

Meeting of the Planning Commission, August 4, 2015

Notes taken by Nancy Young

Headline: Hilton Hotel height exception approved in split vote 4-2

6:30 pm. Commissioners present were Caswell, Hannan, Sullivan, Crouse, Goff. and Connell. Commissioner Rothschild was excused by motion.
Citizens present - 12, Presenters & staff - 5. Urban Renewal staff – 2.

The minutes from the last meeting were approved as presented.

---- Public Hearing

Hilton Garden Inn at 5445 and 5475 Olde Wadsworth (Vineyard Church, formerly Brooklyns): Preliminary Development Plan (PDP) and Height Exception - 57 feet vs. city-wide 35 feet requirement. Developer: Arvada Hotel Investors - a partnership of Renascent Hospitality (of Ohio) and Brinkman partners (of Ft. Collins). Additional exceptions to Code requirements include:

- parking: 153 spaces (including 8 new on-street spaces) vs. 185 required by the code
- parking landscape: reduced width of landscape islands and eliminate one landscape island
- setbacks - reduced setbacks on Olde Wadsworth and W. 55th.
- neighborhood buffer and screening: maintain the existing fence and landscaping on the west and south sides of the property, which is less than the current Code requirement.

Developer's presentation:

Ms. Maureen Phair, Executive Director of Arvada Urban Renewal (AURA), began the applicant's presentation to provide background on the site. In 2003, the City Council established a priority to build an hotel in Arvada. In 2007, AURA became owner of the property when Brooklyns defaulted on a loan of about \$2.8 million that AURA had guaranteed. In the same year, AURA created a "mini" urban renewal area at that site called, Village Commons, with the intent to establish an hotel on the 3-acre site. Over the years, 5 hotel studies were done by paid consultants. These studies all concluded that Arvada could support a limited service hotel of up to 125 rooms.

In 2008, Sage Hospitality was willing to build an hotel there but encountered an economy that tanked. Since there are no comparable hotels in the area, financiers viewed the project as very risky. Therefore, financing such a project was extremely difficult.

The developers then began their presentation: Scott Somerville for Renascent Hospitality and Todd Parker for Brinkman Partners. The last two of the 5 studies mentioned by Ms. Phair were commissioned by Renascent. These two studies stated that markets not being served in Arvada are the corporate and sports markets. The developers believe that there will be synergy between the hotel and local businesses. For example, there is an Office Max nearby for business travelers who forgot their laptop case or need a thumb drive, as well as restaurants in Olde Town.

The hotel will consist of 139 rooms, a restaurant to be named “American Grill”, and meeting/large group facilities for meetings ranging from 10-12 people up to 150-200 (depending on room configuration). There will be an average of 68 employees, which will vary by season. Landscaping will meet both City and Hilton Hotel’s requirements.

The height exception being requested is 57 feet, or 25 feet taller than the Code requirement. The developers noted that the site sits in a “bowl” that is, in part, about 10 feet lower than the surrounding buildings. As a result, the final height, relative to nearby buildings, will be the equivalent of 4 stories. There will be an underground storm water detention site at the southeast corner of the property (moved from the current southwest corner). Also, the existing 10 foot wall on the west side will be “greened-up” with landscaping.

Public Comment:

Neil Greenfield, resident of Water Tower Place condos, was concerned about the sightlines north toward Olde Town, views that he and his neighbors currently enjoy. He was interested in the “footprint” of the hotel compared to the existing Vineyard Church/former Brooklyns building to confirm whether these sightlines would be blocked by the hotel.

Cindi Kreutzer, resident on Grandview Avenue, expressed concern about the height of the building and whether the height exception generated demonstrated benefits to the neighborhood. The proposed height is not consistent with the area. She asked whether this was a proper precedent for Olde Town. Both of these items are required by the Land Development Code.

She noted that per night charges ranged from \$90-160 at Hilton Garden Inns in the Denver Metro area and wondered if this project was even economically viable. At the first of two neighborhood meetings, the developer noted that Hilton could “pull out” in as little as 6 months if the hotel did not achieve their financial expectations. She also noted that without urban renewal subsidies, this project would not be built in a free market environment.

Ms. Kreutzer also noted that AURA is allowed to speak, but citizens are not allowed to address questions related to AURA’s involvement.

In rebuttal, Scott Somerville referred to graphics provided in the meeting packet that illustrated sightlines to the southwest (Mt. Evans area) and southeast (downtown Denver). He did not address the sightlines to the north - toward Olde Town - from Water Tower Place. Regarding the height exception, he restated the notion that the site sits in a “bowl”, and therefore, the full height will appear more like four stories, or about the same height as surrounding buildings. He also noted that up to 6 stories are allowed by the Transit Station Framework Plan.

