

**Blackstone Neighborhood Association**

**General Membership Meeting Minutes**

**April 28, 2021 6:30 pm**

**Via Zoom**

**Members Present: 13**

This meeting was requested by Clarity Development to present it proposed project to be built on the city block that is bordered by Farnam, Harney, 37th & 38th Streets.

Rhonda Stuberg, president, called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

**Guest Speakers**: The members welcomed Tom McCleah of Clarity Development, Matt Dwyer of Greenslate, Ken Smith of City of Omaha, and Eric Westman of Ally Pointer.

**Tom McLeay** spoke first. A multi-use building is proposed on this site. It will have two owners. One will be the city of Omaha that will operate a parking garage. And one will be the Clarity/Greenslate partnership that will own everything else.

While the city block is a rhombus, the real building will be a rectangle. The new building would be as tall as the Cottonwood Hotel. As well, it will be the same E shaped design as the hotel. It would be nine stories above ground.

The project could start this Fall 2021 but is likely to start in Spring 2022. It would take approximately two years to complete – 2024. The current building on the site will be demolished.

One of the questions that the developers asked themselves about this project as it fits into their many other completed projects in the neighborhood was how to solve the parking issue? This is a question that members have brought up many times with this and other developers. Clarity and Greenslate have worked with the City of Omaha to form a partnership in the ownership to meet the parking need.

**Architect Eric Westman** spoke next, showing slides of what the building will look like.

**Farnam Street Front.** Because of a desire to activate the street front, commercial space on the Farman Street side of the first floor will be available for rent. The property line will sit back 7-8 feet further from street than currently is the case, expanding room for sidewalks. There will be trees and greenspace added between parking. The design includes public and private zones for businesses under a canopy covering the western end of the street front. On the eastern end there will be canopies. The site drops 16 feet toward the west. It will be a dynamic streetside.

**Retail.** There will be a total of 17,000 sq ft of space. It could be anything from offices, service, dining. These spaces sport reticulated fronts, so that there isn’t a long solid front with glass but will be more interesting from the pedestrian level. There could be as many nine units.

**Harney Street side.** Harney will be narrowed to two lanes for parking on both sides. There will be trees on this side of the building. The goal is to enhance the street fronts on both sides of the property. On this side there will be 30 foot deep terraces as community space. These will include greenery. This E-shape gives the visual impression of three buildings. There will also be trellises and screens for plants to grow up. On this south side the parking garage will have a metal screen.

There will be 161 residential units.

**Parking garage**. The parking garage will be owned and operated by the city of Omaha. There will be one level of parking underground. 1/2 level of parking on the 1st floor. And two and a half levels of parking above that. On the Farnam side there will be 2 levels of parking above the retail spaces. On the Harney side there will be 3 1/2 levels of parking. Half of the third level will be fronted by apartments on the Farnam side. There will be a parking garage entrance on 38th St. And there will be a parking garage entrance on Harney St on the southeast corner.

On the Farnam side, the facade in front of the parking floors will be a dark gray brick in a basket weave pattern (or a metal screen imitating that look) to allow openings for ventilation but yet feel like a substantial part of the building. On the Harney side the facade will be solid on the first floor and will have metal screens on the floors above.

There will be street parking on all four sides of the building, totaling 24 spots. There will be 411 parking spots total.

**Ken Smith** from the City of Omaha spoke third to discuss parking. He reiterated that Harney will be narrowed to two lanes with parking on both sides. There will be 37 parking metered parking stalls created on Harney street on this and the adjacent block to the east.

**Matt Dwyer** spoke last about the long-term vision and how this is their last project in the Blackstone Neighborhood and will complete 12 years of work in the area.

What followed was question and answer time.

Ken Smith is not sure yet as to how many of the garage spots will be public and how many will be reserved.

Tom McLeay is happy about the continuous neighborhood feel that this building brings to the Blackstone District. Its walkability along the completed streetscape is something he is excited about. The retailers at this location, coupled with the current mix, will have a big city atmosphere. This is big city building.

The height of the building was discussed, particularly how it rises much more than the five story buildings that are currently west of the hotel. It was noted that going down a level for parking is exponentially more expensive and was done in order to eliminate one further level. The cost is $25,000-$27,000 per parking spot when you go below grade. The city parking garage would not be feasible without the apartments included in the project.

The question of the historical ambience of a nine-story building was raised. It was pointed out that there is a higher scale going east, particularly including Kiewit, Mutual, and Midtown Crossing. And that on the western edge of the neighborhood the Med center campus includes big buildings of a higher scale.

The issue was raised whether the city and neighborhood can support more expensive apartments. The response was that there are currently 6,000 people searching for housing in this city, with only 600 homes on the market. The city will soon grow to 1 million people and 10,000 more people are expected to move to the city in the next few years. There will also be a need for housing with the new development planned by the Med Center, which could employ as many as 40,000 people.

The current design does not include any painted brick.

Planting and landscaping is intended as a way to tie into the neighborhood.

The project will include acorn street lighting.

The issue of party noise, particularly on the terraces, was raised. The response was that there are rules in the leases addressing such concerns.

Parking rates have not yet been determined. Ken Smith said that they will “have to play with rates to find the balance.”

Affordable housing issues were raised more than once. Greenslate stated that they currently have 250 apartments priced below the median price for the type of unit in order to keep housing affordable for employees of neighborhood businesses. “We are not deaf to affordable housing.”

In discussing the timeline, Ken Smith added that the parking garage could open before the rest of the building interiors were completed.

The issue was raised of whether Harney street will become two way, and Ken Smith said that has been discussed.

There were questions about how this development fits in with the city’s bike plan and the way the Med Center is trying to develop a bike friendly route through their campus.

There will be bike and scooter charging stations in the SE corner of the garage. There will be bike parking inside the garage. Vehicle charging stations are also planned.

The roof can’t be adjusted for sustainability features such as a garden or green space. Part of that is because of code; it also increases the building costs such that rent would be too high. Nor are solar panels currently feasible.

The issue was raised to keep sustainability in mind for future development projects.

There was a discussion of building details—textures, colors, lighting—and what people did and didn’t like. Eric Westman said that the current design is intentional and though there might be changes, they are settled on these basic design elements and colors.

Finally, the concern was raised over internet infrastructure and the poor signals currently available in the neighborhood and whether this building and its users would tax that further. The hotel and this building have a special broadband service through Great Plains Telecommunications which is bringing higher quality service to these buildings.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at **7:59 pm.**

Respectfully Submitted,

**Scott Jones**

Secretary, Blackstone Neighborhood Association