STAFF REPORT

To: University Heights City Council

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Item: Possible redevelopment
St. Andrew Presbyterian Church Site
1300 Melrose Avenue

Date: December 9, 2008

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Applicant:	n/a
Contact:	Louise From, Mayor, City of University Heights
Property Owner:	St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
Requested Action:	Possible rezoning
Purpose:	General neighborhood commercial and multi-family residential; number of units and square footage of commercial space unknown
Location:	At the NW corner of the Melrose Ave/Sunset St intersection
Size:	3.4 acres 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:	The Comprehensive Plan identifies this area 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 plan is intended to provide general guidance to the City when considering the redevelopment potential of the St. Andrew Presbyterian Church property at 1300 Melrose.

The report is meant to be broad in scope and cannot answer questions in great detail as much of the data necessary to form a more detailed report is not available at this time. If and when a more detailed application for development is made, staff will be able to better answer questions as they arise.

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. JCCOG cannot make specific recommendations about whether or not redevelopment *should* occur on the subject property; this decision should ultimately be made by University Heights elected representatives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The City of University Heights has been approached by a private party with interest in redeveloping the current St. Andrew Presbyterian Church property at 1300 Melrose Avenue. There is interest in redeveloping the property for both neighborhood commercial and multi-family residential uses.

The subject property is an approximately 3.4 acre parcel 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 surrounded by Institutional/Public property owned by the University of Iowa to the north, several undeveloped lots zoned Single-Family Residential to the east, developed Single-Family Residential lots to the south across Melrose Ave, and a Planned Unit Development along with undeveloped land zoned Single-Family Residential to the west (the latter is currently platted as an outlot).

ANALYSIS:

Staff recommends that through discussion in a public forum, University Heights representatives determine what elements of the proposed development are unacceptable, and what elements of the development may be acceptable with or without design changes. While elected officials have a lot of discretion in the Planned Unit Development process, it is important to articulate what mass, scale, size, and design details are appropriate, or are inappropriate and will not be permitted. This will provide clarity to the property owner and developer and will factor into the value of the existing property and the type and value of any future development of the property. Since this is an in-fill site, it is appropriate to look to the surrounding neighborhood and design elements for cues in what might be appropriate on this property. Following are specific elements that should be kept in mind throughout the development process.

Comprehensive Plan: The current University Heights Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2006. The Plan provides a current zoning map and offers three scenarios to be used as templates for future land use. While each of the three scenarios in the plan indicate the potential need for additional commercial and multi-family residential development, the subject parcel remains zoned Single-Family Residential in each scenario.

When the Comprehensive Plan was created, the fact that the St. Andrew Church property may redevelop was not considered or discussed. Similarly, the possibility that the University Athletic Club may be sold to the University of Iowa or another public entity was not considered as part of the Comprehensive Plan. These two possibilities provide rational to revisit the Comprehensive Plan guidance for this portion of University Heights.

Zoning: The subject property is currently zoned Single-Family Residential; R1 and should remain as such according the current University Heights Comprehensive Plan. Should University Heights decide that a mixed-use development is desirable for the subject property, a Planned Unit Development PUD overlay zoning 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 sprit of a comprehensive plan, or harmful to the surrounding neighborhood.

Should an ‘upzoning’ occur on the subject property, the City should take advantage of establishing ‘Conditional Zoning Agreements’ (CZA’s) with the developer. CZA’s can be established to ensure that the City’s desires in terms of appropriate screening, site development, building materials, among others, are met.

The proposal for a mixed-use development on the subject property conforms with the Comprehensive Plan’s goal of increasing the tax base in University Heights. However, excerpts from the ‘Fall 2007 University Heights Citizens Survey’ indicate that growth and increased density is not always favored by a majority of University Heights residents.

Land Use and General Layout of site: University Heights representatives should be assured the general layout of a commercial portion of the site is consistent with the older commercial node on the east side of University Heights, in that the building is close to the street with parking located behind the building. This will result in an *urban* presentation of the commercial space in that it is pedestrian-oriented and a majority of the parking will be hidden from the street. With front doors and windows close to the street, the commercial area should be inviting to pedestrians as well as vehicular traffic. University Heights should request building elevation concepts of the façade of the building facing Melrose Avenue in order to ensure the doorways and windows are consistent with the appearance University Heights is anticipating. For a building this close to the street, long blank walls should be viewed unfavorably.

