

Date: June 7, 2013

To: Historic Resources Commission
Lawrence/Douglas County Planning Commission

From: **Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods (LAN) Downtown
Redevelopment Subcommittee** (Linda Bush, Pinckney; Dickie Heckler,
Brook Creek; David Longhurst, Downtown Lawrence; Kirk McClure, Old
West Lawrence; Cindy Suenram and K.T. Walsh, East Lawrence)

RE: Recommendations, Issues and Opportunities

We are pleased to provide comment on the City's Downtown Redevelopment report, and offer the perspectives of those neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown, workers, owners, consumers and the taxpaying citizens of Lawrence.

We emphatically support the City's Downtown Design Guidelines. Despite recent political pressure to ignore or override these guidelines when they are seen as inconvenient, we believe that adherence to the Downtown Design Guidelines is necessary to insure the retention of the valuable historic character of our Downtown.

Further, we believe that any proposed changes to the Downtown Design Guidelines should be preceded by objective research into the possible long-term effects of redevelopment on Downtown vitality and sustainability, and potential impacts to the Downtown Historic District and the adjoining Historic Districts. We support and encourage City engagement of both paid and volunteer stakeholders.

Our recommendations:

Need for Strategic Planning:

We request that the City engage in strategic planning, and create a Downtown Corridor Study that addresses more than just redevelopment. We believe that the City has an opportunity, now, to consider the following facets of our Downtown:

- Current vacancy rates of retail, office, and residential properties Downtown
- Desired services and products that may be missing but needed Downtown
- The viability of shared, incubator and small spaces for startup entrepreneurs
- Options for providing affordable housing Downtown
- The creation of small play areas with benches and natural, low-maintenance landscaping elements that encourage family-friendly downtown space
- Safer pedestrian friendly river access
- The creation of a more environmentally sustainable Downtown, to include additional bike parking and safe, well-marked pedestrian crossings; recycling and trash receptacles; planters with edible plants on New Hampshire and Vermont streets; low energy lighting; more open green space and permeable surfaces where possible;

Controls on the Height of Structures:

It is the opinion of LAN that the highest buildings Downtown should be on Massachusetts Street, with buildings to the west and east of Mass (on Vermont, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Rhode Island Streets) sloping downward in height, to amplify Mass Street as the focal street, which is the Downtown's historic pattern. We have witnessed recent variances to this pattern, and we believe that City leaders must

have the courage to prevent future planning mistakes, now, and adhere to the Downtown Design Guidelines as we move forward.

It is our recommendation that the absolute maximum height for any structure abutting, facing or backing up to residential housing near downtown be 38.5 ft. with a 14 ft. first floor (as per the Downtown Design Guidelines) and two 12 ft. maximum stories above. For reference, the Arts Center is 38.5 ft.

Overtopping Parking Structures

Adding structures over City or privately owned parking lots is beneficial, so long as the original benefit district contributors, and City taxpayers, are fairly compensated for the loss of existing infrastructure and land. Any development in or over City-owned parking lots should provide at least as much parking as the parking it removes, with no additional cost to the taxpayers. If privately-owned parking is eliminated, new developments in those areas must be required to create an equal amount of parking, to prevent on-street parking encroachment into adjoining neighborhoods. We recommend that City staff research the creation of a “Parking Bank” in the Downtown area.

Development Proposals

We support the City’s pursuit of Request for Proposals for redevelopment, wherein the City takes the lead and proactively identifies desired outcomes and designs, and seeks competitive, healthy and sustainable development proposals for Downtown. We do not believe that the City should simply react to whomever comes forward with cash or a random development proposal.

Correction to Current Redevelopment Map:

The parking lot in the 800 block of Rhode Island, west side, was omitted in the survey provided by staff. We understand that this property has changed ownership and development has been discussed, thus it should be included in the survey maps.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact the LAN Chair, Laura Routh, 979-3918, lauridi@hotmail.com, if you have questions.

Thank you for your ongoing service to our community.