

Rezoning 2005-133 Plummer Property Community Meeting - January 26, 2006

Quick transcription by Nancy Pierce Shaver

I'm sure I missed some things since there were side conversations, private conversations and lots of people talking at once. These are my notes to the best of my ability.

Regular text: Developers Grey Poole (MarkPiercePoole) or Chris Ogunrinde (Neighboring Concepts)

Bold italic text: Comments & Questions from Attending Neighbors (85 people)

Meeting begins:

We recognize the important of this 4.5 acre property to the neighborhood. We believe in Central Avenue and are excited and interested in it. MarkPiercePoole has ½ interest in Tuscan's project next to the library at Plaza Central. This (Briar Creek) represent a \$10 million investment.

We looked at the Small Area Plan Calls for pedscape planning, retail/residential mix. We fell like we have achieved a good amount of that in this plan.

No restaurant signed yet.

We looked for an active tenant. We have an international grocer, an Aldi.

Prior to this plan we had a grocery and a drug store at the corner, the store was at the front. Through iterations with the neighborhood leaders we moved it back. Now we're being asked to move it back to the front. It was in front, we moved it back in response to the neighborhood leaders, now they are saying move it back to the front.

Plan calls for retail below, residential above. Our studies don't show that this will work at this time. This isn't Uptown or Southend. We are looking at 3-4 story residential with parking underneath.

How many variances do you need to get to do this?

None.

Why MUDD-O?

Planning asked for it so we would not have to tear up the existing planting strip and sidewalk.

The Aldi will be more than 16,000 square feet.

Why Aldi? Why not Harris Teeter? Home Economist? Whole Foods? Fresh Market?

Aldi is a smaller footprint, suitable for this kind of development.

Why a grocery store at all?

We need an anchor. We think this is the best use for this site.

Why do we need retail on every corner? This would be a lovely place for homes, private homes. What happens here is going to have an influence on what happens on the Renfrow property. We don't need retail on that corner.

The Small Area Plan calls for an urban scale mixed use retail/residential mix. We're trying to be consistent with what the market and the city calls for there.

But that's not what you're doing. Small Area Plan calls for ped-scale, not a box anchor store. Calls for live/work/retail. That's what the City calls for NOT an Aldi. (Sustained Applause)

What you have described cannot be supported here at this time.

This should be the entrance to the east side. It's the first exit off Independence, it should be as nice as possible. (Sustained Applause)

There's a huge traffic problem here now. It takes five minutes to turn left onto Briar Creek off Central already.

There are 40,000 cars per day here already. This project's impact would be minimal. There would be full movement exit/entrances on Central and Briar Creek.

Apartments above retail isn't feasible.

But what about Morningside?

That's a 26-acre project, or more. They have some things we don't—no frontage on Central, they're inside a neighborhood, they have the park.

Where do you get the figure, surveys, that this place can't support the street level retail with condos?

Well we can show you the market studies, we will give those to one of the neighborhood leaders.

Was the only retailer that showed interest Aldi? That store will attract a bad element, bad people. It's like that in Europe too. Here it is OK, but on the other side of Eastway, farther out, they will come here to use the store. Aldi wants to be here to attract the people that will be a bad element.

What stores are excited to be close to Aldi? Tell us who you are talking to for the other tenants. No wait, you will lease the land. To Aldi?

No Aldi will purchase a piece if the rezoning passes, then build.

We think Aldi is neutral. Other retailers want to be there because they are excited about Central Avenue's traffic count.

Who are they? Are they an abstract concept or actual possibilities... can you just give us a broad category?

We are talking with potential regional and national retailers—neighborhood restaurants like subway or Moe's, casual fast food, apparel, shoes, paint stores...

No wait, slow down, what? Who exactly are you talking to?

We can't say right now.

Are you going to build the other buildings or just the Aldi?

Are they leasing from you? No, Aldi will purchase the land and build their own store.

So how do we know what they will do?

They have to follow the site plan just like we do, it goes with the land. We are committed to building two out of the other three buildings at the same time as the Aldi.

