

Record of Public Meeting on 6.27.07

Jim Durrett of the Livable Communities Coalition opened the meeting by explaining that this would be the fourth of six public meetings. He explained that in this meeting, Alex Garvin & Associates would only be making a short presentation, and that they would be making their next presentation – which would include a far greater level of detail for their plans – in the next meeting. At this meeting local property owners would then be presenting their plans – or lack thereof – for their properties. He explained that audience members would be welcome to ask questions for clarification, but that they would be asked to save their substantial questions for the end, when they could be written down and answered. [Note: For the purposes of this record, all questions and answers – spoken and written – will be grouped together after the description of all presentations.] He then introduced Commissioner Jeff Rader.

Commissioner Rader thanked the Livable Communities Coalition for their work on this process, and explained that Commissioner Kathie Gannon, who has been co-hosting the meetings, would be unable to attend this one, but would return for the next. He then thanked Commissioner Elaine Boyer from District 1 for attending, as well as School Board Member Lynn Cherry Grant from District 2. He then reminded the audience that this presentation would focus on private property owners and their plans for their property, and that the process would return to issues focused on public property in the following meeting. He then introduced Alex Garvin.

Mr. Garvin opened by saying that this process was extremely unusual in his experience of planning – namely, a collaborative, public planning process that included elected officials, private property owners, community leaders, and the area residents. He then explained that his comments would be restricted to changes to the public realm framework in response to comments from the community at the last meeting, by e-mail, and from the survey that had been sent out.

Mr. Garvin first reviewed some general comments that had been received. On the positive end, a number of people had expressed support for the ideas of the new Loop, the boulevards on North Druid Hills Road and Briarcliff Road, and increasing the number and quality of sidewalks and bike lanes to create a local network. A number of people had also stressed that making the neighborhood a better place to walk was extremely important to them. However, people had also expressed a number of concerns. The first was that a number of people had objected that the routes proposed for the northern portion of the Loop would go

through their homes. The second was that if a new exit from I-85 was to be added to accommodate more motor vehicle traffic, there should also be a new entrance to return traffic back to the highway.

In response, Mr. Garvin explained, he and his firm had made a number of changes to the public realm framework. The first was to make the I-85 service road from North Druid Hills Road to Cliff Valley Way a two-way road. This would make possible left turns from Tullie Drive and Cliff Valley Way, and might make it possible to convert a little-used underpass into a two-way crossing. The second was to propose an additional entrance to the I-85 service road in the neighborhood of Tullie Circle. Finally, the route of the northern Loop had been rerouted closer to North Druid Hills Road so that it would no longer go through any residential property.

Thus, Mr. Garvin said, the plan continued to have, as its essentials, the Loop road around the intersection, the X of boulevards on North Druid Hills and Briarcliff Roads, the Grid of a connective local street network, and a public park leading from Kittredge/Audubon Park along the length of the stream to the lake and on to Briarcliff Road. He asked the audience, as they considered the private property owners' proposals that would follow, to think not only about what the owners wanted to do with their property, but about what kind of place would eventually result.

The first property owner to present was Marvin Isenberg who owns, and is planning to develop, the property at the northern corner of North Druid Hills Road and Briarcliff Road, currently occupied by a church and a gas station, both vacant. He is planning to build a 38,000 sf, two-story retail building, which is permitted under the current zoning, and on which he plans to break ground in August. The building will have Walgreen's as a tenant on the first floor, and will include an elevator up to the second story.

Mr. Durrett that said that Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, which owns __ acres of property along Tullie Circle, had informed him that they currently have no development plans for that property. He then introduced Harish Pattni, of Pattni Lodging Group, which recently acquired the former Bellsouth tower at the North Druid Hills interchange with I-85.

Mr. Pattni opened by saying that he was very glad to be a part of this planning process. He explained that his company's business is to buy old buildings and give them new life, and that their plan with the Bellsouth tower would be to do that – to renovate the existing building and return it to its former use as a hotel. He said he

hoped that the newly renovated tower would be a beacon for area and bring new life to the area. In response to a question from the audience, he said he did not yet know what sort of hotel it would be.

The next speaker was Doug Clyburn, representing Regency Centers, owner of the Loehmann's Plaza shopping center on Briarcliff Road and North Druid Hills Road. Mr. Clyburn said that his company had no current plans to redevelop the property. Rather, he said, they were bringing in new tenants to occupy stores that had previously been vacant. He said that the one significant change on the property was that they had torn down the building formerly occupied by a Grady's Restaurant and were replacing it with a new building that would house a Starbucks and a Panera.

