



CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

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Scott Morelli
City Manager

MINUTES

O'Neil Street Facility Re-Use Planning Committee

Thursday, June 28, 2018

3:00 PM

Community Center - Senior Wing

Committee Members Present

Patti Smith	Barbara Dee	Linden Thigpen
Steve Marston	Harold Spetla	Joshua Reny
Tex Haeuser		

Other Staff Present

Brad Weeks	Karl Coughlin	Chase Hewitt
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Developer Representatives Present

Ed Rowe	Rich Simon
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1. Meeting was called to order by J. Reny at 3:05 p.m. Everyone present took turns introducing themselves.
2. Recap of Recent Work - Josh provided the group a summary of the work that the RFP Selection Team has been facilitating since January when the committee completed its work and presented its final report to City Council. The committee had volunteered several of its members to participate in creation of RFP, including Sarah Z., Barbara D., and Patti S. The other team members are Councilor Kate Lewis, Tex, Josh, Brad Weeks (Engineering), and Karl Coughlin (Parks & Rec). The RFP was advertised in early February. A pre-proposal conference and site visit took place at the end of February, with more than a dozen participants. There were several follow-up questions and an addendum to the RFP was distributed. The proposal deadline was March 20th. Two proposals were received, although it was hoped there could be four or more. Some developers were asked if there was any procedural flaw that kept them from proposing, but there were none. The bottom line is that there were a variety of issues that make the site challenging and some developers were already occupied with other

projects. The two proposals received were reviewed by staff and Sebago Technics and were deemed complete and responsive to the written RFP. They were then sent to the individual selection team members with scoring sheets. Sebago compiled all the results, which was followed by another team meeting to review the aggregate scores and discuss next steps. The team selected Windward, contingent on an interview regarding specific questions. On May 16th, the team met with Windward and discussed a variety of aspects of the proposal and potential areas needing refinement, and all were satisfied with the responses. The City Council subsequently selected Windward as the Developer, which allows the City to begin negotiations. There are several more steps in the process, including the negotiation of a final redevelopment plan, a neighborhood meeting, and the establishment of a contract zone. The City Council also asked that the former O'Neil Street Facility Re-Use Planning Committee meet with the Selection Team to discuss the proposal and get feedback before the negotiations begin. That is what brings us here today.

3. Review of the Proposal – Josh provided a brief oral description of the Proposal that was received from Windward Development LLC. The site is approximately 6 acres, and the proposal seeks to maximize open space by siting three attached residential buildings around a central park area. Single family housing would be placed along the west side of O'Neil Street extension and follow the development pattern as it exists on Walnut Street. Of the three attached residential buildings, two would be townhouses built on the Cottage Road side of the site, and one building on the Pitt Street side of the site would have apartment units. Most of the residences would face toward the park which creates a pleasant view and an open feel to the site. The O'Neil Street extension is proposed as a boulevard type design, with medians on street that would help with stormwater management, calm traffic, and add to the aesthetics of the area. All of the housing units, including single family homes, would be 2-3 bedroom. The park area includes a playground, picnic area, possible play field, skate park, and would include natural hills, a walking path, etc. The proposal includes a variety of housing options for families, seniors, etc. There is potential for renting or owning. The greenhouse is proposed to be preserved and donated to land trust or city, but may need to be razed to make room for the community garden area. In summary, it is an eco-friendly housing development that seeks to maximize open space. There would be ground and roof solar, high energy efficiency construction, heat pumps, etc.
4. Review of May 16 Interview with Windward – There were 11 issues that the Selection Team wanted to address before making a positive recommendation to City Council. A summary of that interview and the issues covered were distributed to everyone for review.

The first issue was the concept of a skate park. It seems there is little interest in having such a facility at that location. Steve asked if the skate park is a no-go. Josh confirmed, saying he doesn't believe there will be support for locating it there.

The second and third issues related to ownership and maintenance of the common areas and public spaces. Windward feels that the public space is naturally with the city, but there are some details to sort out like the cost of maintenance. Josh mentioned the concept of a maintenance fee or the possibility the area will simply be treated as any other city park owned and maintained by the City. Patti noted that the gardens would be taken care of by the Community Garden Collective. Tex asked if it would be inefficient to have two separate parties landscaping vs. one entity doing it all, asked about exploring a cooperative effort. He also mentioned it was important to have a play area that is open to the public, to an extent, bringing in the public, and therefore he thinks it should be a city responsibility.