But the restaurant has to be key. Yes, that is why we want to wait until we have a good restaurant tenant, if we get the right tenant we will build it sooner.

(A real estate agent:) You need to look around the room and see the demographic. People in this room make a lot of money, they want their neighborhood to continue to go up. Bobby Drakeford is building \$400,000 homes right on Central Avenue very close by here. You have the potential for making much more money from the rest of that property, in better rent, but Aldi will bring it down. You are looking at the wrong demographic. It's going to pull down the rest of the development. (Sustained Applause)

Well, go with an open mind.

I have lived here four years. We are on the cusp of something really really great but you are going to put an Aldi , an ugly box right smack in the middle of it and it's gonna rewind.....

When you go for the rezoning the room will be full. When?

February 20.

What's happening is you want to develop the land and Aldi is all you can get right now, so you're doing that and bringing the rest down. You're not following our Small Area Plan.

We want to enjoy the stores where we live. Our vision is a European flair, shops, restaurants. We're not asking you to lose money. We want you to make more money, lots of it, in the long term. Just think outside the box, do something special. This is the next NODA, Southend.

A few years back on South Boulevard you had to run for your life, now there's retail/residential, somebody had to take the chance and make it happen.

(Another real estate agent:) You keep talking about the demographics. I came prepared with the real demographics. Here are the streets right here, Commonwealth, Carolyn Drive, Crystal, Morningside, Goodwin, Woodland. Average price for 1,293 square feet is \$198,300. On Ivy, 962 square feet sold for \$191,960. 1700 square feet—\$299,900. 1600 square feet- \$267,500. 1900 square feet- \$256,950. On Dearmon—which a few years back was bad—2,000 square feet for \$299,900. Merry Oaks, 1200 square feet for \$155,000, 1200 square feet for \$137,000. We have new homes for \$360,000 before upgrades. These are all active listing, recently sold. I am also a general contractor and I am putting \$100,000 additions on homes right around the corner.

If Aldi is all you can find for this site than maybe it's not the right time to develop it, yet.

What kind of considerations for pedestrians and cyclists? Sidewalk, bike racks behind the building, pedestrian walkways.

We are adding a 20-foot pedestrian plaza in front of the buildings, the brick wall will stay, to support shop level activities.

Why not leave it residential?

I am trying to see it from your point of view. You are trying to please the neighborhood plus be cost effective to you. If we in this room are a fair representation of the people who are invested in this area, are you really saying this is the best option you can propose? I'm trying to ascertain the mix, the

balance between trying to make it pleasurable, acceptable to the neighborhood and cost effective to you.... Maybe it isn't always about money.

We feel like it is a neat development for this neighborhood.

There are so many places where franchise development happens, so the personality is gone, with what you are proposing, any chance we would have had for more trendy upscale places would be thin....

Well you can't fill 30,000 square feet of space with trendy funky shops

Well you certainly can't with Aldi as the major retailer.

What is the \$\$ cost per square foot for retailer?

Fully loaded low to mid 20's per square foot. One of things we're trying to do is not over park it.

Please consider that people here use alternative transportation, lots of bicycles, walkers.

We have 16 or 17 more parking spaces than code requires, Aldi wants 10 foot parking places, we will only do 9.....

Have you approached Aldi with coming up to the street? Putting it in back is an invitation to it being an unattractive site.

Well we had it there to begin and the neighborhood leaders wanted it in back.
(Neighborhood leaders dispute this contention.)

Residential—parking will go underneath. At the Plaza Central condos (Roll ups) 650 square feet will sell for \$150,00 to \$175,000 Here they would be bigger, 1000 square feet—we don't know yet about price. There would be 40 units, three story building.

Aldi in West Columbia is very nice, skylights, exposed ceilings. How do we know we would get that?

The site plan has to be followed.....

What control do you have over tenant mix?

We would like to get some higher end tenants appropriate for this neighborhood. We are going to control the tenant mix to make sure it's right for the neighborhood.

No wait, you don't have any yet tenants yet, but you say you are going to pick and chose?

