

STAFF REPORT

To: University Heights City Council

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Item: June 29, 2010 "4-2 Residential" Rezoning
Submittal St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
Site 1300 Melrose Avenue

Date: August 5, 2010

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Applicant:	University Heights Planning & Zoning Commission
Property Owner:	St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
Requested Action:	Possible Rezoning; "Alternative 4- 2 Residential" Plan
Purpose:	Multi-family residential; 38 condo units (rear building), 36 condo units (front building)
Location:	At the NW corner of the Melrose Ave/Sunset St. intersection
Size:	5.25 more/less
Existing Land Use and Zoning:	One Building (church); currently zoned R1-Single Family Residential
Surrounding Land Use and Zoning:	North: Institutional Land; owned by the University of Iowa South: Single Family Residential; R1 East: Single Family Residential; R1 West: Planned Unit Development; PUD, and Single Family Residential; R1
Comprehensive Plan:	Identifies the area as Single Family Residential.

INTRODUCTION

This report was created by JCCOG planning staff at the request of the Mayor of the City of University Heights. This report is intended to provide general guidance to the City Council when considering the “alternative 4-2 residential” rezoning proposal for the St. Andrew Presbyterian Church property at 1300 Melrose dated June 29, 2010. The application was discussed by the University Heights Planning and Zoning Commission, and received a 4-1 vote recommending approval, at the Commission meeting on July 22, 2010.

JCCOG Staff is pleased to be able to assist in answering general questions about the potential redevelopment of the subject property and issues raised due to redevelopment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The City of University Heights Planning and Zoning Commission has recommended an alternative “residential 4-2” concept plan for a rezoning of the current St. Andrew Presbyterian Church property at 1300 Melrose Avenue. The proposal is being forwarded to the City Council as an alternative to a separate rezoning application filed by Jeff Maxwell for the same property.

The subject property is approximately 5.25 acres currently containing one principal building with access via Melrose Avenue. The remainder of the property exists as paved parking and gently sloping undeveloped land. There is a University of Iowa owned parking lot to the north of the property with access via the subject property owned by St. Andrew Presbyterian Church.

The property, currently zoned Single-Family Residential, is abutted by Institutional/Public property owned by the University of Iowa to the north, several undeveloped lots and wooded ravine zoned Single-Family Residential to the east, developed Single-Family Residential lots to the south across Melrose Ave, and a Planned Unit Development with an undeveloped wooded ravine to the west.

ANALYSIS:

The following analysis addresses a variety of planning and design information that elected officials will find useful during their deliberations of the rezoning proposal.

Comprehensive Plan: The Comprehensive Plan provides a current zoning map and indicates the potential need for additional commercial and multi-family residential development within the community. The St. Andrew Church property is currently zoned Single-Family Residential.

Amendments to the current University Heights Comprehensive Plan were adopted in May, 2010. The amendments included a set of elements that should be addressed by

the City Council and Zoning Commission when considering any rezoning or Planned Unit Development proposal. Elements to be considered during the rezoning process are as follows:

- Land-use and general site layout
- Building materials and design
- Building mass and scale
- Lot density
- Streetscaping
- Environmental issues
- Transportation issues & traffic generation
- Negative externalities
- Utility provisions
- Fire and Police protection

When the original Comprehensive Plan was adopted in November 2006, the idea that the St. Andrew Church property may be sold for redevelopment was not considered. Similarly, the possibility that the University Athletic Club would be sold to the University of Iowa Facilities Corporation was not considered. These two factors were valid reasons to enhance the Comprehensive Plan guidance for Planned Unit Developments and ensure that the elements stated above be carefully examined during the redevelopment process.

Zoning: The subject property is currently zoned Single-Family Residential; R1. Should University Heights decide that a development comprised of multi-family dwellings is desirable for the subject property, rezoning for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) may be appropriate. PUD overlay zoning is typically used to establish flexibility in the use and design of land and structures in situations where conventional development may be inappropriate and where modification to the underlying zone will not be contrary to the spirit of the comprehensive plan.

