



MEMORANDUM

To: Lisa Nicholas and JoAnn Cornish, City of Ithaca Planning and Development, and the City of Ithaca Planning Board June 12, 2013

What: Responses to Outstanding Items for CEQR from the May 28th Planning Board Meeting, received from Lisa Nicholas on June 04, 2013

Text from Lisa Nicholas listing the unresolved items for CEQR is in <u>red</u> below, responses from John Snyder, AIA, et.al are in <u>black</u>.

John,

As requested, please see the list below of outstanding items for CEQR:

Clarify the SRF information for the Board.

Response: Please see the attached letter from Amy Dake, PE of SRF Associates, revised June 11, 2013, including an updated chart of recommendations and clarified conclusion. It should also be noted that the design team feels that in the short term the amount of parking SRF has recommended for Purity customers is on the light side, considering that the size of Purity Ice Cream is doubling and only two additional spaces are recommended for customer use from what exists today. We are warily hopeful that SRF's prediction of an increase of customers who walk or bike to Purity will increase from 1% to 20% with the site and building improvements we are proposing.

Resolve DOT and City (Transportation Engineer) approval of ingress/egress at Cascadilla St lot.

Response from Patti Bush, NYSDOT, June 11, 2013: "I think the Meadow St. entry/Cascadilla exit is highly likely to not be obeyed by the public. The driveways will eventually become narrow full access drives with a great potential for conflict. Additionally, closing the Meadow St. driveway will add three parking spaces. I'm afraid I have to stick to my request to close the Meadow St. driveway."

Response from Tim Logue, City Transportation Engineer is still pending regarding NYSDOT's recommendation on June 11, 2013 that a two-way drive on Cascadilla St. be implemented.

Mitigations for Cascadilla St parking lot

Response: Official Mitigations on City Property include: The holistic landscaping plan along Cascadilla St. that connects the three lots in the project and goes well above the quality expected of projects in the City. Use of tightly packed, native, drought tolerant planting, interesting paving, and bike racks on City property alongside a building that effectively engages with the streetscape should make for a very lively addition to the West End. See the included rendering of a portion of this area. Existing trees will be incorporated into the plan, and the existing loading area width will be reduced. Similarly attractive landscaping will be added to the City right-of-way on Esty St. at the southern edge of the Fulton St. lot as well.

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<u>Project Mitigations on DOT Property include</u>: Landscaping and bike racks in the DOT right- of-way along Meadow St. fronting the Purity and Cascadilla St. lots. There is also the possibility of a future owner-funded bus stop near the corner of Meadow and Cascadilla streets in front of the Cascadilla Lot. More information on the bus stop can be found below in this memorandum, in an included letter from Doug Swarts of TCAT, and in included renderings. Landscaping in the DOT right-of-way along Fulton St. fronting the Purity and Fulton St. lots, see included rendering. Additional landscaping will also be coordinated with Cornell Cooperative Extension on "Purity Point" in the triangular area at the northern portion of the Purity site within the DOT right-of-way.

Other Project Mitigations include:

<u>Cascadilla St. Lot</u>- This lot is currently empty and in need of improvements. An aesthetically pleasing and expensive fence that goes above and beyond the requirement to screen the proposed parking area from the adjacent residential zone will be constructed. The entire lot will contain pervious paving to serve as an exemplar of sustainable stormwater management. An existing curb cut and driveway that has been deemed potentially dangerous by the DOT will be closed.

<u>Fulton St. Lot</u>-This lot is currently an underused parking and storage area and in need of improvements. Solar arbors in the Fulton St. lot which are highly visible, beautiful, and provide for the charging of electric vehicles for residents and retail customers are proposed. Enclosed, secure bike lockers are being provided for residents. An existing curb cut that has been deemed potentially dangerous by the DOT will be reduced from two-way to a one-way entrance.

<u>Purity Site</u>- A guardrail is being installed at the owner's expense along the Fulton St. edge of the Purity property to ensure the safety of drivers, patrons, and property along a stretch of road that has proven to be hazardous. An existing curb cut on Fulton St. that has been deemed potentially dangerous by the DOT will be reduced from two-way to a one-way entrance. The Meadow St. curb cut will have its width reduced, and the overall paved area on the site will be reduced. Highly visible bike racks are being provided to encourage customers to bike to Purity. Outdoor seating areas are being expanded for customer enjoyment, and the existing parking area is being redesigned to be safer, more attractive and less haphazard.

