

University District Initiatives

Table Topics Discussion

June 23, 2009

Facilitators: Stan Hyland, Tony Poteet

Participants: Scott Blankenbeckler, Lenetha Hunt, Sheryl Lipman, Dan Murrell, Andrew Trippel, Ken Rearden

1. Hyland invited everyone to give a brief introduction and tell why he/she was at the table. He noted that we were discussing the strategic plan made for the University District, as invited by the city, and that this district was under consideration as a CDC.
2. Poteet noted that the latest update to the plan was in 2007, so it is still considered current. The maps on the table showed both University plans as well as some potential public and private investment areas, with such highlights as the Central Avenue project, where Central is turned into a boulevard, with bike lanes, crossings, a planted median, etc. The overall plan is designed to give this district a "sense of place."
3. Rearden's interest was in the best ways to involve UofM students and faculty in the planning and development of the district.
4. Hunt said she was there to listen and learn how this might be beneficial to the student population.
5. Blankenbeckler had interest as a former resident of the district and interest in how the current plan will affect residents living in the district.
6. Trippel was involved in the project design early on as a graduate student. He noted that the intersection of Walker and Highland is to be a sort of town center and expansion would grow from that area to the University. A major thrust of this effort is how to revitalize the area in order to attract or bring back good business and residents. In order to provide for more mixed use, the completed plan will require some rezoning and an overlay for the district. They are currently working with the Land Use Control Board and the City Council for final approval.
7. Murrell's interests were from the fundraising/development perspective. Knowing this information allows him to share a vision with prospective donors. Hyland noted that thus far, the UofM has used its own resources, but that there will be a need for outside funding in the future.
8. Lipman was there primarily viewing the situation as legal counsel for the UofM, but also out of personal interest.
9. It is hoped that in the fall, projects can be identified for both faculty and students that will move this project forward and help create a timeline. There needs to be some evaluation on what kinds of businesses are desired/needed on Highland, that area being within walking distance and a focal point for the services that students will need, to include a drug store, a grocery, office space, etc. It was noted that there are businesses there that are desirable and needed for student life and recreation and that these should be encouraged.

10. The city has blessed the idea of an “education corridor” running from UofM to CBU. What is to be the core of that area?
11. It is hoped that this plan is to be implemented over a 25 year period, but much will depend on funding.
12. Area residents have placed a high priority on a continuation of good educational facilities. There is currently nothing available beyond the Campus School, so a middle and high school are desirable, possibly even as laboratory schools like the Campus school. There would need to be more analysis of the costs and needs of this area and coordination with the MCS system. This might also highlight the need for some improvements to the Highland library, possibly even consideration of a link between that branch and the University library system.
13. Ownership of the properties along Highland is varied and working with the current owners to plan redevelopment is critical.
14. There is an educational opportunity in the study of the various ways that the public/private financing of all of this might work, as well as how terms of purchase, etc. are negotiated. Some Memphis professionals, such as John Dudas, have expressed interest in being part of such a program. Similarly, the law school could play a role in this area, both for student involvement and education, as well as providing legal clinic to the residents of the district.
15. The ever-present issue of parking was raised. New garages are proposed at several locations, and if the campus has more students living on site, some transportation needs may decrease. Nevertheless, there is concern that we are simply moving the problem of street parking, with its related security issues, further into the neighborhoods. It was noted that better public transit would help with that, if it could be provided in the same manner as other urban universities.
16. It was also noted that the problem with the trains along Southern would only get worse, increasing frequency from 30 to 50 a day. Possible solutions include tying in use of a light rail system so that federal dollars might be brought in and either raising or lowering the tracks so that they do not interfere with traffic, pedestrian or automotive. Funding remains the critical issue.
17. The YMCA on Walker is committed to remaining in the area, in part because they are aware of the plans coming out of this initiative.
18. One future goal is to find the best way to market this initiative and show the community what is being planned.