Should a rezoning occur on the subject property, the City should take advantage of establishing a 'Conditional Zoning Agreement' (CZA) with the developer. CZA's can be established to ensure that the City's desires in terms of appropriate screening, site development, building materials, and other factors are met. A CZA can be used to articulate criteria for factors directly attributable to the development.

Land Use and General Layout: The general layout of the concept PUD will result in an *urban* presentation of the development in that it is pedestrian-oriented and a majority of the parking will be hidden from the street. University Heights should examine the building concepts provided by the applicant to ensure the doorways and windows are consistent with the appearance University Heights is anticipating.

Regarding the proposed residential structure at the rear of the property: University Heights representatives should discuss what scale of building is appropriate for this site given the height, character, and setback of the building. Although the applicant has

provided computer generated simulations of how the proposed buildings may appear from north and south, it may be helpful for the applicant to produce a scale model of the PUD so that decision makers can grasp the scale and bulk of the buildings in the proposed setting. For instance, if buildings are set on lower topography than the surrounding neighborhood, or are obscured by tall trees that are preserved during the development process, the taller building may not be as visible.

For the general layout of the site, it is important for the residents to be “connected” to the larger neighborhood. The conceptual PUD accomplishes much of this by proposing 8’ sidewalks on both the south and east frontages of the development and by providing a secondary access to Sunset Street for vehicular circulation. University Heights will want to request a set of landscape plans as the proposed development is finalized to ensure adequate landscaping around the proposed structures and that the development blends in with the surrounding neighborhood.

Building Materials and Design: The University Heights Comprehensive Plan states that *environmentally-friendly construction materials should be encouraged, as well as energy efficiency. Consistent design standards within the community should be encouraged as well* (page 31). There are a variety of lower maintenance building materials available, ranging from brick and stone to a variety of precast concrete panels and concrete blocks. The concept PUD shows that construction materials to be used would be a combination of limestone, cast stone, cement or slate shingles, precast panels and metal sunshades. University Heights representatives should request to see examples of the building materials before finalizing and approving any construction.

In reviewing the concept PUD, University Heights representatives should discuss whether the architectural features and general building design of the proposed structures are acceptable for the location. Aspects of the building design to consider include the location of the doorways, the number and the size of the windows, the roof line and building articulation, awnings, balconies, and other exterior elements of the building.

When discussing building design, University Heights representatives should note that the concept for the residential building fronting Melrose Avenue uses a traditional gable and hip roof design, while the proposed condo building at the rear of the lot is more modern with a flat terraced roof. Although the building materials complement each other, the designs are quite different.

Consistent with the Comprehensive Plan goal of encouraging energy efficient construction, representatives should discuss to what degree, if any, the city will require a future developer to show a minimal level of LEED certification or show that other efficiencies will be achieved.

Mass and Scale: Mass and scale are important determining factors of how a building will blend in with the surrounding neighborhood. Tall buildings can appear to loom over the surrounding neighborhood due to their bulk. This effect can be mitigated through the use of design strategies such as those shown in the building concepts submitted by the

applicant that attempt to break up the mass by using setbacks, offsets, and other methods to articulate both the horizontal and the vertical planes of the building.

The façade modulation and pitched rooflines of the residential building fronting Melrose Avenue helps to reduce the perceived bulk of the building. The front (south) building has an overall height of 39' which is 4' taller than the tallest allowable building (35') per Section 7 of University Heights current zoning code: *"No building in any zone shall exceed 35 feet in height. Height for this purpose shall be the vertical distance from the highest point of the finished grade of any street on which said property abuts to the highest point of the roof or coping"*.

The concept PUD indicates that the proposed condo building at the rear of the property will have an overall height of 55' which is 20' taller than allowed by current zoning standards. To minimize the perceived mass of the building the concept proposal uses a flat terraced roof design. The Building Heights indicated in the PUD are measured from the first floor grade at the building entrances to the top of the roof. Elevations are based on aerial contour mapping. The issue of whether or not to amend the current zoning code to allow for the additional building height should be discussed by University Heights representatives. Amending the zoning code through the PUD approval process is something which can be explored.

