
Subject: Meriter Hospital Braxton PI parking ramp/office bldg proposal

From: Steve Jacobson [mailto:]

Sent: Sunday, May 03, 2009 6:05 PM

To: Kerr, Julia

Subject: Re: Merite Hospital Braxton PI parking ramp/office bldg proposal

Julia,

With respect to my view of the Parking Ramp/office space proposal: What is my view? The property is zoned so that a 4-story bldg can be built along the lines of the select hospital bldg. That is part of the general city plan. Meriter has every right to build along these lines. I respect the City of Madison General Plan and its emphasis on economic growth. The Meriter Braxton Bldg does not contribute much to economic growth-except for construction growth. Employees are being relocated to the building. Parking Spaces? Well, is this a net positive or would sound economic policy suggest shuttle buses from off-site locations. Retail space probably supports some type of low income job creation, but much of that is filled by commuters from the suburbs.

In summary, Meriter certainly has the opportunity to put bldg on the site. It's a matter of what the bldg looks like and the local community impact. Meriter has sought to characterize the area as just a bldg...not much focus on the community. I took advantage of the warm weather today and visited all of the Karabas homes on the Meriter Parking Lot side of the Karabas Property(one is vacant), the two homes along Park Street and two homes on the other side of the building. At the Community Development Subcommittee meeting on housing it sounded as though the residents supported the proposal and that Meriter had had discussions with their neighbors and taken into account their concerns. So far, I can't find anybody who supports the proposal. Also, all are very concerned that the proposal includes destroying the overpass. As I mentioned in the last email, the proposal includes a double-decker enclosed overpass at the far side of the project...where the current enclosed overpass currently is located, with public access limited to business hours and no handicap access.

I understand the level of pressure that is continually put on our local representatives, both pro and con. But the concerns are not simply triangle paranoia. It's about trying to strike a balance between at times competing forces. So, let's look at how a building can fit in the neighborhood. Meriter should have provided views for the neighbors review from the top of the Main Meriter bldg looking down on Karabas-showing how their homes would be impacted-sun versus shade. Let the residents see what the impact is. Explain how the building fits into the neighborhood. The current plan makes little effort to be inclusive. Note that residents on the other side of the Meriter Main building are mentioned in the plan and their concerns directly addressed. Meriter should do the same for the Triangle residents.

It's not just for current residents. We are looking at what it will like in 20 years. Most of the Karabas residents suffer physical disabilities that challenge us and we will see a continuing need for services provided by Karabas and the link to Meriter. This type of housing is expensive and not easily duplicated. This does not mean, however, we can or should put a tall building next to the homes without scaling in the buildings features.

For taller buildings, it should take into account the quality of life and environment/ambient of the neighborhood-since I am sure that the general plan took this into account when Karibas was built. Also, let's look at the economic impact in terms of job creation benefiting the local community-better services provided by the bldg...such as a better grocery store/supermarket. It's not clear that the project supports viable retail space, however. I'm pretty active over in the Williamson Street Coop and I plan to suggest that they look at the space

and location-hopefully within a 4-story proposal as I'm sure that most retailers will shy away from the space generally-look at the problems that St. Mary's is having with their retail space.

On some of the other Meriter Plan buildings, set backs and scaled height are included. This enables residents to live with taller buildings without a parking ramp wall along the sidewalk. It would be appropriate to include some of these features along the side of the Karibas buildings. And, it lets in more sunlight-perhaps some type of a sunlight survey should be prepared before or contingent on approval. Tearing down the crosswalk would be unfortunate as many people, not only CDA residents use it to cross Park Street. I suggest that some other solution be found, not only for resident access to Meriter health care, but to enable the disabled to cross Park Street safely, with 24/ 7 access. Of course, residents can go down to the Braxton Pl lights, but that is a busy and complicated intersection accessing Meriter Emergency room and not particularly close to the bus stop. Also, people can access Meriter via the Emergency Room Entrance, but I doubt that this is an efficient ingress/egress- nor something that Meriter would be very pleased with. It might be even worse if this turns into a disabled access path and blocks emergency services

One other concern I have and this applies to the triangle buildings: drainage. In any given rain storm, the area is flooded. If it's a downpour, the sewer spouts gurgle and in some cases flood first floors. CDA maintenance knows all about this. Where does the water go? Probably into Lake Monona. The more buildings and the taller the buildings, the more serious the problem (like the medical centers areas in Boston) and the more polluted the rain water. Before more buildings are permitted, the city should look for better ways to handle drainage. This applies to parking lots as well. Mary Agard sent me an email raising this concern for the CDA parking lot and resurfacing Braxton Place. Perhaps, the Council can set in motion appropriate safeguards. It might be a good idea to apply this criteria to construction all along Park Street and Regent Street and handle the runoff from the University buildings at Park and Regent as well. If the city doesn't do it today, it will have to face the question in the future.

With regard to the Triangle Ministry, the individuals are earnest. I don't get the sense that they are working toward resident empowerment or that they support/articulate resident interests vis-a-vis the community. In some ways their presence is counterproductive and gives residents an excuse to not do things themselves. One might observe that residents would be more proactive if the Triangle Ministry was less visible-or if more non-sectarian leadership type programs were supported within the Triangle. As science, especially, mental health treatments improve, residents will benefit from programs that focus on skills and leadership, much more than the support services that Triangle Ministry has been so successful with over the years. I note that Bayview does not depend much on ministry type services and their model is, in my opinion, proactive and supports a wide variety of activities.

