

Urban Design Commission
Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)
January 14, 2014

ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Mayor Max Bacon, Chairman
Kevin Drawe
Jim Duelmer
Larry Freeman
Kim Gangemi
Don Hicks
Mike Sizemore
Doug Stoner
Eric Cash

City Staff Present

Eric Taylor, City Administrator
Scott Cochran, City Attorney
Ken Suddreth, Community Development Director
Tom Boland, Economic Development Manager
Jered Sigmon, Economic Development Coordinator

Other Guests Present

Teri Anulewicz, Ward 3 City Council Member
Susan Wilkinson, Ward 5 City Council Member
David Gernatt, David Weekley Homes
Jeff Barrett, David Weekley Homes
Preston Wood, David Weekley Homes
Wes Kimbrell, David Weekley Homes
Steve West, Halpern Enterprises

The January 14, 2014 meeting of the Urban Design Commission was held at Smyrna City Hall and called to order by Chairman Max Bacon at 2:00 PM.

The following agenda items were discussed.

1. Approval of minutes from December 5, 2013, meeting

MOTION: Don Hicks made a motion to approve the minutes. Doug Stoner seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously.

2. Consideration of Belmont Hills/David Weekley design elements

Ken Suddreth gave an overview of the project, noting that developer David Weekley Homes has proposed to build a residential product on pods C and D of the Belmont Hill redevelopment site. The proposed use is allowed, so there is no zoning issue in question. The City Council will review the proposal from a site plan review standpoint. Today's meeting is for the UDC to review the proposed elevations. Mr. Suddreth said staff has evaluated the proposal and is recommending approval.

David Gernatt of David Weekley Homes introduced his team members and provided some background information on the development company. He referenced another David Weekley Homes product that is currently under construction; Parks Edge is a traditional single-family development on Power Springs St. The project at Belmont Hills will be the company's first urban infill development in metro Atlanta.

David Weekley Homes is proposing to build 164 single family detached residential units on 10.4 acres. The homes are zero lot line homes with approximately 3 foot separation between the units. An outer ring of 3-story homes will face the four perimeter streets. A ring of 2-story, "living on the main" units

will form a middle ring. An inner ring of “master on the main” homes will face an interior park space. Mr. Gernatt explained that their “detached townhome” residential concept will have windows on three sides, making it more attractive than a standard townhome. The fourth side will be located on the lot line and therefore must be a firewall with no windows.

Mayor Bacon asked if this type of product is selling elsewhere in the country. Mr. Gernatt confirmed, saying the detached townhome concept is also selling at a higher price point than standard townhomes. He also noted that every unit will be sprinklered.

Michael Sizemore asked for clarification of the houses’ orientation and garage locations. He pointed out that the fronts of some houses would face the garages of other houses. He suggested this was not attractive, and that these homes would sell for less, potentially lowering the value of the overall development. The landscaping would not be sufficient to mask the visual aesthetic of a long row of garages and concrete driveways.

Jeff Barrett, architect for David Weekley Homes on this project, suggested the landscaping and second- and third-story architecture will help make up for the first-floor view.

Mayor Bacon said the developer had met previously with staff and acted on their suggestions.

Mr. Sizemore referenced the preferences of younger buyers who are looking for environments similar to Atlanta’s Inman Park and Old Fourth Ward. If these buyers can’t afford the in-town neighborhoods, they look for suburbs offering a similar in-town feel. One characteristic of in-town developments is a mix of residential housing types. He suggested modifying the site plan to avoid having long rows of the same product type.

Mr. Barrett replied that while that mixed approach may be beneficial for traditional housing, David Weekley Homes has discovered that their buyers prefer the visual simplicity of the current proposal.

Larry Freeman asked if David Weekley Homes had a similar development in metro Atlanta which they could reference. Mr. Barrett replied that they did not, but said he could send pictures of similar neighborhoods built in Texas.

Jim Duelmer pointed out that there are only about 20-25 units which will face the garage side of the other housing units.

Steve West of Halpern Enterprises said the property had been zoned for a variety of uses to accommodate a market-driven development in the future. He said Halpern is happy to be working with David Weekley Homes. He added that the proposed site plan has achieved the goal of orienting the homes along the perimeter to face the public streets.

Mayor Bacon said the city needs rooftops to attract higher-end retail and other viable businesses. He expressed support for David Weekley Homes and their proposal.

Mr. Duelmer asked how this development is expected to affect the redevelopment potential for the rest of the Belmont Hills property. Mr. West replied that Wood Partners has struggled to line up financing for the multi-family component. He said they are meeting soon with their investment committee, and that they have been following the progress of the David Weekley Homes project very closely.

Mr. Gernatt said the proposed site plan has gone through multiple iterations to get to this point. The developers first considered a traditional townhome design that achieved the highest density allowed on the site. They have reduced the density by mixing in some different floor plans and lot sizes.

Mr. Suddreth concurred that staff has been working with the developer through the design process. He noted Mr. Sizemore's concern, but also pointed out that this is a different type of product. He said staff liked the residential edge this proposal would provide, making the development look more inviting from the public view. He also noted there would be a decorative fence around the development.

Mr. Gernatt showed a number of renderings of the proposed development.

Kevin Drawe asked about gates into the neighborhood. Mr. Gernatt said there would be gated access for both vehicles and pedestrians.

Doug Stoner asked for confirmation that the internal roads would be privately owned. Mr. Gernatt and Mr. Suddreth confirmed this. Mr. Gernatt said having a private community helps to improve the price point and reserve the neighborhood amenities for use by home-owners. The lower price point for homes along the outer ring will be in the mid-\$200,000s. The highest price point for the less dense homes facing the interior park would be in the mid-\$300,000s.

The build-out is expected to be a 3.5-4 year process. Having multiple housing types allows the developer to market the neighborhood to different populations and reduce the overall build-out time.

Don Hicks asked about pedestrian gates. Mr. Suddreth said every home along the perimeter will have access to the public streets via pedestrian gates.

Mr. Hicks asked if the remainder of the planned roads throughout the Belmont Hills site would be built once this project gets underway. Mr. West said at a minimum, the rest of Belmont Blvd would be completed. This would connect Ward St all the way to Atlanta Rd. Halpern may wish to coordinate the remainder of the road system with the proposed Wood Partners development.

Mr. Gernatt said the housing units would range from 1,500 – 2,200 SF initially. He said they hope to drive up the square footage on some units by adding optional spaces like walk-up attics, for example. He said the company likes to offer a base floor plan with some flex space for buyer customization.

Mr. Gernatt said the exterior construction materials would include hardy plank siding with brick and stone accents on front. He said all of their homes in their portfolio are built to tight tolerances, and each comes with a 3-year energy usage guarantee.

Mayor Bacon asked for a motion on the agenda item.

MOTION: Don Hicks made a motion to approve the design elements as proposed. Jim Duelmer seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously.

3. Other Business

Mr. Freeman asked about the status of the city's Smyrna Grove property. Tom Boland replied that developer Southeast Capital is moving forward with its due diligence. They will be formally requesting an extension of the due diligence period due to a delay with their surveyor. This will not, however, affect the anticipated closing date in mid-August.

Mayor Bacon asked for an update on the city-owned property at Concord Rd and Dunton St. Mr. Suddreth replied that the contract specifies the developer should have notified the city by the end of 2013 if they were not going to be able to close on the property. At this time, the developer remains interested, but they are still looking for a tenant. Mr. Drawe asked if this meant the city could now accept other offers on the property. City attorney Scott Cochran confirmed that we could.

Mayor Bacon adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

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