After Mr. Clyburn, the next speaker was Lynn Cherry Grant, of the DeKalb School Board, who spoke about the school board property currently housing the DeKalb Magnet School, the DeKalb School for the Arts, Open Campus High School, and Adams Stadium. Ms. Grant explained that she was speaking not for the school board, but as a member of the school board. She said that the school board had been approached by the Sembler Company a few months ago about selling the property. All of the buildings on the property will soon no longer be in use except for Adams Stadium, which is the only facility of its kind in this part of DeKalb County. Now that the Special Purpose Local Option Tax (SPLOST) has passed, the schools are set to move. The school board has authorized the superintendent to reopen talks with Sembler. Ms. Grant said that she did not know what would be the result of those talks.

Ms. Grant said that the school board has the right to buy and sell property for educational purposes. She added that she was a lifelong DeKalb resident, and a resident of this area for 25 years. She said that she was excited at the prospect of a future with wide boulevards and green spaces, and that if development was done with integrity, with a true purpose to benefit the community, then she would be excited for it.

The next speaker was Richard Munger, representing Gables Residential, a national residential developer headquartered in Atlanta. Mr. Munger explained that his company was in the process of building a new apartment complex of 329 luxury apartments at the corner of Sheridan Road and Executive Park Drive. He said that, while the most visible piece of construction on the property was a central parking deck, this would soon be wrapped by 4-5 story buildings built around it. These buildings would be full masonry-faced buildings. The property would not have a fence around it, and was designed to be pedestrian-friendly.

The next speaker after Mr. Munger was John Sullivan, representing HRPT Properties, the owner of Executive Park. Executive Park is a 70-acre office complex flanking Executive Park Drive, with frontages on North Druid Hills Road and Sheridan Road. Mr. Sullivan explained that his company is one of the largest property owners in the study area, and that they are long-term owners. The complex consists of 22 office buildings, most of which were built in the 1970s and '80s, and contains a total of 900,000 square feet of office space, much of it vacant. 16 of these buildings are single-story buildings, and market demand for these buildings is weak. He said that his company plans to 600,000 square feet of new office space and to demolish 300-350,000 square feet of old office space. They also intend to build 700,000 square feet of retail space, as well as 500 new apartments. He explained that the reasoning behind this plan was to take an old, tired product and add new uses, building on existing assets – Executive Park Drive is great, and the property has multiple ingresses and egresses.

After Mr. Sullivan, the next property owner to present was the Sembler Company, which had multiple presenters. The first to present for Sembler was Jeff Fuqua, the president of the Sembler Company. Mr. Fuqua opened by saying that he wanted the current tenants of the Park at Briarcliff to know that the project would not start construction for at least one-and-a-half years. Sembler would contact tenants long before development so that tenants would have plenty of time to relocate. He added that Sembler has a great deal of expertise at tenant relocation, and is considered to be very professional at handling such matters.

Mr. Fuqua then said that, although Sembler does not own the school board property, they would be showing it in their plans. He explained that Sembler does have under contract the Park at Briarcliff, which is 78 acres. He also said that Sembler is in the process of conducting a massive traffic study, and that in his opinion, the Loop road (discussed by Alex Garvin & Associates) would be a good thing for traffic.

Mr. Fuqua then laid out the program for the proposed development: 1.5 million square feet of retail, 300,000 square feet of office space, a 300-room hotel, and 3700 units of new housing. He said that he believed this would be one of the most integrated residential and retail centers in the United States. He said this would be mixed-use, high-density, non-sprawling development – in Gwinnett County, this would be 1000 acres with 50 miles of new roads.

He also said that he believed that this development would not cause big spikes in traffic. He said that the expected trade area would be 3 miles, most of it east of I-

85. One major advantage of this development would be that it would keep tax dollars in DeKalb, instead of going to Buckhead, Lindbergh Station, and elsewhere. He estimated that the project would produce \$16 million per year of new ad valorem real estate taxes, as well as \$39-40 million per year in new sales taxes.

