

After the Planning & Development meeting of April 8, the question of the hour is....

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

In short, (other than a reduction in height*) **NOTHING HAS CHANGED.**

The presentation by the development team was lackluster at best, and failed to address the concerns expressed by several Aldermen, as well as the majority of citizens.

Here are some of the details:

***Height:** a proposal of 38 stories. The developer presented a building height of 421 feet. However, the backlit screening that hides the building mechanicals on the roof adds an additional 24 feet to the height making the actual height 445 feet.

For reference: the tallest building in Downtown Evanston is the Chase Bank building which has a height of 270' 3" to the rooftop (total height is 277' 8" when you include the rooftop mechanicals). Sherman Plaza is just inches shorter. Depending on how height is calculated (with or without mechanicals), it appears that the revised proposal is between 151 and 167 feet taller than the tallest building in the Evanston skyline. Take a 15-story building and put it on top of the Chase building and you will get some idea of what is proposed.

Retail Space: *minimal* increase in retail space, still LESS square footage than currently exists on site.

Office Space: absolutely none (current site houses approximately 140 professionals on second floor).

Parking/traffic: the required parking under current zoning laws is 396 spaces. The developer is still deficient with only 270 parking spaces proposed. Traffic density will not be affected by the proposed change (600 daily trips).

Residential Units: the developer has not changed the number of units. They are still proposing 218 luxury condominiums.

Loading Docks: the requirement is 5 loading docks; the developer is still deficient with a proposal of only 2 loading docks. This is a significant issue as delivery trucks may need to wait on Orrington for an available space, adding more congestion to the downtown.

FAR (Floor Area Ratio): a measure of density, the developer has decreased the FAR from 15.77 to 15.56. This is still more than triple that of other developments and far exceeds the zoning regulations (even if all allowances were granted, the FAR is still twice that of the zoning regulations).

Zoning Change Request: the developer is still requesting a change in zoning for the property in question. Current zoning, with allowances, would allow for roughly 8-10 stories. With a change in zoning to D3, the height increases to 85' (approx. 125' with allowances). City code allows a "tower" up to 220' in height as an approved planned development with sufficient public benefits. However, it also requires a minimum setback of 30' from the front lot line and 25' from the side lot line beginning at 42' in height. The new proposal does not have this required setback on all sides.

Public Benefits: there is currently *no change* in Public Benefits. While Aldermen asked for an increase in meaningful benefits, the development team has chosen to ignore this request for the time being and simply decrease the height. With no changes other than height, you have to wonder how the developer can hope to address the important issue of Public Benefit. The developer still insists that renovating the Hahn building, at a cost to the City of \$3 million dollars, is a benefit. An affordable housing contribution is mandated by ordinance and tax revenue would accrue to anything developed on the site (although it is likely that the 218 units would now be assessed at a lower rate – decreasing tax revenue potential). While retail space has increased marginally with the new proposal, it is still less than what currently exists. The elimination of contributing Class B office space is a real issue for the economic health of Evanston.

Economic Analysis: the City of Evanston, at a cost to the taxpayers, has hired consultant Marty Stern of US Equities to give an “independent” economic analysis of the project. Mr. Stern has a long history with the City and some question the ability of Mr. Stern to be unbiased.

SPAARC Review: because the proposed project has changed significantly (at least in height) it was requested that the developers present the revised project to the Site Plan Appearance and Review Committee.

Future Meetings: several meetings are currently scheduled and there will undoubtedly be more to come. The meetings we are aware of are:

- SPAARC (date/time to be determined)
- Economic Development/P&D Joint Meeting – Wednesday April 30 @ 7:30pm
- Special P&D Meeting – Wednesday May 7 @ 6:30pm (note: public comment has been limited to 90 minutes)

Developer “Speak”: for those of you not yet clued in to the buzzwords, we have listed a few for your pleasure.

- *Lifestyle Center:* the developers have told Evanston that this is something to strive to become. Wikipedia defines a Lifestyle Center as “a shopping center or mixed-used commercial development that combines the traditional retail functions of a shopping mall but with leisure amenities oriented towards upscale consumers.
- *Form Based Design:* we’ve heard of form based zoning, but form based design is a new buzzword introduced by the team.
- *Iconic, Capstone, Signature, and Centerpiece:* all buzzwords used by the developer to tell us that our downtown is falling apart and needs their building to “pull it together”.
- *Delicate, light, and airy:* words to describe a building over 15 stories taller than any building in the immediate vicinity.
- *Lighthouse (a personal favorite):* when asked about the backlighting of the mechanical shield at the top of the building, the development team referred to it as another Evanston lighthouse (think iconic).