
AGENDA
Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board
Wednesday, June 25, 2008 8:30 AM

Florida Community Design Center
300 East University Avenue
1st Floor Suite 110

A. ROLL CALL

B. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – Approval of the Minutes for the April 23, 2008 meeting.

D. REQUEST TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

E. COMMUNICATIONS

1. Chair's Report

2. Staff Report – Information Items

Downtown Parking Study – Rich & Associates has been selected for this project and the purchasing process is complete. Staff will coordinate with the consultant to schedule data gathering activities over the summer. However trip observations and measurements of local parking demand will not occur until Fall Semester, in order to obtain accurate information regarding peak demand.

Hampton Inn/Lot 9 Redevelopment – The construction continues to make progress and is on schedule to open by July 2009.

University Avenue Improvements – The Renaissance Lights are in progress along the Avenue between Waldo Road and East 15th Street. The maintenance agreement for streetscape items is currently being routed for approvals and will be sent to FDOT. Benches and waste receptacles are in stock and can be installed pending approval of the maintenance agreement by FDOT.

Cade Museum - Museum organizers are working on the building concepts and are continuing with fundraising feasibility.

F. OLD BUSINESS

1. Plaza Improvements/Bethel Garage Development (B)

..Explanation

During the summer of 2007, RTS was finalizing preparations to shift a number of activities from the Downtown Plaza to the new transfer facility located adjacent to Depot Park. At that time, DRAB recognized the potential of the historic Bethel Station to accommodate a lively new redevelopment activity after the RTS ticketing offices vacated the premises. For that reason, DRAB requested, and the CRA board approved, recommending the City Commission designate the CRA as the lead agency for Bethel redevelopment. The City Commission authorized this status on September 24, 2007. The following month, DRAB further considered the issue, recommending that the CRA approach the project from a more comprehensive perspective, incorporating not only Bethel redevelopment, but also improvements to the remainder of the Plaza. On November 26, 2007, at the request of DRAB and the CRA, the City Commission authorized the CRA to pursue revitalization of the Downtown Plaza, and reserved the funds in General Government 332-M660-5190 for redevelopment activities at the Plaza and Bethel Station.

DRAB last discussed the Bethel project at the April 2008 meeting. Since that time, the former bus shelter adjacent to the Bethel building has been deconstructed and removed from the site. All salvageable materials were saved for reuse. With the out-of-use bus shelter removed from the Bethel site, Staff is currently drafting a scope and preparing to issue a Request for Proposals for adaptive Bethel reuse. Based on input from DRAB and the CRA, as well as Staff analysis, the likely use at this building will be foodservice. The RFP will solicit

businesses interested in operating out of the Bethel building. Respondents will be asked to provide a description of the business, proposed hours of operation, information regarding utilization of the associated outdoor seating areas, engineering/construction considerations, and financial information related to upfront and operational costs associated with installing a business at the site. Staff anticipates that the RFP will be issued this summer; DRAB will be provided with regular updates as the project moves forward.

In addition to Bethel, both Staff and the CRA board are eager to initiate larger improvements to the Plaza as a whole. Over the years, the Plaza has received much attention related to design, functionality, improvements, etc. These plans and concepts may be useful in considering how to move forward with new improvements to the space; they are included as backup to this agenda. Staff would like to review these concepts with DRAB, and discuss the next steps for revitalization the Plaza. This discussion will begin the process of implementing lasting and beneficial improvements to this important public space. Staff envisions conceptualizing and refining a variety of improvement options for the Plaza, with the CRA providing input as to the final vision that will be implemented.

..Fiscal Note

The CRA has \$9,883.00 in account 610-790-W201 to use for Plaza Improvements, including Bethel Station. In addition \$188,149.49 is budgeted in General Government account 332-M660-5190. The CRA is authorized to utilize these funds for Bethel and Plaza improvements.