Mr. Fuqua then yielded the floor to Mike Rollison and Jeff Barber of the architecture firm Gensler, who are Sembler's architects for the proposed development. They began by explaining that the presentation would not be very detailed, and that it would focus on the public realm of the project. The project had been designed to be a town center, with a focus on community and neighborhood destinations, making it a place to work, shop, and play. They said that the spaces between the buildings would be as important as the buildings themselves. They also said that mixed-use, dense development was a more sustainable way to develop. They said that LEED standards are different for different types of buildings, and they had not yet worked out what could be built in accordance with LEED, although Gensler does have experience building LEED buildings.

Showing a trade map, the architects demonstrated that they did not expect the traffic to come not from all over the neighborhood, but rather from within about a 3-mile radius. They then said that the project had, in accordance with the Loop proposed by Alex Garvin & Associates, been designed to deflect traffic away from the intersection. They then demonstrated the various entry and exit points for the project, and demonstrated the circulation routes for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. They also showed their proposed green space, and noted that this included not only streamside greenspace of five acres, but a town green bigger than a football field.

Commissioner Rader then closed out the meeting by saying that a technical advisory committee of local planning and architecture professionals had been formed to help with the process. He asked community members to stay engaged in the multi-lateral planning process, even if they began bilateral talks with developers. He also said that a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) study process was underway that would examine traffic and related issues. And finally, he said that the planning process would produce a study similar to Livable Center Initiative (LCI) study. He then thanked everyone for attending.

Questions

Spoken

For Marvin Isenberg

Q: Will the large trees currently on the property on the back border be preserved?

Marvin Isenberg: They will be preserved.

Q: These seem to be a lot of parking spaces and a lot of asphalt.

MI: This is the amount of parking required by the country.

Q: Will this building be built to LEED standards?

MI: This building is designed by Wakefield Beasley & Associates, who designed Atlantic Station. It goes above and beyond the basic county environmental requirements. But it is not designed to LEED standards.

For Harish Pattni

Q: Will you be doing anything to the church south of your property?

Harish Pattni: No, we don't own that property.

For Doug Clyburn

Q: I'm concerned about the traffic on Briarcliff and North Druid Hills, particularly people turning into your property. I think there should be a requirement of no left turns on those roads.

Doug Clyburn: Those roads are controlled by DOT, so that's something you would have to discuss with them.

Q: There are potholes in the roads and service areas behind your stores.

DC: We will take care of those.

For Lynn Cherry Grant

Q: Why can't we have more options on Adams Stadium?

Lynn Cherry Grant: We have not been able to find a property that we currently own that is big enough to house a new stadium. Adams Stadium is outdated and outmoded. When we have a stadium in central DeKalb, then we'll be able to think about this more clearly.

Q: Will there be a loss of school programs?

LCG: It isn't my purpose tonight to talk about programs. There will be no ceasing of programs – they will just be moved to different buildings.

Q: I moved here in 1965 for the schools. There are no public education facilities in this area – it's like a hole in a doughnut. The people say there are no schools because there are no families. But I wonder which is the chicken and which is the egg. I'm concerned about education and about creating an attractive educational future.

For Richard Munger

Q: Is this development family-oriented?

Richard Munger: No.

Q: Good, because there are no schools.

Q: When you say walkable, does that mean that there will be public transportation serving this development? Have you looked at that?

RM: No, we have not.

Q: What are your plans for the Park at Briarcliff? When is that closing?

RM: We don't own the Park at Briarcliff – we just manage it.

Q: Where do people enter and exit this development?

RM: There is an exit onto a road that leads onto Executive Park Drive, and there are two exits onto Sheridan Road.

Q: Do you have a bridge over the stream?

RM: No.

Alex Garvin: But when we return next month, we will propose sidewalks on each side of Executive Park Drive.

Q: I live in the Park at Briarcliff, and it looks like that is going to close soon. Can I relocate to this development?

RM: The closing of the Park at Briarcliff will be up to Sembler. Our development will open in the first quarter of 2008, and we would be very happy to have you.

For Sembler

Q: What will this project do to property values?

Jeff Fuqua: They will go up.

Q: Why does this project turn its back on Briarcliff Road and North Druid Hills Road? If you're trying to create urban boulevards, then they should front on those streets.

JF: There is no backside on Briarcliff and North Druid Hills Roads – the project fronts them with residential buildings and retail buildings.

Q: Is your loop multi-modal.

JF: Yes, whatever that means.

Alex Garvin: We are working on that. Next time we will come back with a design for a multi-modal loop, and we will be asking your input.

Q: Are you tearing down the trees by Sheridan Road?