In some ways, it is difficult to evaluate some support programs' impact. We don't appear to want to look at cost-benefit tools for many of the programs, whether it's the food pantry, mental health programs, Triangle Ministry or neighborhood programs-or parking lots for that matter. Perhaps the city council should direct the services to look for ways to promote quality of life indicators and support programs that increase longevity, reduce health costs because residents are eating better food at reasonable cost, not just high fructose/glucose carbohydrates, etc.

Steve

P.S. I hope to see you at the Plan Commission mtg tomorrow.



Tel 608-220-2147; email address: stephenhjacobson@netscape.net

-----Original Message-----

From: Kerr, Julia <district13@cityofmadison.com>

To: 'Steve Jacobson' <stephenhjacobson@aim.com>

Sent: Tue, 28 Apr 2009 1:37 pm

Subject: RE: Merite Hospital Braxton Pl parking ramp/office bldg proposal

Steve: Thank you for both your emails. I am sorry to not respond more quickly to your thoughtful comments, but I was taking an email "vacation" to work on some other city issues. I want to make sure that you (and any other interested people) are aware the the Plan Commission will be considering the the Meriter Master plan next Monday. Here is a link to the site where the agenda will be posted (soon I hope): <http://legistar.cityofmadison.com/calendar/#current>

It will subsequently be taken up by the Common Council on Tuesday (5/5) and the agenda will be posted on the same site.

You raised a couple of important issues:

First, how can I and others in the city can assist in the strengthening the the resident's association? I am more than happy to assist in any way as I strongly believe that one of my first (and most) important jobs is to encourage effective citizen participation. If you and others could let me know what you would think would be most helpful on my end, I will be happy to do what ever is necessary.

I should also mention the Planning Division has a staff person who works quite closely with neighborhood associations across the city and it may be desirable to have her attend a meeting with neighbors if you think that would be helpful. Also, as I know you know, the staff from Triangle Urban Ministries is a great resource for resident and perhaps they could be helpful.

Second, I am double checking with staff about the possibility of resurfacing the lot, which I agree is in great need. I will copy you on their response.

Third, I am not sure from your email if you are suggesting that Meriter should not move forward on its plan to build on the Braxton Lot; I have however, placed calls Karabis residents who were part of the Meriter Plan Neighborhood Working Group so I can hear directly from them about issues of concern.

Fourth, regardless of whether or construction takes place on the Braxton lot, I want to assure you that preservation and enhancement of the CDA housing on the Triangle is critically important to me. I am generally prefer not to engage the media too much so I don't send out press releases and such, but want to let you and others know that I work very hard in a quiet way to preserve and protect CDA housing on the Triangle.

I hope this is helpful to you and that we can work together on these and other important issues. I think the first and most important step would be to support the creation of a larger neighborhood association in the Triangle and would appreciate your letting me know want to be as helpful as possible in that effort. I am also happy to talk by phone or meet in person if that would be more productive than working via email.

Thank you for getting in touch and i look forward to working with you on these and other important issues.

Julia Kerr, Alder
Madison Common Council
District 13

From: Steve Jacobson [<mailto:stephenhjacobson@aim.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2009 1:59 PM

To: Kerr, Julia; Mayor

Subject: Merite Hospital Braxton Pl parking ramp/office bldg proposal

Dear Alder Kerr,

So far as I can tell the City Council will consider the proposed rezoning at today's meeting. I discussed attending the meeting with several residents of Karabas and Brittingham over the week, following up on one of your suggestions. As you know, most are severely disabled or have mental or physical handicaps. Many have attended meetings discussing the parking lot and other projects. The one continuing theme of the discussions is the reaction that many had to your accusing one of the residents of being paranoid when he attempted to ask questions at the Meriter Hospital meeting locale. I was not at the meeting. Moreover, I have repeated until I am blue in the face that on at least two occasions I have heard you apologize for the statement. Some things, however, have an enduring impact.

So, I guess that I will ask you to carry the water on this one and strike a balance that takes into consideration all of the families in the Triangle-about 400 or more if you include three generation families, much in the same way that the Council took into consideration the concerns of the residents of the Monroe Street area during recent Council deliberations.

Please keep in mind that Meriter has not been willing to provide schematic views of the bldg's impact on Karabas or Brittingham. Nor has it been willing to discuss any setbacks addressing the impact of the bldg abutting the homes.)From a safety pt of view, one might want to look at the oxygen compressor station that Select Hospital has in it's parking space and whether it is within code.)

As I mentioned in a prior memo on the subject, there does not appear to be much of an economic or parking impact that might favor the project. Not that this has any merit, considering the willingness to set resident concerns higher in the recent Monroe Street deliberations, but the Meriter proposal originates from the Hospitals commitment to one of their employees, a neurologist/surgeon to expand his operating/lab facility. So, they are vacating office space and proposing to move the staff across the street. They can accomplish this within current zoning that permits four stories.

More parking space is a dubious benefit: Setting up better shuttle service between satellite parking and office locations addresses this concern. As you know from the previous memo, there are some other points, but you can make them at the meeting as well as I can.

On to another subject, the Obama Administration and the recent funding bills include carbon credit fund options that may represent a way for the city to: 1. generate revenue from the sale of carbon credits; 2. Use stimulus funds in construction projects to bldg environmentally friendly green facilities that spin off carbon credits. The Council may wish to set up a committee or ask the Mayor to set up a committee to explore these options-scale is important and two or three projects together probably generate credits, whereas one bldg would not. This follows the briefing that we attended on the geothermal heating/cooling technology last week.

Steve Jacobson



Tel 608-220-2147; email address: stephenhjacobson@netscape.net