..Recommendation

CRA Staff to Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board: 1) Hear presentation from Staff; 2) Provide input as necessary

2. Depot Park Team Update (NB)

..Explanation

The CRA has been designated as the lead agency for the Depot Park Team, comprised of CRA, GRU, Public Works, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs staff. In May, the Depot Park Team convened to discuss the schedule, budget, and other issues related to park development and maintenance. A summary of discussions is presented below.

Stormwater Pond Performance and Maintenance: Due to the anticipated high visibility of the Depot Park Ponds and the dual role they will assume as functioning stormwater treatment areas and as a 'central park' focal point, it is imperative that the ponds maintain an aesthetic appearance while effectively treating stormwater runoff. CRA staff visited the existing ponds to conduct a visual assessment of current pond performance, maintenance, and aesthetics. Some of the notable challenges that may ensue are algal blooms and establishment of invasive hydrilla. The CRA, Public Works Departments, and Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs are collaborating to develop a pro-active plan that will address challenges related to pond performance, maintenance, and aesthetics. Input from peer review resources such as Carol R. Johnson Associates and the University of Florida Environmental Engineering Department are being sought to insure that an innovative approach is developed.

Landscaping Phase I-A: This project consists of installing irrigation and landscaping trees at the existing Phase I pond site. Originally scheduled to begin construction during July 2008, complications with maintenance personnel having access to the site during remediation of the Poole/CSX sites has extended the project start date to Spring 2010. Site access limitations are attributed to remediation contaminant exposure, human health, and liability concerns.

Depot Building Rehabilitation: The CRA is requesting that a peer review of the current Depot Building Rehabilitation plans be conducted. This peer review will address partially rehabilitating the structure while it is stored in its temporary location (building will be moved this summer) as well as providing input to specific restoration procedures. LEED building practices will also be explored. The CRA recently selected firms from an RFQ process for professional services annual contracts in architecture, landscape architecture, and historic preservation. It is expected that the peer review will be performed by one of the selected firms.

Depot Park Design and Technical Standards: The CRA has been working collaboratively with Landscape architects from Carol R. Johnson Associates and professional engineers from Volkert Associates to develop design and technical standards for Depot Park. After a careful inventory, analysis and presentation of various options for over 30 potential park features to CRA, the consultants have narrowed down their recommendations

to a palette of choices that celebrate the site's character, its history and the neighborhoods redevelopment objectives. The working meeting held on June 12, 2008 with City stakeholders, SPROUT and DRAB provided an opportunity for final public comments before a draft manual of recommendations on design and technical standards for Depot Park is produced. The technical standards are expected to be completed by late July.

Design of Park Elements: CRA staff is planning to procure professional design services for the Depot Park Trail, plazas, promenade, general improvements, and landscaping later this summer. The design services will incorporate the design and technical standards currently under development by Carol R. Johnson and Associates. The anticipated construction start date for these elements is 1st quarter 2010.

Depot Ave Reconstruction: At the City Commission meeting held on May 29th 2008, the commission adopted a recommendation to fund Depot Ave III from the local gas tax revenue in the amount of \$1,036,000.

..Fiscal Note

Carol R Johnson and Associates has been retained for \$49,000 and is funded out of a Parks & Recreation account (335-850-C350-965-5720-6030).

..Recommendation

CRA Staff to Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board: 1) Hear presentation from staff

3. Gainesville Greens Update (NB)

..Explanation

In June 2005, the CRA issued an RFP for a mixed-use development including residential and/or hotel space at City Parking Lot 10. The CRA received four responses, which were ranked in September 2005, with Gainesville Greens receiving the top ranking from staff, DRAB, and the CRA. This ranking was largely based on the following factors: Gainesville Greens proposed more owner-occupied residential condominiums than any of the other respondents; Gainesville Greens proposed "green" building and affordable housing components not found in the other responses; Gainesville Greens requested 60% TIF over 15 years, while other respondents requested 80% TIF for 15 years.

