



Based on discussions held at their meeting on October 2, 2010, below are the Naperville Area Homeowners Confederation Board of Directors thoughts regarding the Land Use section of the draft Downtown2030 plan.

Although not specifically in Section 3, we feel the concepts of creating dual walkways, as illustrated for the buildings on the north side of Jefferson, and “Festival Street” along Jackson, west of Washington, are excellent enhancements to the downtown and hope to see these ideas carried out.

Globally, we are concerned with the notable absence of any discussion of the negative impact to the transportation grid from increasing both the area and density of the downtown. It is a given that the network of streets in the downtown area are insufficient to the demands placed on them today, with many intersections exhibiting failing level of service (LOS) ratings. Making matters worse, is the inescapable fact that, aside from minor “tweaks”, this is the grid we are stuck with. We cannot widen Washington, we can’t align Mill with West, and, for example, we doubt seriously if residents along Chicago would stand for their parkways being removed in order to widen that street. Frankly, it is only the use of the residential streets by people escaping the congestion on the arterials that keeps traffic flowing into and through the downtown area.

We therefore suggest that discussions regarding transportation and land use be merged and not looked at separately. Additionally, there needs to be recognition that development in the downtown area has to observe reasonable limitations so residents are not ultimately faced with complete gridlock.

It is the Confederation’s belief that it is time for Naperville to commit itself to improving our dismal LOS ratings in the downtown area to at least a “C”. Ignoring projections of further deterioration of LOS in the future, while, at the same time, proposing significantly higher intensity of use in the downtown, is unacceptable in our view. This continued reluctance to face congestion reality will ultimately endanger the viability of the downtown and reduce the quality of life for those who live near, drive through, or use the downtown.

The Board finds the practice of evaluating the additional traffic generated by individual projects to be unhelpful in a thoughtful analysis of future downtown traffic. Based on the “findings” of past proposals, we can all but be assured that the results of any given traffic study will show just a modest increase in traffic from said project. Certainly, if all the approved projects are actually built, there will be, collectively, a significant increase in traffic and resultant congestion in the downtown area. Ignoring this reality, and continuing to analyze additional individual proposals “in a vacuum”, is a disservice to the community. Naperville needs to decide, once and for all, how much traffic the downtown area can tolerate and plan accordingly.

The following comments address specific areas highlighted in the NAHC Board of Director's review::

Special Study Area; The Naperville Area Homeowners Confederation Board of Directors is opposed to the strong possibility of essentially creating a "Water Street North", and disagree with the concept of encouraging a large "anchor" or "destination" use (hotel, museum, movie theater, large retailer, etc.), or allowing even greater building height than the proposed 60 foot maximum here. This seems to us to be in complete opposition to the plan's stated desire to "preserve the small town character of the downtown" and "stepping down" in size and intensity of use in order to create a buffer for nearby residential property owners. Here, we feel that Rick Hitchcock's "Terminated View" illustration in the study document more accurately portrays what this area could, and should, look like. The downtown is known for its small town charm and scale. We feel that any expanded development should build on that reputation, not abandon it, as appears to be happening at Water Street.

Expanding the Downtown past Eagle; The Confederation Board is opposed to expanding the downtown into the vibrant residential areas on Jefferson Avenue (between Mill Street and Eagle Street) and Webster Street (between Douglas Avenue and Benton Avenue) where the draft discusses "alternative uses" including home to office conversions. Simply put, Naperville needs to decide on some hard boundaries for the downtown. Residents, and potential future purchasers of these homes, need to know that their neighborhood is not going to disappear into the downtown business district.

Washington and Naper Schools; The downtown is coming perilously close to both schools, and in consideration of the safety the young children of these two schools deserve, there needs to be a reasonable buffer from the intensity of use the downtown represents. The downtown, at a minimum, needs to end at the east side of Eagle and the north side of Franklin, and, we would like to see greater emphasis put on the safety of these K-8 students as pedestrians. The transportation section of the draft plan discusses balancing the conflicting needs of the pedestrian with the need to maintain traffic flow. We maintain that the balance needs to be tipped everywhere more in favor the pedestrian, particularly five through twelve year olds, than is currently the case.

FAR (floor area ratio); Naperville needs to revisit the concept of how FAR is calculated as it relates to developments with parking structures. To state that the Water Street hotel proposal has a FAR comparable to Main Street Promenade illustrates that the calculation has become meaningless when considering developments with parking structures. Setting aside developments with parking structures, we wonder why the city feels the need to allow a 60' height limit when the proposed continued use of a 2.5 FAR will, in our estimation, effectively limit both height and intensity of use.

The Confederation Board applauds the efforts that are going into determining this blueprint for our community's future. There are many good things included within the proposal document, and we look forward to seeing those concepts incorporated into future zoning and land use decisions. At the same time, as noted above, we have definite concerns around the impact increased density will have on the quality of life for those who call Naperville their home as well as around the safety and security of our school children. We appreciate your consideration of our comments and welcome the opportunity to engage in further dialogue on the issues, opportunities, and impacts inherent in a far-reaching document such as this.