If University Heights agrees to rezone this property to a planned unit development designation, density is another factor that should be kept in mind. The proposed density in the concept PUD is approximately 14 dwelling units per acre. The applicant indicates that the units in the rear (north) building will be two bedroom units, and the units in the front (south) building will be a mix of one bedroom, two bedroom and studio units. An emphasis on two bedroom units results in fewer people per unit than three or four bedroom units.

Streetscape: The perimeter of the site is an important element to consider in that it serves as the transition from new development to the existing neighborhood. In a residential development, elements like large windows, canopies, and appropriate signage integrated into the building façade can enhance the appearance. The concept PUD includes a large plaza area in the southeast corner of the proposed development that would ease the transition from the surrounding neighborhood to the newly constructed buildings. Street trees planted in an orderly manner can enhance the appearance of the street right-of-way as well; benches and bike racks can further contribute to the site becoming a destination for University Heights residents. The creation of a destination within University Heights for University Heights residents is, in our opinion, an attractive goal.

If the concept plan progresses through the development process it would be logical to request additional details on street furniture, landscaping, and other functional details of the development such as loading and unloading areas and dumpster locations.

Slopes and Drainage: The subject property exhibits steep slopes (18-25%) in the northwest, east, and northeast quadrants of the subject property as indicated in the University Heights Sensitive Areas Ordinance (comprehensive plan pg. A-9). The storm water management system will need to be designed as part of the development of any final design plans. The concept plan, as proposed, utilizes a bridge structure to span the ravine on the east boarder of the site and provides a secondary access to Sunset Street. The proposed structure would minimize the amount of disturbance to the natural features in this area.

Transportation and Traffic Circulation: Melrose Avenue (near the subject property) is congested at peak travel times with an Average Daily Traffic (ADT) of 13,500 in 2006 (Iowa DOT). In 2002, Melrose Avenue operated at a Volume to Capacity (V/C) ratio of 1.0-1.4 (2007 JCCOG Long-Range Transportation Plan). Corridors exhibiting V/C ratios of 1.0 or greater are considered to be functioning over capacity, and can be congested during peak periods of the day/year.



Melrose Avenue / Sunset Street Intersection (looking north)

Based on information provided in the conceptual PUD, the amount of traffic generated by the new development is anticipated to be in the range of 450 vehicles per day. This number is based on the assumption that the development will include approximately 74 two-bedroom condos. The dedicated left turn lane on Melrose Avenue is beneficial to traffic flow as proposed in the concept plan. The necessity for a left-turn lane will ultimately depend on the final size and type of development approved for the subject property.

The conceptual plans proposed by the applicant to restrict left-turning traffic out of the proposed development at both the Melrose Avenue and Sunset Street accesses is likely to be viewed favorably by University Heights. The restriction will create less congestion and reduce the number of conflict points at the Melrose Avenue access making for a safer environment for both vehicles and pedestrians, and the left-turn restriction at the

Sunset Street drive should minimize cut-through traffic on Grand Avenue. Should University Heights officials choose not to require the second access onto Sunset Street, allowing left-turns out of the main driveway would then become a necessity.

The geometry of the Melrose Avenue/Sunset Street intersection should also be considered if the subject property is redeveloped. Given that the geometry of the intersection is skewed, visibility for both motorists and pedestrians is reduced; therefore decreasing overall safety at the intersection. Specifically, the north leg of the intersection (Sunset Street) veers to the northeast at approximately 45 degrees, instead of the more desirable 90 degrees. From a transportation planning perspective it would be beneficial to realign the north leg of the intersection to increase both motorist and pedestrian safety. The cost of such a realignment would have to be determined by an engineer.

Aside from the geometry issues at the Melrose Avenue/Sunset Street intersection, bicycle and pedestrian access near the subject property is adequate. Constructing 8' wide sidewalks on both the south and east sides of the development as proposed in the concept plan is consistent with the wide-sidewalk currently being constructed on the north side of Melrose Avenue between Golfview Avenue and Sunset Street.

