

Livable City Initiative Board of Directors (LCI Board)

Special Meeting Via Zoom Minutes June 3, 2020

Present: Hon Delphine Clyburn, Tim Yolen, Pat Brett; Mary Wadley, Neil Currie, Serena Neal-Sanjurjo, Evan Trachten

Absent:; Hon. Ernie Santiago, Seth Poole

The meeting was called to order by Tim Yolen at 6:03 P.M.

Action items

0 Dixwell Avenue (MBP 292 0390 03100) / rear of 486 Dixwell Avenue / a.k.a. 484 Dixwell Avenue & 324 West Division Street

Evan Trachten explained that the City is proposing to sell these two lots to Columbus House Inc. The applicant is proposing to develop a two-unit affordable rental property (at 25% AMI and 20 year affordability period) on 0 Dixwell Avenue and also build a structure at 324 West Division Street (1 unit or 2 subject to zoning) and sell it to an owner-occupant for a minimum 5 year occupancy period. The parking for this development serves both structures and is located at the rear of 324 West Division Street. The site would be developed over two years. In 2020 the Dixwell property will be developed, and in 2021 the West Division property would be developed. Evan told the Board there are several members of the community on the call who want to address the Board.

Chairman Tim Yolen said he would allow everyone to speak and allowed Adam Hopfner to speak. Adam teaches at the Yale school of Architecture and conducts the Vlock Build Project. This process began in August of 2019 with meeting with the City to identify lots and community meetings thereafter. Adam worked with Alder Steve Winter to have several community meeting both on this block and at the Community Management Team. Since then, property owner Kerstin Hopes-McFadden raised concerns about this site being developed as currently proposed. Adam told the Board he was comfortable moving along with only the rear piece on Dixwell Avenue and work with Ms. Hopes-McFadden to address her concerns on 324 West Division Street. The Dixwell site plan requires the driveway to be along 324 West Division Street because the Dixwell lot is a rear lot / flag lot. The original proposal was to build one or two units at 324 West Division Street but the applicant wants to be a good neighbor and would consider not building at the site. Adam noted that 2 parking spots are required at 0 Dixwell and one spot for 324 West Division Street as shown in the site plan. Adam wants to be a good neighbor, he doesn't want to do anything that would be perceived otherwise. Adam told the Board he is prepared to do whatever the Board decides. Tim mentioned there is support from the Alder and the Community Management Team (CMT). Neil Currie asked about the ten foot strip along Dixwell Avenue, Adam told the Board it would be a foot path that would be landscaped. Columbus House would maintain this area once developed. Adam plans to cut trees in the path area and the neighbor Mr. Mabery will be pleased about this improvement.

Tim recognized Searle Mabery a neighbor at 482 Dixwell Avenue, he expressed his support for this project going forward via telephone. Pat thanked him for his comments.

Tim recognized Kerstin Hopes-McFadden who opposes development of 324 West Division Street, she is a property owner at 320 West Division Street since 2004. She told the Board that LCI offered her one-half of the lot 10 to 15 years ago but told her it was unbuildable so she was not interested. Her tenant has been parking there for many years. Kerstin told the Board she feels she should have had a first right of refusal for this land. Kerstin attended some of the community meetings and expressed her concerns and objections. Kerstin doesn't like "easements" because they can be hard to enforce and very inconvenient when someone is blocking the way out. She also raised concerns about the traffic created by this development. Kerstin also told the Board there is not much parking on West Division Street. Kerstin told the Board that she received a call from Adam to discuss the situation and expressed his willingness to hold off on 324 West Division Street. Tim told the Board there are many easements and its part of City living. Tim is a lawyer and easements are enforceable. Kerstin told the Board that creating an easement affects her property negatively.

Mr. Mabery would like this development to move forward to eliminate the blight and create housing opportunities for rental and home-ownership. There is trash, animals such as rats, skunks, etc. and the community deserves better. Serena told the Board that many years ago LCI sold this type of land (sliver lots) as yard area, but now we develop them when possible to create affordable housing. This is an opportunity for a development partner to build units with no subsidy from the City.