Regarding residential structures, a tall residential development would be out of character for the majority of University Heights. University Heights representatives should discuss what scale of building is appropriate for this site. In order to determine this, it would be helpful for the developer to produce a scale model or a computer generated simulation of how tall buildings will appear from the east, west, and south. If buildings are set on lower topography than much of the surrounding neighborhood, and are obscured by tall trees that are preserved during the development process, taller buildings 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. This can be accomplished by ensuring connectivity of sidewalks from a residential structure to the surrounding sidewalk network, a secondary access to Sunset Street for vehicular circulation, and trees and landscaping around the residential structure to ensure the site is not perceived solely as a commercial development. In reviewing any Planned Unit Development, University Heights representatives should review the pedestrian circulation, vehicular circulation, and on-site landscaping.

Building 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. Brick and stone are more consistent with traditional building materials in University Heights and Iowa City; precast concrete panels can be decorative and attractive as well. If building materials and building design are important to University Heights, representatives should request to see mock-ups of the building design and examples of the materials before finalizing and approving any development. Other aspects of building design include the location of the front door and doorways, the number and the size of the windows, the roof line and building articulation, awnings, balconies, and other exterior elements of the building.

Regarding energy efficiency, if this is important to University Heights, representatives should request a minimal level of LEED certification or some other evidence that the building is designed in an energy-efficient manner.

Mass and Scale: Mass and scale are perhaps the most 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 by design strategies that attempt to break up the mass by the use of offsets and other methods to articulate both the horizontal and the vertical planes of the building. Façade modulation and pitched rooflines can help reduce the perceived bulk of the building. Tall trees and topography can also be a factor in how the building's scale is perceived.

It will be important to articulate near the beginning of the development review process what size and scale of building may or may not be appropriate. This will be important for the owner and developer of the property as well as the community in having a clear understanding of the development potential for the site.

If University Heights agrees to rezone this property to a planned unit development designation to allow a mixed-use development, density is another factor that should be kept in mind. The overall density in terms of units per acre should not exceed the density normally allowed in the University Heights multifamily zone. Allowing a density greater than what would normally be allowed in the highest density multifamily zone would be unusual.

There is the potential for conflict between commercial uses fronting on Melrose Avenue and the existing residential uses on the south side of Melrose Avenue. One way of mitigating this potential conflict is to require that the commercial street frontages be similar in overall scale to the residential structures on the south side of Melrose Avenue.

Streetscape: The perimeter of the site is an important element to consider in that it serves as the transition from the new development to the existing neighborhood. In an urban area, new development should accommodate and encourage pedestrian activity by providing balconies, terraces, and yards. In a mixed-use development, elements like large windows, canopies, and appropriate signage integrated into the building façade can enhance the appearance. Arcades and covered entrances can promote pedestrian use of the street edge by providing weather protection, security, and safety. 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.

Property Values: City representatives expressed concern about the state of neighborhood property values if redevelopment occurs. There is reason to believe that if the property is developed with the neighborhood in mind, adjacent property values should not be adversely affected. This, of course, depends on many factors such as:

- Minimizing negative externalities such as light, air, and noise pollution
- Constructing attractive, pedestrian friendly buildings
- Adequately maintaining the buildings and grounds

- Managing/oversight of the tenets of the buildings, both residential and commercial
- Attracting neighborhood friendly businesses
- Properly managing both motorist and bicycle/pedestrian traffic

Environmental Issues: 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-8), and must be protected as such. The amount of impervious surface and subsequent storm water management, as well as potential habitat loss, soil degradation, and other environmental features should be calculated by a qualified firm before redevelopment occurs.

Transportation and Traffic Circulation: Melrose Avenue (near the subject property) is already 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-Rang Transportation Plan). Corridors exhibiting V/C ratios of 1.0 or greater are considered to be functioning over capacity, and are strained to some degree. As such, it's possible that a left-turning lane for eastbound Melrose Avenue traffic at the entrance to the new development would be warranted. The necessity for a left-turn lane will depend on the size and type of the proposed development and should be considered as redevelopment plans are established.

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. If the subject property is redeveloped, the issue with the skewed geometry of the intersection should be resolved; especially if access from Sunset Street to the subject property is permitted.

Melrose Avenue / Sunset Street Intersection (looking north)

If the north leg of the intersection (Sunset Street) can be reconstructed to a more desirable geometry, it could benefit the development of the subject property as well as the public. 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. However, during redevelopment, a sidewalk on the east side of the subject property should be constructed. A wide-sidewalk on the south side of the property should also be considered in order to provide consistency with the wide-sidewalk scheduled to be constructed on the north side of Melrose Avenue from Golfview Avenue to Sunset Street. The topography should be evaluated to see if it will allow for a trail from the subject property, northwest, to the property currently owned by the University Athletic Club. This could be advantageous for both properties; especially if the properties are redeveloped as mixed-use developments.

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. Development engineers are able to produce a photometrics plan identifying proposed light sources and the amount of foot-candles they will generate at the light source and in increments beyond the light source; it would not be unusual to request to see such a photometrics plan.