This site plan looks kind of like Ballantyne, we chose not to live out there, not cuz we're poor but because we really don't like that kind of place, sterile, strip mall land, it's really annoying, it would really suck for our area.

The thing about Aldi is that if it can be built with good taste and design it would not be so bad. How can we be assured Aldi will build its nicer prototype?

If Aldi IS in the back of the property does it have to conform to urban street guidelines a la MUDD?

It will have windows at the entrance.

But what about along the wall?

If your question is are we putting it in back to avoid having to conform to MUDD guidelines for streetscape, the answer is no.

But will it have ped-scale window if you do put it at the back of the property?

It has windows near the entrance.

But does MUDD require its streetscape things if you put it off the street?

Don't know what you mean.

OK so we don't know the answer to that...

(young teenager) So will there be a place for kids to hang out? Like ride our bikes too.

Well maybe ice cream or coffee, you don't drink coffee do you? Like Starbucks or Heroes.

It's not safe to ride our bikes all the way there, to 7th street.

Well we plan to put a plaza in front, we're going to build at least two buildings with the Aldi

Renfrow property?

We don't have a part of that now.

You no longer have a financial interest in the Renfrow property?

No.

BREAK

ONE PRIVATE CONVERSATION:

(We never said move the Aldi to the back. When you showed us the first site plan in early June we made it clear that we did not like the box retailer. But we never said you should move it to the back, ever. We said we did not want a box at all but we never said move it to the back.)

MEETING RESUMES

You're showing us these pictures, are there things in writing which say you have to build it like this?

Well there are restrictions under the zoning.

So it would have to be brick?

Yes.

What about this corner building that you say is the grand entrance into the development, but you say you would have to modify it for whatever tenant you would have, what if they didn't want a rooftop garden? So you do have fair amount of latitude in what you can build there, is there a time schedule? What happens if you don't get a tenant?

We would be losing money. We can't build it until we have a tenant.

You mean in five years it could be sitting there without a tenant.

We hope not.

What about the condos?

This market's not ready for condos yet.

So there's no guarantee when and if they will ever get built, yet you're asking us to support this rezoning, and we have no guarantee.

I remember when we were looking at pictures (renderings) of Eastland Mall and we backed the rezoning, the pictures looked really pretty, then the tenants didn't come and look what is there now, it's nothing like the pictures, so if you don't get the tenants.....if you don't get the restaurant until later—how close to this picture do you have to build? You have this rooftop dining. Well we got shown a lot of pictures of Eastland too and it didn't happen..

What can you guarantee to us besides Aldi? Is there anything else you'll swear (oops, this is a church) you'll swear will be there eventually?

We had to submit a phasing plan, we're going to build at least two buildings with the Aldi.

So it may be five years before you get the tenant. Might we just end up with an Aldi and two strip buildings forever?

We hope not.

Residential?

It's not part of our commitment in the first phase. We think the market will come later for a condo project on the site.

We are all talking about Aldi. Everyone who does not want an Aldi stand up.

(At least 90% of those in attendance stood.)

Aldi is no a ped-bike store. It generates traffic.

I have to say, you all seem to be going on about Aldi and "bad people" I find that offensive, talking about "bad" people.

We want to create a sense of place here, someplace for the neighborhood, our fear is that you would set the stage for the development with an Aldi, then what kind of sense of place does that leave us?

What about the product? I haven't been there. Are there lots of processed food, unhealthy? High fructose corn syrup?

There are some good products—I buy olive oil, some coffee, cheese, balsamic, some European products you can't get other places..

Look at Lowe's in Dilworth- they wanted to be there, they adjusted their prototype. Will Aldi do that for us? If you made Aldi an urban prototype we would accept it.

Well it just has a bad reputation, what it looks like from the street, the flyers in the paper—it just seems bad.

Yeah, poor people eat the unhealthy food and it makes them obese.

They do have some nice food, some bad. It's no frills.

The public perception of Aldi is low class. Like Sears—they left Southpark because they're not high end enough. Aldi would not be a draw to other businesses like we want here.