JF: No, we're keeping them.

Q: What are you doing about public transportation?

JF: That's a question for MARTA.

Q: How many acres is this site?

JF: 107 acres including the school board site.

Q: How tall are the buildings?

JF: The tallest buildings are 20 stories. Most of it is 6 stories.

Q: Where is the density?

JF: On the outside and inside of the project.

Q: Where are the residential units?

JF: All over.

Q: 1.5 million square feet of retail is about the same as Lenox Square Mall. How many trips per day will that generate?

JF: We're doing an impact study. That will come out between July and August.

Q: What about transit? You have a development by Lindbergh Station. What percentage of shoppers coming to that development use transit?

JF: Our Edgewood development is also next to a MARTA stop. I don't know the numbers – I would guess about four or five percent.

Q: How will your development interact with the Merry Hills neighborhood?

JF: We need to talk to you. We'd like to sit down and meet.

Q: What do you currently have facing it?

JF: A department store and a residential building.

Q: What is going to happen to Kittredge Pool and Park?

JF: We're actually going to improve access to the park. And the pool is staying.

Q: If families come here to live in this development, where will their children go to school?

JF: I can't answer that. The school board can.

Q: Are the Boston Market and Quik-Trip [at the corner of North Druid Hills Road and Briarcliff Road] staying?

JF: I hope not. I'm trying to buy them.

Q: When will we see a new route for the Loop?

Alex Garvin: Next month will be bringing in a revised and more detailed version of the Loop.

Q: And then will that be final?

AG: Definitely not. We will want your input.

Q: I live in the property behind [south of] your development. What faces us?

JF: Two story townhouses.

Q: Can we meet with you?

JF: Sure.

Q: We would like to have a bilateral process with you.

JF: We would be glad to have a bilateral process.

Q: I live on Holly Lane. Will I be in the shadow of that huge residential tower? What is the distance between that and my property?

JF: I don't know the exact distance. We'd like to meet with you and discuss that.

Written

Q [by North Druid Valley Homeowners Association]: We have traffic patterns on North Druid Hills Road that are clearly related to work hours. People coming and going from I-285 come by our neighborhood. It is 5 miles from this property and we believe traffic will be worse as a result. What is your plan?

Alex Garvin and Associates: We are proposing to create in the study area a road network, consisting of a Loop road, boulevards along North Druid Hills and Briarcliff Roads, and a Grid network of local roads to disperse traffic currently along North Druid Hills and Briarcliff Roads and alleviate pressure on their intersection. We believe this would have benefits that would extend up and down

the roads beyond the study area, and would make it possible to accommodate new development in this area without creating gridlock. However, it is impossible, within the scope of this study, to address the regional traffic patterns that extend far beyond the boundaries of the study area, and that are metropolitan in scope.

Q: There needs to be more housing for laborers – people who are on fixed incomes and who work making minimum wage.

Q: Who needs it? And whatever happened to R-85?

Q: Re: Park @ Briarcliff apartment residents who will be displaced. What will you do to assist in relocating apartment residents? Will monetary compensation be provided? The Park @ Briarcliff apartments currently houses over 1000 people – where are they going to go for affordable housing? [See answer to next question.]

Q: I have lived at “The Park at Briarcliff Apartments” for 7 years. My current rent is \$760/month for a 2 bedroom apartment. The current rent for a 2 bedroom apartment on Briarcliff Road and North Drid Hills Road is over \$920/month. How will you relocate residents that live at the apartments who don’t want to purchase a house or condo and cannot afford to pay a monthly rent more than what they are currently paying on their rent right now? I’m in the mortgage industry for 10 years, and the federally owned backed up mortgage company “Freddie Mac” is changing programs and raising the criteria to purchase home and reliance on subprime lending (for people who cannot qualify to get a loan from franchise bank). I know you’re idea of attracting the community to live in your residence will be mostly people who are high income makers.

Sembler: Management of the Park at Briarcliff is and will continue to be the responsibility of the current owner for the next 18 months or so. As such, any issues regarding these apartments during that period of time are beyond Sembler’s control. When this project progresses to the point where Sembler assumes full responsibility for these apartments, the company will act as it has in every occasion where re-development has required the closing of existing housing units; that is, Sembler will develop a practical and thoughtful relocation assistance program for tenants that remain on the property at that time. The specifics of such assistance have not been determined yet and probably will not be until such becomes timely in 18 months or so.