The discussion jumped to issues 6 and 7. The extended O'Neil Street would be accepted by the City as a City street, but the proposed City acceptance of a side street (entrance to the townhouses) could create some problems related to snow plowing and maintenance. Josh explained the team had reservations about owning the dead-end street. Ed Rowe mentioned it was intended to give the "red" building a front yard on-street and residents would enter via parking to the rear. It was identified as an issue that still needs to be discussed as part of refining the re-development plan.

The fourth issue discussed was architecture and design. Josh explained to the committee that the rendered drawing in the proposal has each building color-coded for identification (red, yellow, blue, etc.), but those are not the proposed colors of the buildings. There were several questions about building height and Ed Rowe explained that the townhouses would be 3-3.5 stories, with maximum 3 stories of living area. Windward is willing to work on mutually acceptable design standards. They have attempted to locate some parking below the structures to maximize open space and reduce the need for surface parking. It also works well with the elevation changes on site. The building designs will consider passive solar energy, for example, and so design must take into account how modifications will affect other aspects of the proposal. A neighbor asked to speak and said that design was her biggest concern. She asked that the re-development be congruent with neighboring properties and fit with the neighborhood. She asked the City to consider whether attached residential units are appropriate in the neighborhood, which is predominantly small single-family units. Josh explained that the committee worked all last year exploring a variety of design layouts and building types, from multi-family to tiny homes to traditional single-family homes. The committee found that redevelopment restricted to only single family homes would minimize open space, and one of the key areas of consensus was that the neighborhood desired open space, a playground, garden, etc. It was asked if building height could be limited to 2 stories. Ed Rowe noted that current zoning allows for 35 feet of building height and there are 3 story buildings throughout the neighborhood. The height of the tallest building as proposed is about 40 feet, and that is due to parking under the structure. The building is located near the embankment so there is a natural buffer. Josh asked the group if there was a preference to eliminate some open space for shorter buildings with larger footprints. There was no support for

this. Steve said that he doesn't like the design and doesn't feel it reflects the vision the committee laid out. Other members clarified that the image is only a concept and the buildings have not yet been designed. Ed Rowe explained that he is not the architect, but they have assembled a talented team and will work on an architectural design that fits the neighborhood as best as possible. More details and design will be presented at a neighborhood meeting. Tex said he recalls that multi-story buildings were discussed during the planning process. Windward was asked if profitability was a factor in the building design. Ed Rowe explained that a certain number of units would need to be built in order to make the project work, and it needs to factor in costs for infrastructure, utilities, recreation facilities, etc. They attempted to design with a mix of housing options and open space as the committee had outlined. Patti mentioned that there were a variety of options the committee considered; single family, cluster development, a variety of housing options, some for empty nesters, new families, etc. She said this was to meet the needs of the community and neighborhood, and green space was a major theme. She also noted that the proposal lacks some details at this stage that will be helpful in their review, including a detailed site plan that shows scale, landscaping and features. Patti suggested the green space could be consolidated and one or more building locations shifted. Ed Rowe said the central park area is a key feature of the redevelopment and moving the buildings closer to each other could take away from that. If the under-structure parking were eliminated to reduce the height of buildings, it could add a couple dozen surface spaces. It was pointed out that understanding the relative heights of existing and proposed structures, such as the hill and sand and salt sheds, would be very helpful to compare and understand what would be appropriate. Ed explained that the high point of the hill on the Cottage Road side is about 30 feet, so a 40 foot building would put the height about 10 feet above land, and would be below the buildings on the high side of the hill. Tex explained that neighborhood compatibility is more than just architecture, and should also consider topography, buffering, public amenities, etc. These all need to be considered. A strict requirement that any development mirror the rest of the neighborhood is too narrow. It was restated the actual building design has not been determined, and Windward will use all the feedback to refine the proposal. Their architect hopes this could be an award-winning project. Ed stated that he lives in South Portland and cares about community and understands the permanence of this project and that it needs to be done well. The reason he is so interested in this project is his desire to build a great park for the community. Barbara thanked Ed for caring about preserving open space. Rich Simon said that his chief interest is energy efficiency and sustainable design. Josh explained that the process will have several steps, including a refinement of the original proposal, negotiation of a contract zone, and a neighborhood meeting to present the final plan. People will have the ability to provide feedback and ask questions once the redevelopment plan has greater detail.

The fifth issue was related to outdoor areas for each townhouse unit. Although it is not shown with great detail in the drawing, each unit would have private outdoor space that is buffered from the park area.