We need a better stronghold to set a more positive tone for the area. My mom lives behind the Albemarle Road Aldi. Her property value has dropped since it came.

We just can't be supportive of this, it's a step in the wrong direction. And you don't have any other tenants committed yet.

My brother and I made an investment here in 1960 and we're still here. Well I don't sleep here at night except that I do take a nap during the day now, but I am here working six days a week. What is important now is that there is a \$300 million investment in Morningside not very far from where we are sitting right now. That has got to be the model for anything that goes up on Central Avenue and Briar Creek and all along Central, there is another couple acre tract available between Carolyn and Cyrus. Morningside has got to be the model for everything, it has to set the standard. These folks here (the developers) have got to go along with that, and we have to stay firm on this. (Sustained Applause)

What will happen as the demographic changes and Aldi doesn't want to be here anymore? Will the building be such that it can be reused?

Well I disagree with your premise that it won't want to be here. It will be good for any demographic group, so I can't answer because I don't accept your premise.

Why don't we have drawings for the buildings? Close ups?

Three weeks ago you said you could not do a tree save, now you are saying you will. And three weeks ago you said the Aldi would be 15,2300 feet- before that you said 13,200. Now you say more than 16,000. So you are adding square footage but also doing a tree save now?

Well we made a mistake about the square footage of the Aldi. It is more than 16,000 square feet.

We overlaid the tree survey on the plan.

How many trees are to be saved?

Maybe 30 or 40. Also we will do significant planting.

What will happen between phases.

Well grass, we won't park those empty places.

So are you committed to Aldi? Can that change? Do you have some kind of contract with them?

We're not in bed with Aldi, if that's what you mean. This is the first time I've worked with them.

Do you think Aldi would be added value for condos?

It would be neutral.

Do you have flexibility with your contract with Mrs. Plummer? Could you back out now so that someone else could come back in less than two years and ask for a rezoning again? It would be better for us if the rezoning fails and sits here for two years, or is developed residential, but for her, it would mean she can't sell her property now. Could you back out now – would you back out now-- if you think it's going to go down, so she can do something else??

We don't think it's going to fail, we think we have a good project and the zoning will pass.

We think the Renfrow development will complement this, at 22 units per acre it will provide a lot of customers.

It's amazing to me how retail always rents, you can throw up a strip shopping center almost anywhere and it will fill up. But in this case is it what the community will support? I don't think so.

Why is no one from Aldi here to speak tonight?

This is the same plan we saw last November 22, it hasn't changed a bit.

Well we didn't realize this meeting would have such a focus on the Aldi.

We have to focus on what you have and Aldi is all you have! It's the only retailer you have, so it's all we can talk about!

New urbanism is an expensive way to develop. This is going to be a very expensive project to develop.

About the restaurant—in the rendering it's the most exciting piece of architecture. But if you won't build it unless you get a tenant—yet you say you have to get national or regional tenants—don't they have their prototypes? So what if you get a steak house—in Columbia, that Aldi with the skylights has some kind of steak house restaurant next to it—they may not want to build a landmark building with

roof top seating and a terrace in front. What then? It's entirely possible that the corner could be another nondescript box.

We are committed to the rendering, but we are going to wait until we find the right tenant.

Or any tenant? Isn't that how you got the Aldi?

But can't you go back to Planning, to the City, in a few years and say "well we can't do that, the market just isn't there," and they can do an amendment to the site plan or something, change the zoning, and you can do whatever? They can't force you to build a restaurant.

I just want to say that I think an Aldi would do very well here, it will probably generate a lot of money for its owners in Germany. But I think it will have a bad economic effect on the neighborhood. I will also say that a few of my college-educated professional friends do shop there on occasion. But it won't attract good retail or residential. But all that being said, it's not about the Aldi per se, it's about site design and building design. We are not going to get anywhere with City Council if we Aldi-bash. We have to say we want a good urban streetscape site plan. If Aldi will conform to good streetscape design, and have good Architecture, then I think it would be OK.