This site contains a beloved community business, and additional expense and effort is being put forth to preserve the character of the front portion of Purity Ice Cream and incorporate it into a larger project that can ensure its viability into the future. The unattractive and currently underused rear portion of the existing building will be replaced by a very attractive mixed-use development. There has been little concern voiced about the quality of the building as designed, and we are of the opinion that the exterior is successfully representative of its time and yet respectful to the existing building it incorporates and the best parts of the surrounding neighborhood. The exterior has been modeled in updated included renderings. Several sustainability measures are being incorporated into the material selections and building systems, and the units are expected to be compact yet highly desirable. Interior renderings of a one-bedroom living space are also included to demonstrate the level of quality. This building will be the first major mixed-use project in the West End since the West End design guidelines were proposed in 1998, and there is expectation that the project will act as a net positive for spurring further development in the neighborhood.

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Suggested by the PB at the meeting:

Lambert agreed that she could create a maintenance plan.

Response from Heather Lambert: The maintenance plan for the Purity landscape design will consist of a series of seasonal visits from a landscape maintenance crew. There will be a large spring and smaller fall clean up. Other visits will consist of mulching, trimming back, weeding and other general landscaping tasks. The beds will be filled with a large quantity of vegetative materials in a tight matrix of grasses. The design intent is to create a naturalized garden that celebrates meadow gardens and encourages the naturalization of plants such as joe pie weed, goldenrod, milkweed and other volunteers. The varied height and tight weave of vegetative materials along with a thick installation of mulch will discourage unwanted invasive species from taking over the beds. The inspiration and installation of these gardens will be in the style and practice of Piet Oudolf (landscape designer of the NYC Highline, among other projects, see http://www.oudolf.com/piet-oudolf for other examples).

Fernandez asked about the use of bioswales and other sustainable landscaping mitigations for rainwater. The storrmwater could be used to irrigate some of the landscaping.

Response from Andy Sciarabba PE, Civil Engineer, T.G. Miller PC: Using stormwater practices such as rain gardens or bioretention filters to mitigate runoff would not be necessary for this project if the Cascadilla Street parking lot were converted to porous pavement (note: that is the intent). Furthermore, due to the shallow grades found on all three sites it would be extremely difficult to sheet drain surface runoff to either type of practice. Additional difficulties include the NYSDEC design guidelines prohibiting the use of rain gardens for treating parking lot runoff and the lack of locations adjacent to the building where rain gardens could be installed to capture portions of the proposed roof runoff. Bioretention filters have a deeper cross section than rain gardens, approximately 4-feet minimum, which would put collection pipes for the practice too low to be picked up by adjacent storm sewers. As a result, it is not feasible to consider either of these practices for this project.

Response: Additionally, we have explored cistern options for collecting rainwater from the roof of the new Purity building. Due to the climate of our area it would behoove us to locate a cistern either inside the building or underground. The proposed building does not include extra space that would allow it to be inside, and an underground cistern is prohibitively expensive.

Jones-Rounds observed that the Cascadilla Parking lot could be more than a parking lot, perhaps, to help mitigate the presence of the lot on that corner. Lane replied that the size of the lot constrains the kinds of things that could be done with it.

Response: We have thoroughly considered other uses and options for the Cascadilla St. lot that works alongside our goal of keeping the necessary parking. One possible solution we have come up with is planning for a future TCAT bus stop on the Meadow St. side of the corner. Preliminary discussions with TCAT have been measured but favorable to the property owner's contributions, see included letter from Doug Swarts of TCAT. The proposed landscaping would be altered to anticipate that installation,

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transforming spaces

which could happen at the owner's expense as soon as TCAT agrees to route changes that would serve the new development and the northern West End, which it currently does not (see included illustration). We think this proposal meshes well with the Board's interest in encouraging transit- and pedestrian-oriented development in the West End, and that the Purity Project can spark the evolution of bus routes to an underserved area.

It is the opinion of the design team that the TCAT letter also demonstrably illustrates the interdependency of all of the entities that are involved in affecting changes to transportation systems. The onus of modernizing the car culture cannot reasonably be placed on any single partner in this development, whether those partners are the City of Ithaca, TCAT, customers, residents, tenants or property owners. We think that Bruce Lane is holistically and realistically proposing an excellent addition to the West End, even considering the 621 Cascadilla St. parking lot, and has negotiated in good faith with the Planning Board every step of the way. The included letter from Bruce Lane much more eloquently explains his position on this matter.

