

Town Hall Meeting with 2nd Ward Alderman Robert Fioretti, April 30, 2014

Place: James House Penthouse

Time: 6:50-8:00

Subject: Re-development Project on the corner of Clark and North Avenue

Summary of the Alderman's Position:

Alderman Fioretti is in favor of giving the developer, Howard Weiner, a chance to meet the requirements and opinions of the "Gold Coast Community", which he represents, consisting of J/K and neighboring buildings. To ensure that happens, Mr. Fioretti is postponing the downsizing issue in City Council. The Downsizing Issue is "not off the table or going anywhere—it is just deferred" and is now a "cloud" over the property. It is used as leverage with the developer in negotiating.

The Alderman feels that the developer is "beginning to listen" and understand NO tall building. Continuing he said, "Let's see how far he will go." The Alderman referred to "we" and "us" meaning the Gold Coast Gateway community and more specifically "the people in this room". According to Ald. Fioretti, as of this meeting, Mr. Weiner's latest proposal is a 99' building with 32 condos. He said, "I hope it's not his 'final'".

The Plan: Once Alderman Fioretti has seen an iteration he approves of, the J/K owners will see it, and vote on it. If it is not approved by us, downsizing will be brought back before the Zoning Commission of the City Council. If it is approved by us, Mr. Weiner will continue with his plan to build, which could commence at the end of the year.

Caveats: Mr. Weiner's plan must solve the issues of: height, traffic congestion, and consistency with the architectural tone of the community. Once the plan is approved, Mr. Weiner cannot change it based on whim or sudden financial reconsiderations.

How this Meeting Summary was Created:

Note: The information below was not backed up by a recording of this meeting, but rather notes taken by the Board Secretary. They are an attempt to represent what transpired by topic and not an exact replication, except for things that are in quotes.

Meeting Content:

The meeting was called to order by Board President, Judy Barnes, at 6:50 pm. Judy introduced two members of Alderman Fioretti's staff: His Chief of Staff Tim Stevens and Head of Infrastructure Dean Argiris (whom she said helped get our potholes repaired by the City on Germania and Sandburg Terrace).

She then introduced Alderman "Bob" Fioretti.

Ald. Fioretti began with telling us about his day in City Council, covering issues for PetCo, banning plastic bags, and Pedi-Cabs. He invited anyone who wanted to, to come and see what happens at these meetings.

Then he asked, “Why are we here?” He said that was the purpose of tonight’s discussion.

Ald. Fioretti mentioned again that he wasn’t elected to be our Alderman, but he cares about our community and does, in fact, represent us. He referred to Mr. Weiner, the developer as a “nice guy, but also, a salesman”.

As a frame of reference, the Alderman mentioned a proposal for a high rise at 900 DeWitt. Residents wanted a zoning change. Three thousand notices were sent to City Hall. If Mr. Weiner were proposing a high rise, we would have to do something similar and notify more and wider surrounding areas.

Ald. Fioretti said, “Traffic is my biggest concern”. That being said, he mentioned that height and the blockage of views that could affect property values were also of concern to him. “I represented the Village Theater. I represented the Near North Preservation, which kept building height to 125 feet. There is no way a building of that height is going to be built on the Clark/North corner.” It must be attractive. “He (Weiner) must listen to the community. He must give us his best offer.”

The Alderman felt Mr. Weiner’s first proposal consisting of two choices: one an attractive building of 125’, the other an “ugly” building of glass and steel were not viable. Mr. Fioretti said, “If Mr. Weiner walks away, we’ll downzone and perhaps put town homes here—or a building with retail at the bottom and a few floors of condos.”

Questions and Answers: “What do we want here? Anyone have any ideas?”

Q: What about the Downzoning Ordinance? Why was it cancelled?

A: It’s on the docket and it’s going to sit there unless this developer either “gets with the program or walks away”. If he walks away, we’ll get a developer who respects the downzoning. Very few people have the financing to build something appropriate for that corner.

Q: What about the entrance/exit off North Avenue. It could be a mess. What can we do?

A: A traffic study could analyze that. Traffic studies are a dime a dozen and often used in court. This traffic study would have to be geared toward that information.

Q: Under current zoning, can Mr. Weiner move forward with his project?

A: There is the downzoning “cloud” on the title to the property. He claims he has \$400,000 into the project already with attorneys’ fees—and he has a lot of attorneys. But they are not going to move forward because of the downzoning issue.

Q: Can’t we strike a delicate balance, here? If Mr. Weiner proposes something within the present zoning, can’t we move forward?

A: It’s complicated. They say there’s no property right protecting views. How high do we want this building to be? “I think views are compensable; they affect your property value.”

Q: Can we bring something “more artistic” to the neighborhood that could enhance the Theatre?

