion of gardens on the roofs of whatever is built there. Discussion of having use that would work with MSU. Something commercial that would also be connected to MSU because of proximity to main entrance. Also maybe a visitor's bureau. Some concern about sizes/heights.

**pm/am combined, Dempsey closing remarks:** We will compile all of your information. If you can jot them down and give them to us, that would be great. Thanks to everybody. Over 100 participants in the 2 sessions together. Stay engaged in process.