Lighting: Lighting is a 'negative externality' that can be very noticeable to surrounding residents, and can make a large development even more noticeable and glaring at night. If lighting is a concern to University Heights representatives, they should request that any and all light fixtures on the site be downcast and shielded to not allow more than one foot-candle of light spillage beyond the property line. One foot-candle is a widely used measurement of light, and is approximately the amount of light given by a full moon at night.

Signage: Another thing to consider is the size and style of any signage used. Large signs, illuminated signs, and flashing or blinking signs can significantly detract from the residential appearance of Melrose Avenue. If signage is a concern for University Heights representatives, they should establish a conditional zoning agreement or covenant with a future developer restricting the size, illumination, and animation of any signs on the site.

Utilities: Before proceeding with any development process, University Heights should request that the developer's engineer and/or site designer confirm that utilities are adequate for a proposed development. There should be enough pressure in the water system to accommodate the height of a residential structure. University Heights should be assured that there is adequate sewer capacity to accommodate any anticipated uses of the site without creating negative impacts to downstream sewer users. University Heights should require that a future developer obtain a letter from the Iowa City Engineering Department outlining the required upgrades and draft an agreement that said upgrades would be completed in conjunction with any future development.

Fire and Police Protection: The University Heights Police Department and the Coralville Fire Department both provided letters indicating they were able to provide protection to this property in regards to the Maxwell rezoning proposal, and could do so with the current capacity of their departments. It is assumed that this would also be the case with the proposed '4-2 residential' concept plan. In addition, the University Heights Police Chief has indicated his department has the capacity to enforce any traffic issues related to traffic making illegal turning movements into and out of the proposed development.

Comprehensive Plan Goal to Increase Tax Base: The proposal for a residential development on the subject property conforms with the Comprehensive Plan's goal of increasing the tax base in University Heights. Given the changing ownership patterns for properties in this part of University Heights, the relationship between tax base and infill development should be discussed in the context of the concept plan.

When discussing the relationship between tax base and infill development, University Heights representatives may find excerpts from the *Fall 2007 University Heights Citizens Survey* helpful.

- Out of 142 respondents, 52% indicated they thought the City should allow more commercial development, 36% indicated the City should *not* allow more commercial development and 13% had no response.
- When asked about multi-family buildings, 23% of respondents (out of 142) indicated the City should maintain current multi-family regulations, 30% indicated the City should prohibit new multi-family buildings, and 13% indicated the City should permit higher density multi-family development (the remaining respondents wanted no regulation, or did not respond).

University Heights representatives may also find excerpts from the on-line survey & email and mail correspondence received in January/February 2010 regarding the Comprehensive Plan amendments helpful when discussing the relationship between infill development and tax base.

- Out of 15 pieces of email & mail correspondence, 73% felt that University Heights should be concerned with its tax base; out of 52 on-line survey respondents, 54% indicated that they were very concerned with University Heights losing taxable property / tax base.
- When asked where University Heights should first look to expand commercial or mixed-use development (if tax-base was a concern), 64% out of 50 on-line survey respondents identified the St. Andrew Church property as a viable option.

One issue that is unclear at this point is the future use of the University Athletic Club property at 1360 Melrose Avenue since it has been purchased by the University of Iowa

Facilities Corporation. A significant factor to consider for the financial health of University Heights as a corporate entity is the amount of property from which commercial property taxes can be collected. The University Athletic Club paid University Heights approximately \$26,000 in property tax revenue in 2008. If the property is to be used for an academic - related function, the University would not be required to pay property taxes on the Athletic Club property in the future.

Smart Growth: New State Legislation (Senate File 2389) dictates that State agencies, local governments, and other public entities consider and apply smart planning principles during deliberation of all appropriate planning, zoning, development, and resource management decisions. As such, it is important that local officials be aware of the following smart planning principals throughout the development process.

While the applicant's concept plan clearly adheres to many of the following smart planning principals, local officials may request that the applicant provide additional detail on how the proposal will utilize these smart planning principals to better the community as a whole.