By May 2006 a development agreement had not been signed; the developer addressed the CRA and requested a variety of proposed changes to the project. Citing unexpected cost increases, the developer requested fewer building stories, less affordable housing, and relaxed "green" building standards. At the request of the CRA, the developer coordinated with staff and returned at the June 2006 meeting to formally request revised incentives. At that time, the developer requested increased tax increment and a longer payment period, asking for 75% TIF reimbursement over a period of 20 years. Additionally, the developer requested a 29% reduction in the number of affordable units (each to be priced at \$200,000), a reduction in project size from 12 to 10 stories, and an increase in the amount of residential units from 134 to 144 condominiums. At the time, the second ranked respondent, AMJ, Inc., stated that it would not object to the proposed changes to the Gainesville Greens project from that described in the original RFP response. The CRA approved these changes to the project, and in October 2006 a development agreement was executed.

By Spring 2007, the developer had yet to exercise the option at Lot 10. On April 23, 2007, the City Commission approved the developer's request to extend the option on for a period not to exceed 12 months, ending June 17, 2008. During this 12-month extension, the developer did not exercise the option in order to commence construction on the Greens project. As the June 17th, 2008 deadline approached, the developer communicated concerns regarding both market conditions and the Supreme Court's decision in the *Strand* case, inquiring as to the possibility of an additional 18-month extension to the option. Staff discussed the issue with the developer and with the CRA attorney, and informed the developer that because the development agreement for the Gainesville Greens project was executed prior to *Strand*, the court decision would not impact the status or legitimacy of the existing development agreement. The developer subsequently inquired about the possibility of a 6-month extension to the option. The developer also suggested that the project be allowed to move forward initially as rental apartments, with a condo conversion envisioned at a future date when supported by improved residential market conditions.

The CRA considered the developer's requests at the May 19, 2008 meeting. At that time, the board recommended the City Commission extend the option an additional 6 months. However, the CRA asked that Staff provide additional information to the CRA and to the City Commission regarding a schedule of

benchmarks (related to planning, permitting, financing, etc.) that the developer would be obligated to meet as a condition precedent to exercising the option at Lot 10. These benchmarks would ensure the project’s progress towards construction by then end of the option period.

The CRA again considered the issue at the June 16, 2008 meeting. At that time, the developer rescinded the proposal that the project be allowed to move forward as rental apartments for an interim period. The developer instead requested an extension to the option in order to provide time needed to implement a residential condo project. CRA staff presented an analysis of the project, noting that even with TIF; the development would yield very small returns as a rental project. However, the development stands to generate substantial profits as for-sale owner-occupied condo units. CRA staff also coordinated with the developer to generate a series of conditions, requirements, and critical dates that the project would need to achieve during the extended option period. These benchmarks are intended to position the development for implementation immediately following the option period. The CRA formally recommended that the City Commission extend the option at Lot 10 for an additional 6-month period, subject to the conditions outlined by Staff. The CRA further recommended that during the 6-month phase, Staff prepare a new RFP for development at Lot 10; in order to continue progress at the site should Gainesville Greens be unable to move forward by the end of the extended option period. Later that evening, the City Commission voted to extend the option and authorize preparation of a new RFP, in accordance with the CRA’s recommendation.

..Fiscal Note
None at this time

..Recommendation
CRA Staff to Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board: 1) Hear presentation from Staff

4. GRU Site Redevelopment (B)

..Explanation

At the November 2007 CRA meeting, the Board requested Staff break down planning activities for the GRU/Depot areas in order to differentiate between the Depot site and the GRU site, focusing separately on each project in two distinct master planning processes. Since that time, the staff has formulated an action plan for Depot Park, and brought that program to both the CRA and the City Commission. Concurrently, Staff has also been pursuing initiatives related to the GRU site.