The eighth item covered during the interview was erosion control and stability of the embankment area onsite. Windward agreed to have a structural engineer inspect the embankment area determine what specific improvements could be made to protect the stability of the bank. Some of the retaining walls that currently exist may be left in place, for example.

Items 9 and 10 related to stormwater management and building heights. Windward agreed it would use best practices for the former, and the group agreed that the latter had already been discussed in detail. Bottom line, the proposed building heights will be scrutinized and options will be explored as part of the overall design review.

The final question related to housing affordability. Josh noted that most of the units would be owner-occupied in the \$300K range, but one building contains rental units. He asked how everyone feels about having rental units in the neighborhood. During the public meetings last year some of the neighbors expressed reservations about having rental units as part of the re-development. The committee had agreed that creating a variety of housing options would be beneficial. Linden mentioned she is a landlord with many long-term tenants and believes people will stay if they have a nice affordable place to live. She said many senior citizens would like to downsize and rent so having rentals would be an advantage to the senior citizen community. There was a question about short-term rentals and whether any could be operated at this location. Josh explained that the regulations currently under discussion would limit those types of rentals to “hosted stays” where the owner is present, in residential zones, but short-term rentals could be banned completely at that location as part of the contract zoning. Windward has discussed affordable housing programs with CEI, but financing single family homes is challenging. The easiest way to accomplish this is through a down payment assistance program provided by the city, if it is willing to directly subsidize the units in exchange for a mortgage lien. Another option is an affordable housing tax increment financing (AH-TIF) arrangement that would reimburse the owner of the apartment building in exchange for keeping rents below a certain level. The City will explore these ideas further with Windward.

5. Additional Issues to be discussed – A question was asked about parking and whether Windward intended to meet the current parking standard. They indicated the proposal does meet the current parking standard. There are several additional parking spaces shown adjacent to the public areas for people who drive to visit the park, but it is expected that most users would visit by foot or bike. Josh asked the group if there were any other issues to consider. Steve asked why other developers had not submitted proposals and if the City would have received more if it had demolished the buildings and cleaned up the site itself. Josh said the City’s approach has been to fully disclose the current conditions and allow the developer to factor those costs into the project model. However, the City is removing tanks, fuel and chemicals, has done environmental studies, and has spent quite a bit of money to date. Brad Weeks

mentioned that the economy is good and developers are very busy with projects. Steve asked if the process could be slowed down as there is no time constraint. Josh said the selection team was asked whether the City should re-advertise when the two proposals came in. If they had been low quality or unresponsive to the RFP, then perhaps the best option would be to go back out to RFP. But the City received two quality proposals, and everything was done as the City requested. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that even if the City re-advertised, there was no indication that the result would have been any different. There was nothing broken about the process. It was decided that to be fair to those who actually went through the process it was proper to proceed.

Windward was asked if they could provide a few design options at the public forum so attendees could participate and be polled on preferences. Brad said his department regularly holds these types of public meetings to present project plans and seek feedback. He reassured everyone the City will continue to address public concerns and there will be a method for feedback when the meeting is held. There will be more detail at the public meeting so we should try not to get hung up on a conceptual design. Steve asked Windward if they are willing to deviate from the initial concept plan. Ed said the development pattern on the west side of site will be the same as Walnut Street. The larger area below the embankment is the area where there is greater opportunity to create something unique, the “gem” that the committee had discussed, and everyone who will be buying into the development will be doing so understanding what they are getting. So, there should be little impact on the current neighbors some distance away. Rich said that he heard Steve’s concerns and they are willing to refine the plans to take some of those concerns into account.

6. Next steps – Refine the redevelopment plan, tentative approval by selection team, public presentation, further refinement if necessary, negotiate contract zone, City Council approval

Windward will develop a site plan, begin refining the plan based on feedback. Team would like to see side-by-side or overlay to better understand scale and dimensions. Ed and Josh suggested that people email photos of any architectural designs that they like. Any feedback is welcome. Rich suggested that they immediately start meeting with the City’s project team to prepare a refined plan.

Steve asked if the Committee will have a role helping advertise the public meeting. He volunteered to deliver flyers like the group did last year. Josh said he will be reaching out to everyone in advance of the public meeting to see who will be willing to help get the word out.

7. Adjourn – Motion by Linden T. second by Patti S. to adjourn the meeting at 4:34 p.m. All in favor.