

2/15/2021

Columbus City Council

Addendum to Basis Sheet Z20-061
280 E Whittier Street
Columbus, OH 43206

Esteemed Council,

I cannot fit my observations into the basis sheet space that we traditionally use to communicate our concerns for cases that receive split votes from the Development Commission.

This is a watershed project that will set precedent for re-zoning in the city for the next several years. As you may be aware, there is a high level of acrimony between proponents and opponents of this case, and in my 20 years of being a member of the Development Commission there has not been a case with more letters in opposition to a rezoning proposal.

This case is peculiar in that it falls within the purview of the Southside Area Commission, but borders and is surrounded by German Village and the Schumacher Place neighborhood. I am reminded of a gerrymandered voting district when I see this property included in the Southside Area plan. Although the Southside vote was affirmative but very close, I was surprised that there were no residents of the Southside Area that opposed this case, either in person or by letter at the Development Commission. The immediate neighbors, German Village and Schumacher Place residents, were overwhelmingly against the proposal.

The underlying and consistent basis of their objection was the density and scale of the proposed project, which is essentially dropping the two River South apartment buildings (those sit between S.Wall and S.Front St. to the north and south and W. Rich and W. Town St. east and west) out to the edges of the existing sidewalks. The juxtaposition of that mass against the two story facades on Whittier and the single family and apartment buildings on the other three sides of the site is jarring. The proposed building belongs in a downtown environment, not in the middle of German Village and Schmacher Place. Please take a minute to Google earth the satellite shot of our downtown. Locate the River South buildings and look at the scale of them in their immediate environment. Then scroll over to the Giant Eagle site and place those two River South buildings onto the 280 Whittier site. Notice the smaller semi-urban fabric of the 280 Whittier St. area as compared to that of the downtown fabric.

The developer's presentation was skillful and their proposed building was clever in several aspects and well designed by a first class developer and a first class architectural firm. These are certainly better quality buildings than the River South apartments, and have several attractive amenities. They will generate tax dollars for the city. But they will impose an undue hardship on their neighbors and the neighborhood.

This application was tabled in January and the applicant was asked to address their 20' wide service alley on S. Grant and improve the ease of access for all of their parking (270 +/- spaces) and trash service for their building without impinging on the Ebner St. residences whose garages and parking and 300 gallon trash receptacles line this alley. They were also asked to show the worst case shadows that the 5 story building would cast on the neighboring properties. They returned to the Development Commission in February and did neither.

Traditionally when larger buildings and less permissive zoning constraints are proposed that impose upon established neighborhoods of smaller scale and densities the Development Commission requests and gets improvements to setbacks, screening and fencing from the developer. None was forthcoming.

This is a nice building, but it doesn't fit nicely or comfortably into the site, it would be unduly conspicuous due to its size, imposing undue hardships on the neighbors, it would create surface parking issues, and would change the character of both German Village and Schumacher Place neighborhoods by its scale.

Suppose you always wanted a great pair of bespoke Church shoes, or Manolo Blahniks, and they were offered to you at an attractive price, but they were a size too small. Ah, but you wanted them and thought you could wear them well. This site and this building as proposed is that conundrum. Wearing them is always painful, and the example that you set will become a precedent for developers offering all of us shoes that don't fit.

Respectfully,

John Ingwersen