Commissioner questions are summarized:

Q: How does the hotel brand affect the height exception request and aesthetics of the building?

A: Hilton requires Garden Inns to be 4-5 stories. Buffers will be provided regarding residents to the north. Views from Grandview will be preserved, as indicated by the graphics in the meeting packet. Regarding the request for setbacks from the street/property line that are less than the minimum required, landscaping will provide a buffer while improving pedestrian access.

Q: The view from the Vineyard Church/former Brooklyns appears to be at about the same level as the neighboring buildings. The notion of a “bowl” needs further elaboration.

A: The lowest point of the site is on the far western edge, where the site is nearly 10 feet lower than the “ground level” of surrounding buildings, and it varies across the site.

Q: Does the height exception include machinery on the roof - like heating/air conditioning?

A: Each room will have its own air conditioner unit through the facade. Public rooms (like the restaurant and banquet rooms) will have machinery on the roof within the height exception requested.

Q: How many 5-story buildings currently exist in Arvada?

A: Not many.

- PPOT (Park Place Olde Town at Ralston & Wadsworth ByPass, under construction)
- Marcella Manor (Wadsworth near W. 66th)
- the building by Kmart [N.B. Arvada House]
- the Lofts at Water Tower Place (two stories visible at the Grandview Grade, remaining stories below the hill).

Q: What height exceptions have been granted in the Olde Town area?

A: The stair towers for the parking garage, the Lofts at Water Tower Place, PPOT

Q: What is the demonstrated benefit to Arvada of this height exception?

A: Ms. Phair stated that some Metro Conference data [N.B. possibly the Metro Conference of Mayors?] provided Metro Area average spending by hotel guests. She stated that the amount was significant, but was unable to provide the specific numbers.

Q: The Code states that if an height exception is granted, then no other exceptions should be entertained. It appears that a new set of rules are being written here since several other exceptions are included in the PDP.

A: Cheryl Drake, City Planner, stated that she did not see it that way. She stated that the PDP for a Planned Unit Development. Therefore, the plan needs to be viewed in its entirety. One of the exceptions being requested is having a landscaped island every 12 parking spaces. The developer could put in an island, but would lose one parking space. The granting of this one additional space seemed to be a minor exception with little impact on the overall project.

Q: What is the visual (i.e., “views”) and privacy impact on Water Tower place neighbors to this project?

A: The “view corridor” graphics illustrate that the views from Grandview are not affected. The nearest neighbors to the west will be separated from this project by their garages, a ten-foot fence, and parking on the west side of the project.

Q: What is the impact on traffic, especially on Olde Wadsworth?

A: Existing streets can handle the traffic generated by this project.

Q: How did the staff determine that hotel traffic will have little impact?

A: Staff uses a national “handbook” that provides traffic impact of various types of projects. Using these guidelines for hotels, there will be no meaningful impact on traffic from this hotel project.

Q: What impact does the Gold Line have on the economic viability of the project?

A: It is an amenity.

Q: Is the staff comfortable with the parking lot exceptions requested?

A: Yes.

Q: Were the neighbors, at the neighborhood meetings, generally supportive of this project?

A: There was a vote on the preferred design, which is being presented this evening.

Motion to approve the Preliminary Development Plan (PDP), and Commissioner comments prior to vote.

- Commissioner Caswell: Overall, support this hotel project and find many beneficial features. Very concerned about the height exception and aesthetics. A project at this location needs to be exceptional.
- Commissioner Hannan: Agreed with Ms. Caswell. Further, he stated that the “Grand View” for which Arvada is famed, is endangered by such projects. The views might be lost forever.
- Commissioner Goff: Agreed with the previous comments. However, Arvada needs an hotel, so he intends to vote in favor.
- Commissioner Crouse: Lives in north Arvada. There are nearby hotels, but none in Arvada.
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The PDP was approved by a vote of 5-1, Commissioner Caswell voting no.

Motion to approve the height exception and Commissioner comments prior to vote.

- Commissioner Caswell: A discussion is needed regarding the relevance of the 35-foot, city-wide height limitation. This project would be more appropriate if it were only four stories, a possibility indicated by the developer [N.B. using Hilton Hotel guidelines of 4-5 stories for a Hilton Garden Inn].
- Commissioner Hannan: A 57-foot building has too great an impact on the neighbors.
- Commissioner Sullivan: Concerns about the excessive height were alleviated by the sightline graphics and the “bowl” configuration of the site.
- Commissioner Crouse: The transient-oriented plan states that buildings can be up to 6 stories.

The height exception was approved by a vote of 4-2, with Commissioners Caswell and Hannan voting no.

The next meeting will be on August 18, 2015. There will be a public hearing on changes to the Land Use Table.

7:50 pm Meeting adjourned.