A: I don’t know what the appraisal of the property is. I met with the ‘younger’ Potash and said they need to plan for the capital gains tax and should consider re-investing in this property. I don’t know their price point for the property. I sat with architects from around the world for ideas. This is an important corner and the building has to blend in.

Q: Is there an interest by an organization in buying the theater?

A: That would be a separate offer.

Resident Comment: Very attractive condos with retail in a shorter building that would blend in would be a good option.

Alderman’s Response: I think 5 stories would really enhance the area. I’m not ready to say “all” retail. Actually, I’d rather see a singular living units than 1st floor zoned separately for retail. (Retail within a condo building is usually owned by a third party.) This is a very important corner for development—important visually.

Resident Comment: I like the idea of having residences there.

Alderman’s Response: Another developer offered something at another location that wasn’t appropriate. Whatever it is has to be appropriate. How do we get Weiner there? We each have a separate vision, but it has to come together.

Resident Comment: Just having town homes is not profitable and not economically feasible.

Alderman’s Response: That probably won’t happen. Weiner says they won’t sell.

Q: How is the project as it stands not viable?

A: Weiner said he couldn’t cut it down, but he could. It’s at 99’ now. Can he cut more? There’s still “wiggle room”.

Q: How much will 10’ matter?

A: It could. The developer has to compromise. He is trying to work with people. But we have to say what’s acceptable to us. “He’s starting to listen.”

Resident Comment: Germania is a landmark. His building shouldn’t be higher.

Alderman's Response: I'm not sure that matters here.

Resident Comment: Latin School is 70' high and bulky. We need to take that into consideration.

Alderman's Response: I agree with you. The building (at Clark/North) can't be high and it can't be bulky. "The first time I saw Weiner's proposal, I fell off my seat."

Q: Are you saying that we should wait with the cloud of downzoning?

A: Let's see what (his proposal) looks like. Do we feel it's thumbs up, or thumbs down? "If they (the developer) think they aren't going to listen to you, they have another thing coming."

Q: What's easier to get? A downzone or an up zone?

A: The current zoning is at 80', if he puts retail on the first floor. Shorter, if it's all residential. (This information also offered by Dave Beck)

Q: How much time do we have between our agreeing to a plan and when he begins the project?

A: He could begin building near the end of the year. He has to listen to us. We'll foster a good project. The original (125')condo could have been nice. But not here. I told him to drop things back; also give us more side walk.

Q: When he gives you his final plan, will you share it with us?

A: Yes. If I like it.

Q: Why is Alderman Reilly interested in this?

A: You have to ask him. By the way, I haven't met with the senior Potashes yet. I want to see where they are.

Resident Comment: Sandburg Village was a planned development for a mix of low rises and high rises. Putting a high rise on that corner goes against that original plan. That's why most of us want no more than (a building of) 60 feet. There was originally supposed to be a park there.

Alderman's Response: I like parks. But maybe not there. Most small parks are often handed off to the Park District to take care of. (It becomes complicated.)

Q: Would anybody buy the gas station across the street?

A: They do a great business there. But gas stations are very challenging and costly to remediate.

Q: I'm confused. You mention the Zoning Meeting. Wasn't it cancelled?

A: Yes, the downzoning ordinance was deferred. But still some people showed up (just in case). Alderman Reilly and I met with Commissioner Solis 6 weeks ago and agreed to defer it. Ald. Reilly told Solis (of the Zoning Committee) that we were all in favor of moving the Downzoning Issue forward. Reilly and I are not in agreement with that point at the moment. I wanted it deferred because we need to give the devel-

oper room to come up with his plan. If we don't like it, we'll move forward with downzoning. Right now, it is a cloud and pending until final offer from Weiner.

Resident Comment: This new project needs to benefit the community. We need the services that there such as the Thai restaurant and the dry cleaners.

Alderman's Response: They are part of Germania, which will stay intact. But, I'll bet in five years, most will be gone.

Q: How can we be assured he (Weiner) won't change his plan in mid-stream because of economics?

A: He can't do that (legally).

Q: You have met with architects from all over the world. What do they propose for this corner?

A: They had ideas that would blend into the community. Most architects don't do that. This is a very congested area. Everything impacts it—even the wind.

Q: How would they (the other architects) do something different? Wasn't the first condo building proposed by the developer okay?

A: They (the developers) are willing to compromise that building. "Let's get to where the needle stops."

Q: You say "we". Who is "we"?

A: "I mean all of us in this room."

Q: Many people went to the Downzoning meeting, and then you pulled the plug on that?

A: Again, downzoning was put on the agenda without my approval. Let's see what his (Weiner's) final proposal is. Then we'll worry about downzoning. What will they (developers) come up with? We're not there yet. If they (the developers) say 'screw it' and walk away, we'll downzone. But, first, the community has to embrace it (his plan).

In closing, Ms. Barnes thanked the Alderman on behalf of all of us and adjourned the meeting.