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

Noise/Hours of Operation: While University Heights cannot restrict the specific use of the property (any use allowed in the Commercial Zone in the adopted Zoning Ordinance would be allowed on the commercial portion of the property), you may restrict the hours of operation of the site to mitigate against any late-night noise issues. While the site is well-buffered to the northeast and west, there are residential properties on the south side of Melrose Avenue and on the east side of Sunset Street. If noise from commercial activities is a concern, University Heights could discuss with the developer hours of operation, outdoor seating for restaurants, cafes, or bars, and/or exterior loudspeakers or other noise creating elements.

Another thing to consider is the noise that a mulit-family residential building can create; especially if balconies are allowed. Balconies are common in multi-family residential buildings and can add to noise pollution on and off site. It would be appropriate to discuss with the developer whether or not they intend to include balconies in their design early in the development process so that this issue can be discussed.

Utilities: Before proceeding further in the development process, University Heights should request that the developer's engineer and/or site designer confirm that utilities are adequate for the proposed development. There should be enough pressure in the water system to accommodate anticipated commercial uses as well as the height of a residential structure. University Heights should be assured that there is adequate sewer capacity to accommodate any anticipated commercial and residential uses of the site without creating negative impacts to downstream sewer users.

Fire and Police Protection: University Heights should confirm with their police department that there is capacity to accommodate increased density and new commercial uses on this site without undue impacts. Since this is an in-fill site, it should not result in increasing the size of the area patrolled by University Heights Police. Fire protection is another matter, particularly if a tall residential structure is constructed. University Heights should confirm with the area fire departments providing fire protection that a tall residential building does not present any challenges from a fire protection standpoint.

CONCLUSIONS:

One issue that is unclear at this point is whether or not the University Athletic Club property at 1360 Melrose Avenue will be redeveloped in the near future. 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.

If the Athletic Club property is purchased by the University of Iowa, or another tax exempt entity and property taxes are no longer paid, the City of University Heights will lose approximately $26,000 in property taxes annually (2007 information from the Johnson County Treasurers office). In order to offset this potential lost revenue, it may be advantageous for the City of University Heights to amend the City's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code to allow for and encourage development on the subject property. If this is desired by University Heights representatives, any increase in intensity on the property will need to be considered carefully to avoid negative impacts on adjacent properties.

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

- It will be important to articulate near the beginning of the development review process what size and scale of building(s) may or may not be appropriate.

- The adopted University Heights Comprehensive Plan indicates that the subject property is, and should, remain zoned Single-Family Residential.

- Rezoning the subject property does not comply with the spirit of the adopted University Heights Comprehensive Plan. As such, any rezoning or application of an overlay zone should be carefully considered and justified to the public.

- The subject property exhibits several steep slopes, as indicated in the adopted Sensitive Areas Ordinance, which must be protected should redevelopment occur. A complete environmental assessment of the property should be completed by a qualified firm before redevelopment is allowed.

- Melrose Avenue near the subject property is congested at peak travel times. As such, the possibility of constructing a left turn lane for eastbound traffic at the property entrance, and correcting the skewed geometry of the Melrose Avenue/Sunset Street should be considered as redevelopment plans are established.

- While existing bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are adequate, the construction of a standard 4' sidewalk on the east side of the property and a wide 8' sidewalk on the south property line should be considered.

- There is reason to believe that if the property is developed with the neighborhood in

mind, adjacent property values should not be adversely affected. This depends on many factors that should be addressed as redevelopment occurs.

- The proposed commercial area should be inviting to pedestrian as well as vehicular traffic; University Heights should request building elevation concepts of the façade of the building facing Melrose Avenue.

- University Heights representatives should discuss what scale of building is appropriate for this site; the developer should produce a scale model or a computer generated simulation of how the building will appear from the east, west, and south.

- University Heights representatives should request to see mock-ups of the building design and examples of the proposed 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 mixed-use development, elements like large windows, canopies, and appropriate signage integrated into the building façade can enhance the appearance.

- University Heights representatives 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.

- University Heights representatives should discuss with the developer the size, illumination, and animation of any signs on the site.

- University Heights should discuss with the developer hours of commercial operation, outdoor seating for restaurants, cafes, bars or balconies, and/or exterior loudspeakers or other noise creating elements.

- University Heights should request that the developer's engineer and/or site designer confirm that utilities are adequate for the proposed development.

- University Heights should confirm with their police department that there is capacity to accommodate increased density and new commercial uses on this site without undue impacts.

- University Heights should confirm with the area fire departments providing fire protection that a tall residential building does not present any challenges from a fire protection standpoint.

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