Q: Where will the children from the 3700 residences go to school? If the school board sells all the land where will they find new land for an elementary school?

Q: Where is all the water to supply such a large number of people? Sewer capacity too?

Q: What percentage of families is anticipated? And if there are many, what about the schools – we should have neighborhood schools instead of monstrosities such as Shamrock!

Q: Will the Sembler plan be on the Briarcliff association website?

A: Yes.

Q: Really need more specific info about where loop might be.

AGA: This will be presented at the next public meeting, scheduled for July 25th.

Q: What about recreational space & facilities for all these new and old people. We need a year-round pool and park trails. I know that DeKalb has been talking to Gwinnett about their parks. Now is your chance to put on in this part of the county.

AGA: We agree that recreational space and facilities are extremely important to this area, particularly if more people are going to move into the area. At the July 25th public meeting, we will lay out in greater depth our proposals for public space and park facilities, building off the ideas we have been presenting.

Q: Looks like Sembler is proposing a stream buffer variance around the lake. Don't give it to them!

Q: Impact on Sheridan Road and Mayfair Drive – oppose widening Sheridan west of Executive Park Drive intersection.

AGA: We will have more details at the meeting on July 25th, but we are not currently proposing any changes to Sheridan Road west of the Executive Park Drive intersection.

Q: Sembler plans do not appear to link park green space to area west of Briarcliff (in LaVista Park). Although overall introduction to session promised this.

Sembler: Sembler will be creating a nature walk extending along the stream between Kittredge/Audubon Park and Briarcliff Road.

Q: Streets in Sembler development – are they being constructed of permeable or impermeable (to rain water) surfaces?

Sembler: Impermeable.

Q: 20 story towers at entrances on Briarcliff will overshadow LaVista Park yards and interfere with privacy – could these be moved to middle of development?
Sembler: Sembler will make every effort not to cast overshadows over adjacent residential areas, and will study this issue seriously. [Also see response to question below.]

Q: Concern re nature of buffer to protect existing residential areas on southern boundary of “Park at Briarcliff.”
Sembler: Sembler is currently fine-tuning its plans and will present a plan to buffer existing residential buildings on the southern boundary in September when it has more detailed plans. Sembler will begin meetings with local neighborhood groups after this planning process ends.

Q: No Howell Mill at Briarcliff and North Druid Hills.

Q: Place link on DeKalb homepage on web for planning process, etc.

Q: LEED certification – what level will Sembler reach?
Sembler: Sembler retail shop space will be designed and constructed in a sustainable manner.

Q: Impact fees – who pays? Who receives?

Q: Loop – more specifics on location, widening, acquiring.
AGA: These will come at the July 25th meeting.

Q: Parking on boulevards needs to be on retail side not median.

Q: Access to GA 400 – will more options be provided than Sheridan to Cheshire Bridge?
A: GA 400 lies outside the scope of this planning study.

Q: Need strong consideration for greater transit service.
AGA: We will discuss transit service at the July 25th meeting.

Q: How many accessible units will there be for disabled/seniors?

Q: North Druid Hills and Briarcliff has all residential frontage. Need better face – retail to roads.

Q: All Sembler projects require multiple stops/parking.

Q: Traffic studies – need large area studied.

A: Sembler, as part of the DRI process, is producing a traffic study, is working on a major traffic study.

Q: Have plans to build new schools changed? Are students going to be moved back to Avondale?

Q: Need clarification on zoning conditions for development managed by Marvin Isenberg.

- Disposition of oak trees
- Development condition required remaining
- Trees should stay

Q: What would be the impact on this community of these development proposals, separately and in total, in terms of such considerations as traffic, environment, public infrastructure, and our quality of life?

For instance, would traffic congestion increase or decrease? By how much? Do we need additional I-85 access to bring more traffic into and through this already congested area?

Can you tell us who is supporting these development proposals other than your property owner clients and the public agency landowners that will get substantial buyouts?

Would you support an independent community oriented cost-benefit analysis of these proposals?

In your opinion why should our community not oppose all this?

AGA: Any large development proposal in DeKalb has to go through the Development of Regional Impact (DRI) process with the Atlanta Regional Commission. That process requires study of the impacts on traffic, the environment, and so forth.

Whatever the results of that study, we will be making recommendations on July 25th to reduce traffic at the intersection of Briarcliff and North Druid Hills Roads, and to improve traffic flow coming on and off I-85.