Alder Clyburn told the Board this project has been a long time coming. This will better the neighborhood and help people who live in the area by making it safer. There is community support for this development. The neighborhood is developing. Her tenant has been blessed with being able to park there, but the time has come to give the land to a new use that betters the entire community.

Kerstin responded to comments. She told the Board she grew up in Newhallville. She said that the lot is not large enough to support this level of development. Her property has never had trash on it and she has been caring for the land at 324 West Division Street. She is not a slumlord and the fact she is not an owner occupant is irrelevant. This is causing stress for her and her tenant. She is the most affected person due to the proposed development. This development doesn't need to happen. She should have been given the opportunity to purchase this lot for development (housing) but she was not given the opportunity. Pat thanked Kerstin for testimony. Evan clarified that 15 years ago the City was not aggressively building on sliver lots. Back then, we would split sliver lots for side-yard and discount the land under the "sliver lot" program with a non-buildable covenant, but now we look to develop affordable housing wherever possible. This lot has 40' of frontage. Pat also noted that LCI did not offer Ms. Hopes-McFadden the opportunity to develop this site with a structure.

Alder Steven Winter addressed the Board. He told the Board there is not an overabundance of land or available structures. Steve has been focusing on developing this part of his ward. The lot at 324 West Division Street is a dirt lot. Getting an owner occupant will

improve the neighborhood by creating stability and being invested in the area. The proposed easement should not be an issue if this property is developed. This proposal achieves the highest and best use of the land and generates tax revenue. There is some off street parking on Sherman Parkway and West Division Street. Please make the best use of the lot by creating a long term stakeholder and more affordable housing.

Tim asked to hear from LCI Board Members. Pat expressed her understanding of Ms. Hopes-McFadden's position and Mr. Mabery's position. Is there a way to accommodate Ms. Hopes-McFadden and make a win-win situation? She hopes it can be worked out and thanked everyone for working together. Mary Wadley talked about opportunity and including Ms. McFadden in this development. Serana told the Board discussions about parking for the tenant of Ms. Hopes-McFadden can occur with Adam and Evan, but this is an opportunity to provide affordable housing.

Neil Currie expressed that he was happy to hear from the neighborhood and the Alder. The community seems to be on board with this development. Neil understands the concern of Ms. Hopes-McFadden with respect to the density of two units at 324 West Division Street. Neil would explore using the footpath on Dixwell as the driveway if possible, to minimize the traffic impact. Alder Clyburn expressed her support for this project going forward as a blessing for the community and it has been a long time coming getting development of affordable housing and development in the community, she fully supports the change from vacant lot to housing.

Ms. Hopes-McFadden was permitted to address the Board again. She would consider building affordable housing, a community garden, or something. She does not want an easement and density on the property. We should try to do something outside the box and continue this conversation. She noted she attended two community meetings to raise her concerns about this project in November 2019 as well as at another meeting on site. She does not believe this proposal is best for the neighborhood. Mr. Mabery told the Board he has lived here for 20 years and some of his tenants have moved out because of the area not looking good, this is an opportunity to clean up the area, create housing where this is needed, a vacant lot for parking is useless. Nathia Joyner an owner-occupant from West Division Street agreed with Alder Winter, she does not want a community garden, she wants housing and taxes from a structure. Alder Clyburn made a motion which was seconded by Pat Brett. The motion was retraced and Neil Currie put forth a new motion. Tim asked that we vote individually for each property. Pat Brett offered a friendly amendment: Can the walking path along Dixwell Avenue become a driveway, Neil told Pat that would not work with the design. Neil recommended only building one unit onsite.

A motion was made by Neil Currie to approve 324 West Division Street for \$1,000 as one unit of housing to be built in 2021, Second by Pat Brett, all were in favor, approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Neil Currie to approve 0 Dixwell Avenue for \$2,000 as two- units of housing to be built in 2020, Second by Pat Brett, all were in favor, approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30 P.M.