Schroeder suggested that the solid brick wall below the glass could be differentiated in some way, some articulation, to provide some kind of interest on the pedestrian level. Snyder responded they would be looking at some options in that location. Fernandez suggested doing landscape at that area. Snyder responded they could explore that, as well.

Response: Additions of clerestory windows and water table detailing into the brick wall and landscaping along the Fulton St right-of-way have been made. Please see the updated renderings.

Fernandez suggested adding slow down signs, speed bump, etc. on the entry way from Meadow Street. Lane replied that speed bumps would be a wonderful idea.

Response: The option of adding a speed bump to the Purity parking entrance has been studied after Fernandez's suggestion. The entrance to the Purity parking lot from Fulton St. (Route 13 South) is being reduced in width, from a two-way entrance/ exit to a one way entrance, while being greatly increased in length. Measured from the threshold of leaving the roadway to the threshold of entering the body of the lot, there is an increase from the existing 33' of driveway to 98' of driveway, which provides opportunity for a comfortable slowdown without necessitating the addition of a speed bump.

Response from Andy Sciarabba PE, Civil Engineer, T.G. Miller P.C.: I don't see the need for signs or a speed bump. Meadow Street is 30 MPH and vehicles have to slow down to turn into the parking lot. Then they slow down further to find their parking spot. They will need to slow down more now that we are narrowing the entry/exit to 24'. We also are removing the Fulton Street exit which will discourage traffic cutting through the parking lot so I don't see speed as an issue in the lot.

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Additional comments by the Design Team:

Planning Board members suggesting that shared parking could be easily coordinated with the property also owned by Bruce Lane at 803-805 Cascadilla St. There is a 24 space parking area there intended to be used by the four tenants of the building on the property, totaling 6,580 sf of rentable commercial space. We consulted the City of Ithaca's standards for parking outlined in the Zoning Code Section 325-20 (minimum parking requirements not applicable in the WEDZ zone, just used as a guideline) to get a rough determination of whether there was a surplus of parking provided onsite. That calculation would recommend 1 parking space per 250 sf of net assignable office area, or 27 spaces, so no surplus exists. We also consulted the City of Ithaca Zoning Code for the requirements of shared parking:

(g) Shared parking. In a case where two or more establishments on the same lot, or on lots meeting the distance requirements (emphasis added) found in § 325-20D(4)(d) of this section, and have substantially different operating times (emphasis added), the Building Commissioner (or, in the case of a project subject to site development plan review, the Planning and Development Board) may approve the joint use of parking spaces, provided that the Building Commissioner or the Board finds that the intent of the requirements of §325-20 is fulfilled by reason of variation in the probable time of maximum use by patrons and employees among such establishments.

We are of the opinion that the two current tenants of the building (a car rental sales office and garage and a dental office with conventional weekday operating hours, plus weekend operating for sales office) do not have substantially different operating times from either the retail/ office tenant space at Purity or the restaurant or ice cream shop uses. The Purity tenant space would most likely be used during conventional business hours, as would the restaurant, and Purity Ice Cream's peak hours begin around 2pm, which overlaps the conventional business day. Furthermore, it would not be smart business practice to expect the owner to limit the pool of tenants in 4 rental spaces to only those that operate outside of his existing tenant's hours.

Lastly, the 803-805 Cascadilla lot does not meet the Zoning Code's recommendations for distance from the uses the shared parking would be serving:

(d) Distance from use. The distance from the lot or parcel containing the off-site parking area and the lot or parcel containing the use which requires the off-site parking shall be measured from parcel to parcel following and along the pedestrianway that connects the off-site parking area to the use. Except where no public sidewalk exists or where no crosswalks or corner-curb aprons exist within 125 feet of the lot or parcel which requires the off-site parking, pedestrianways that cross a public street shall be measured in a way that only crosses such streets at crosswalks or corner-curb aprons. The maximum distances of the pedestrianway shall vary by use and shall be no longer than as follows:

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[1] For mercantile uses, off-site parking lots or parcels must be within 250 feet of the lot or parcel on which the use is conducted.

[2] For all other uses, off-site parking lots or parcels must be within 500 feet of the lot or parcel on which the use is conducted.