Collaboration – All stakeholders, including those from outside the jurisdiction, are encouraged to be involved and provide comment during the deliberation of planning and zoning issues.

Staff feels that the applicant's efforts to involve the public in the development process shows a willingness to collaborate with stakeholders.

Efficiency, transparency, and consistency – Individuals, communities, and governmental entities should share in the responsibility to promote the equitable distribution of development costs and benefits using an efficient and transparent planning and zoning process.

Clean, renewable, and efficient energy – Planning, zoning, development, and resource management should be undertaken to promote clean and renewable energy use and increased energy efficiency.

Occupational diversity – Increased diversity of employment and business opportunities should be promoted; including access to education and training, entrepreneurial opportunities, and the establishment of business opportunities in locations near housing, infrastructure, and transportation.

Revitalization – Revitalization of established town centers and neighborhoods by promoting development that conserves land, protects historic resources, promotes pedestrian accessibility, and integrates different uses of property should be promoted. Reuse of existing sites and infrastructure is preferred over new construction in undeveloped areas.

The proposed development is consistent with the promotion of infill development rather than construction in undeveloped areas.

Housing diversity – Diversity in the types of available housing, support for the rehabilitation of existing housing, and the location of housing near public transportation and employment centers should be promoted.

The location of the proposed development will clearly provide housing near a major employment center (University Hospitals & Clinics).

Community character – Activities and development that are consistent with the character and architectural style of the community should be promoted.

Natural resources and agricultural protection – Protection, preservation, and restoration of natural resources, agricultural land, and cultural and historic landscapes, and increasing open space and recreational facilities should be promoted.

Sustainable design – Developments that utilize sustainable design, construction standards, and conserve natural resources by reducing waste and pollution should be promoted.

Transportation diversity – Expanded transportation options for residents of the community should be promoted. Consideration should be given to transportation options that maximize mobility, reduce congestion, conserve fuel, and improve air quality.

SUMMARY:

In summary, the following points should be considered as part of the development review process:

- It will be important to articulate to any future developer what elements of the proposal are appropriate.
- The current adopted University Heights zoning map indicates that the subject property is Single-Family Residential.
- The subject property exhibits several steep slopes, as indicated in the adopted Sensitive Areas Ordinance, which should be protected should redevelopment occur. An assessment of the property should be completed by a qualified firm before redevelopment is allowed, and the grading plan and tree protection plans should be reviewed by the University Heights Engineer.
- Melrose Avenue near the subject property is congested at peak travel times. As such, the construction of a left-turn lane for eastbound traffic at the property entrance, and correcting the skewed geometry of the Melrose Avenue/Sunset Street is viewed favorably from a traffic engineering perspective.
- While existing bicycle and pedestrian accommodations exist, the construction of 8' sidewalks on the east and south frontages of the property would be advantageous for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- University Heights representatives should discuss what mass and scale of building(s) are appropriate for this site; we recommend a future developer produce a 3D scale model or additional computer generated simulations of how the buildings will appear on site in relation to the surrounding neighborhood. Although the rear building is proposed to be taller (55') than the building fronting Melrose Avenue (39'), the perceived heights of the buildings may not appear as such depending on the viewer's vantage point. A 3D scale model of the site could address these perceptions by showing the proposed buildings in concert with proposed grading, set-backs, and vantage points from street level.
- University Heights representatives should request to see additional examples of the proposed construction materials before finalizing and approving any development.
- The perimeter of the site is an important element to consider as it serves as the transition from the new development to the existing neighborhood. New development should accommodate and encourage pedestrian activity. In a residential development, elements like large windows, canopies, and appropriate signage integrated into the building façade can enhance the appearance.
- We recommend University Heights representatives request that any and all light fixtures on the site be downcast and shielded to not allow more than one foot-candle of light spillage beyond the property line.

- University Heights representatives should discuss with a developer the size, illumination, and animation of any signs on the site.
- University Heights should request that a developer's engineer and/or site designer confirm with the Iowa City Engineering Department that utilities are adequate for any proposed development.