GRU will be constructing a new operations site on N Main Street, and as that new facility comes online, GRU components from the existing site will transfer to the new location. Concentrating on the soon-to-be-vacated GRU property is important because the final goal of this master planning initiative is to create a comprehensive development program that can immediately translate to implementation. As the GRU property is already controlled by the City, it will be the first component of the area ready for redevelopment and capable of following the “roadmap” created through the master plan process. Other sites in the greater GRU/Depot area would likely not be positioned to immediately move forward with implementing the results of the master plan.

Since the GRU project’s inception, a number of parallels have been drawn between the Technology Square project in Midtown Atlanta and potential redevelopment at the GRU site. Technology Square provides an excellent example of how to create a vibrant urban space by combining economic development, urban design, science/technology industries, and proximity to a major research institution. For these reasons, Staff has met with the creators of Tech Square: The University Financing Foundation, Gateway Development, and Lord-Aeck-Sargent Architecture in order to better understand the financial, development, and design components that have made the project so successful. Based on these discussions, Staff has determined that Lord-Aeck-Sargent, which specializes in science facilities, mixed-use development, and higher education facilities, is uniquely qualified to provide master planning and site layout services for this project. As testified by Technology Square, Lord-Aeck-Sargent has a proven record of providing the type of innovative, successful, and extremely high-quality development that Gainesville is seeking for the GRU property. Lord-Aeck-Sargent provides an exceptional, highly-skilled toolset encompassing the design, economics, phasing, and community involvement components that are integral to redevelopment of this scope and magnitude. Additionally, as their previous work indicates, the firm does not provide “off-the-shelf” deliverables to its clients. Staff and the CRA is confident that working with Lord-Aeck-Sargent will result in a unique, highly-specialized solution for the GRU site. The final product will not only be implementation-oriented, it will also be extremely creative, of superior quality, and tailored to the specific strengths, challenges, constraints, and opportunities found in Gainesville.

..Fiscal Note

Planning services from Lord-Aeck-Sargent will cost approximately \$34,000. The cost will be split evenly between GRU, General Government, and the CRA (DRAB). There is currently \$163,606 budgeted for Depot Area (now GRU) Master Plan as follows: CPUH \$44,222, Downtown \$22,111, Eastside \$8829, GRU \$22,111 and Community Development \$22,111

Recommendation:

CRA Staff to Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board: 1) Hear presentation from Staff

5. Porter’s Neighborhood Improvement (NB)

..Explanation

The CRA has contracted with DRMP, an engineering consulting firm, to produce 30% plans for improvements along SW 3rd Street from Depot Ave to SW 4th Ave. These improvements include undergrounding utilities, completing sidewalk connectivity to the Porter’s Community Center, upgrading sidewalks to be ADA compliant, improving aesthetics to reflect current CRA Design and Technical Standards for Streetscapes, adding pedestrian scale lighting, and resurfacing the roadway. The engineering work will also provide details regarding cost, timeline, and technical issues. This data will allow staff to prioritize, phase, coordinate, and budget in the most effective manner possible.

The CRA engineer and DRMP met with representatives from utility companies within the corridor, including GRU, Cox, and AT&T. Plans for undergrounding activities were discussed, and all agreed that joint-trenching the utilities was the best course of action. Designs from each utility are being solicited and compiled into the preliminary plans. A tree mitigation assessment was conducted by the City’s Parks Department to assess the condition of trees that may require removal due to sidewalk construction. The majority of trees requiring removal were in fair to poor condition.

Particularly of note, GRU has future plans to underground some major utility corridors running through the area. Due to tactical issues, these improvements must be coordinated around the timelines for the Depot Park excavation/environmental remediation and the proposed FDOT Main Street rebuilding project. These 30% plans will help staff plan these activities in conjunction with current improvements to ensure that resources are allocated as efficiently as possible.

..Fiscal Note

The contract with DRMP is for \$24,200 and funded out of account number 9999-610-W231-W07.

..Recommendation

CRA Staff to Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board: 1) Hear presentation from Staff

G. NEW BUSINES

H. REPORT OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

I. BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. PUBLIC COMMENT

K. ADJOURNMENT