Vue & City Council
January 30, 2016

High Point Place Neighbors:

Several of you have asked me how the City Council meeting went last Tuesday to consider the Vue. The answer -- poorly. But before discussing in detail. I want to thank all of you who turned out for the hearing. Special kudos to Kerry & Bob Holley and Debbie Lee for their excellent Letters to the Editor, which the News-Press ran, and to Bill Lauman for speaking at the hearing.

There was never any doubt that the Council would approve the building -- that was never really the issue. The issues turned on what conditions would be but on the development and the building’s unit density. The report the City Staff sent to the Council was really pretty good and complied with the City’s Smart Code. But the Council sided with the developer and did not give adequate weight to the public benefits the developer was supposed to provide.

Let me say that density can be a good thing. The City is in bad financial shape and desperately needs property tax revenue. Also, more people need to live in or near downtown to support the type of vibrant downtown we want. But, the Vue property is in such a sensitive location next to Centennial Park and the lot is so small and narrow, one has to ask if this is the best place to build a condo with the highest density of any condo in the River District. The average density for the other River District Condos is around 70 units per acre. The Vue will have 100 units per acre for a total of 133 units. By right, the developer can build a condo with 50 units per acre. The Smart Code, however, allows for an additional 50 units per acre -- if the developer provides public benefits. The Smart Code lists 9 public benefit criteria and the Council, based on Staff recommendation, can determine to what extent the developer complies with the criteria and award partial or full bonus density. The Council's awarding full bonus density, not partial, was where the process broke down. The developer did fully comply with some of the bonus criteria, but on the criteria that are difficult or expensive, compliance was poor but the developer received full credit. I will discuss briefly below where the developer came up short.

1. Provide 5,000 square feet of mixed use space. The developer will provide 1,000 square feet.

2. Provide a Riverwalk on the north and west sides of the property (along the River and then along Legacy Harbor to W 1st Street. The developer will provide a Riverwalk along the north side of the property but only a 1/4 of the distance on the west side. Pedestrians will need to backtrack.

3. Provide $270,000 for workforce housing. The developer will provide $200,000.

4. Provide $210,000 to the City parking fund. Instead, the developer will be able to count 13 spaces in the Vue's parking garage as public parking.

Other conditions from the original Development Agreement:

5. Provide a children's interactive fountain in the park. The developer offered $100,000 and the City accepted. But, the type of fountain described in the development agreement cannot be built for $100,000. We estimate cost in the range of $250,000 -- $400,000.

6. The Development Agreement specified a 7,000 sq foot office for the Edison Sailing Center (estimated cost $1,350,000). Obviously, since the new developer did not own the property on which the office was to be built this was an impossibility. In lieu of this, Staff recommended that the developer remove and relocate the Centennial Park restrooms and utility shed. Staff estimated cost at $600,000. Developer will provide nothing.
A major unresolved problem is an improper easement the developer received for property on the north side of Centennial Park along the water and for submerged lands contiguous to the shoreline.

Sad to say this has become a pattern and practice of the City Council relieving developers of their responsibilities and accepting whatever the developer wants to provide.

I will continue in my commitment to address this problem. Please let me know if you remain interested and want to be kept informed.

Again, I appreciate your support.

Best,
Gene

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