Measured from property line to property line, following crosswalks and sidewalks, the Purity and 803-805 Cascadilla lots are 274' or 286' apart, depending on which crosswalk is used. The City of Ithaca Code does not have a definition of what "mercantile uses" are in their glossary, but going by the NYS Building Code Occupancy classification it would include any retail store or sales room, which would include the tenant space at Purity and the front ice cream sales portion of Purity so a 250' distance would be the standard, which is not met.

The City of Ithaca West End Urban Design Plan

The Purity Project team has consulted the West End Urban Design Plan of 1998/1999 throughout the design and approval process of this project and has taken care to fulfill the guidelines presented in it to the most feasible extent possible. The Plan contains alternative options and mitigations if a proposed development does not perfectly fit the most optimal vision contained therein. The project team is of the opinion that our proposal has, at a minimum, met these alternative options. Relevant points of discussion pertaining to the parking lot proposed at 621 Cascadilla St., have been raised and addressed as outlined below.

The first detriment brought against the proposed design is that the property abuts a residential zone located to the east on Cascadilla St. The Plan recommends a separation between the commercial Meadow St. corner and residential neighborhoods. On page 15, of the Plan, Section 2, Physically Separate the Commercial Zone of the East Side of Meadow Street and the Residential Neighborhood Adjacent on the East:

"Protection of the residential neighborhood located east of Meadow Street from impacts of commercial uses and high volume traffic is of primary importance to area residents. The optimum buffer is provided by the construction of a solid fence or wall at the rear lot lines of properties on the east side of Meadow Street, to separate the residential district from the commercial corridor. Such a solid fence or wall must create a continuous barrier without openings."

The proposed design includes a fence at the rear lot line that is solid and continuous and matches the Design Standards laid out in a subsequent chapter of the Plan.

Secondly, the lot is on a corner, and the West End Urban Design Plan recommends that buildings anchor the edges of corner lots. See page 13 of the Plan, <u>General Design Principles and Guidelines</u>, Section 1, <u>Promote a Continuous Street Edge in the Meadow and Fulton Street Corridors</u>:

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"The appealing visual character of urban spaces is in large part created by the continuous street edge or wall, providing a strong "edge" that helps define space and orient the viewer. To the extent practical, a continuous wall of multi-story buildings should line both sides of Meadow Street. ... Corners of the block are important spaces, marking the end of the street edge or wall. Wherever possible buildings should be located to serve as visual anchors at block corners."

In the next the next paragraph The Plan presents an alternative to using a building wall as the reinforcing edge of the street:

"...the street wall should be continued either architecturally with a low wall or fence or with substantial landscaping at the same set back as adjoining buildings. This same concept or continuing the street wall with a low wall or plantings is also a good alternative when building close to the street line is not feasible."

The same sentiment is also delivered in the official Summary of the West End Urban Design Plan from December 1999, recounting its approval in September of that year. In the fourth paragraph, under **Designs Standards**:

"Parcels at block corners are especially important to visual character. Wherever possible, buildings **should** (emphasis added) be located on these sites. Where this is not possible, planting of tall trees can serve to anchor the corners."

It has been determined that a parking lot is permitted by the City of Ithaca Zoning Regulations to be built on the property in question. Alternatively, the option is given in the West End Urban Design Plan to anchor the corner with tall trees. The proposed design includes tall trees to anchor the corner of Meadow and Cascadilla St.

Lastly, the project team would like to step back and take a view of the big picture. The West End Urban Design Plan outlines its goals on pages 2-3:

"The principal aims of the study include:

 Redevelopment that results in a visually appealing urban mixed-use district, including retail, office, and residential uses."

The project team concludes that this goal has been achieved as proposed.

"Protection of the traditional residential neighborhoods east of Meadow St."

The project team concludes that this goal has been achieved as proposed with the fence at the rear lot line of 621 Cascadilla St.

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 "Easing the impacts of the anticipated transition west of Meadow Street from single-family houses to denser mixed-uses, which may include residential uses without diminishing the overall potential for redevelopment."

The project team concludes that this goal has been achieved as proposed with the fence at the rear lot line of 621 Cascadilla St. and with the landscaping that connects the lots along Cascadilla St. It is also important to note that the goal states that the overall potential for redevelopment should not be sacrificed in favor of optimizing the relationship between adjacent neighborhoods.

· Creation of an attractive and safe pedestrian environment coexisting with high volume traffic."

The project team concludes that this goal has been achieved as proposed with the landscaping plans submitted as well as the building design.

Respectfully submitted,

John Snyder AlA, John Snyder Architects PLLC