Letter: CAC Asking Mayor, Aldermen to Take Close Look at Addison Development

Terry Pastika to city officials: There is more in the Zoning Commission's rejection of Addison LLC's proposal than meets the eye.

Posted by Karen Chadra (Editor), August 26, 2013 at 02:58 PM

Terry Pastika, Citizen Advocacy Center senior advisor (former executive director) sent this letter to Elmhurst Mayor Steve Morley and Elmhurst aldermen regarding the Addison Avenue project, which is on the city's Committee of the Whole agenda Monday.

The letter, dated Aug. 25, is reproduced here in its entirety.

Dear Mayor and Aldermen:

Thank you for convening a Committee of the Whole discussion on the Redevelopment of 135-149 N. Addison (Addison LLC Redevelopment). The Citizen Advocacy Center has monitored the Addison LLC Redevelopment project since inception in 2009 and has provided extensive commentary. It is my understanding that Alderman

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Deuter were the only public officials to attend any portion of the Zoning and Planning Commission (Commission) Public Hearings on Addison Street and therefore are the only public officials who saw first-hand the significant number of concerned citizens and business owners who attended and spoke out against the project as proposed and considered before the Commission. Indeed, by way of reference for those Aldermen who have been on the Council for less than a decade, this hearing was one of the most widely attended since the Block 300 Development.

While the Citizen Advocacy Center has a multitude of issues with the Addison Street project, we find it particularly significant that the Commission, considering only the land use components of the application as they are required to do, unanimously rejected the proposed six-story development. In doing so, they issued a comprehensive set of findings and commentary. I encourage the Mayor and all Aldermen to take the time to read or re-read the report personally, rather than rely on a staff summary. The reason is because the report is multibered and multi-faceted.

The Commission summarily rejected the application’s compliance with all mandatory criteria, and in addition, generally commented on the extensive need for holistic planning of the Addison Street Corridor prior to any development being proposed.

The reason for this suggestion is painfully obvious but warrants highlighting: Piecemeal development is counterproductive to maximization of use. Additional concerns identified in the Commission report and during the deliberation were:

- The Traffic Study included in the application identified several engineering and safety issues that were not addressed.
- At the deliberation phase, staff provided details of the three buildings in the Elmhurst central business district area which are higher than 45 feet. The Commission appropriately determined that the proposed Addison Street structure was significantly different from each of these based on a variety of factors.
- A City Consultant hired to conduct a regional analysis and determine suitable uses for the Hahn Street property identified excessive unoccupied office space in downtown Elmhurst.
- The application required the inclusion of a loading dock and the loss of public parking due to adding that element was unknown.
- The applicant also did not detail how many public parking spots would be replaced due to additional bicycle parking.
- Project revisions needed to accommodate engineering and safety issues were not addressed.
- General pedestrian and traffic safety issues identified as “very problematic” were not addressed related to lot-line-to-lot-line development and narrow alleys vis a vis truck/ car/ pedestrian traffic.
- The project as proposed would inhibit the ability of the City to explore and implement creative new pedestrian amenable in the immediate area.
- Notably, during the deliberation, one Commissioner questioned if even a four-story parking garage project could be appropriately constructed on that site.

The Citizen Advocacy Center agrees with the Elmhurst Chamber of Commerce and the Elmhurst Economic Development Commission that redevelopment of the Addison Street parcel is important to tax based development. However, the question of what should be built on this parcel of property remains to be answered in a suitable public process. It is unknown, despite asking, to what extent comprehensive planning has been considered for the Addison Street Corridor, who participated, and how the contract to build on the site in question furthered that planning.

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Prior to moving forward with further consideration of this particular project, we ask that the City engage in a subarea comprehensive planning process that 1) discloses any previous planning for Addison Street Corridor and 2) seeks authentic public input. Although the City may be in a difficult position because of the project already entered into for a four-story parking deck project which can be built without the need for a specific zoning process, taking a pause for subarea planning would address the holistic planning failure identified by the Commission.

The City of Elmhurst is fortunate that numerous business owners and citizens have expressed concerns about what happens on this parcel of property. Planning, done properly, provides an opportunity to bring together diverse viewpoints to work collaboratively. In referencing diverse viewpoints, I mean more than those of the City’s business development institutions. The Elmhurst Chamber of Commerce, City Centre, and the Elmhurst Economic Development Commission each serve their own purpose, which is far broader than land use development for a specific subarea of downtown. Bringing together these institutions (some of which have recently submitted general resolutions in support of proceeding promptly with a redevelopment project but none of which provided testimony at the public hearing) along with the several specific business owners (acting on their own behalf), residents, and other members of the public who testified at the Commission hearing, would be a valuable endeavor yielding a result that all members of the community could buy into.

To help facilitate the process, the Citizen Advocacy Center offers to assist City Staff in developing a meaningful public process that involves the institutions referenced above as well as business owners and residents who attended the public hearing, and others. If the City concludes that the Citizen Advocacy Center’s offer is desirable, I would suggest that City Council direct the City Manager to contact Pepperdine University’s School of Public Policy, Davenport Institute. It is a program specifically designed to inform municipal government entities in how to engage the public in policy development, far beyond public comment opportunities. While most of their hands-on work and grant making is restricted to California public bodies, I am confident that their Executive Director, Pete Peterson, can provide guidelines for facilitation.

Thank you for your consideration.—Ms Terry Pastika, senior advisor, Citizen Advocacy Center

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