

April 3, 2007

To: Peoria City Council

From: Heart of Peoria Commission

Dear Councilperson,

The Heart of Peoria Commission met on Friday 03/23/07. One of our main topics of discussion was the deliberation and action taken by the Planning Commission and the Zoning Commission at their last joint session. A motion passed by the Planning Commission recommends establishing the maximum building setback line at 150' along Knoxville Ave. between Virginia St. on the north and Pennsylvania Ave. on the south. The Zoning Commission approved a motion recommending establishing the maximum setback in this area at 80'. This area will now be designated as a CG (Commercial General) Thoroughfare district.

The HOPC was charged with the implementation of the Heart of Peoria Plan. The key deliverable that is required to do this is the Land Development Code (LDC). We have spent considerable time, and effort developing this code and it is being prepared for presentation to the City Council. As a Commission we find the recommendation of establishing the maximum setback line for new development in this district at 150' from the street unacceptable, and ask that you consider this very carefully.

The Principles of New Urbanism are very specific in their regulations and standards that have been developed for the streetscape in new development or redevelopment in the urban parts of the city. The fundamental value that is placed on reclaiming and revitalizing the street edge for use by pedestrians and others is part of the foundation of successful development that is defined in the Land Development Code.

The concept of a street space, which is composed of the street, surrounding buildings, sidewalks, plantings, and parking areas, is a crucial element in successful development. The scale, safety, and comfort of the areas between a building and the street are essential components. Placement of buildings that are setback and separated from the pedestrian by vast areas of parking lots destroys the character of the development along the edge of the street and the space that is so important to establish.

One of the best examples of the destructive effect that unregulated development and planning have on our local environment can be seen in the corridor of University Ave. between Forrest Hill and War Memorial Drive. This is a mean section of street space when considered in the context of the standards set forth in the Land Development Code. There is very little planting or green space in any proximity of the street edge. Traffic speeds by, and drivers have unlimited access to a huge expanse of paved parking areas immediately adjacent to the street. Pedestrians are wise to stay off what little remains of the crumbling and discontinuous sidewalks.

Another negative effect on the urban environment of areas like University Ave. is the impact that development with deep setbacks has on adjacent neighborhoods. The buildings that are pushed to the very back of the site have all of their service, delivery, trash collection, and utility areas immediately adjacent to the neighborhoods behind these developments. Garbage, odors, and other trash are just across a fence or alley from the rear of residential properties. Bright exterior lighting on buildings at night often provides direct glare to adjacent properties.

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The HOPC made a concession to the Zoning and Planning Commissions that would allow 80' building setbacks in The CG Thoroughfare district. This was the "compromise" that was made regarding new development. We did not approve the establishment of the building setback to 150'. As a commission we are recommending that the developer, in exchange for an 80' setback, will provide a proper area of street space with the required elements as illustrated in the Land Development Code. The developer is to provide this area across the full frontage of their property. Space for street trees is to be integrated as shown in the code. The Heart of Peoria Commission suggests that a building setback of 150' in the CG Thoroughfare district should not be allowed.

The successful application of the principles of New Urbanism holds great promise in making our community a more comfortable and meaningful environment. We must be mindful of the desolate condition along University Ave. and the negative effect it has had on the character of that streetspace. This type of environment must not be allowed to continue to develop on Knoxville. The adjacent neighborhoods and the quality of their environment are directly affected by this type of unrestricted development. The HOPC feels that the successful adoption of the Land Development Code and the disciplined application of its regulations will make our city better in many ways. Please consider these points in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey A. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Geoffrey A. Smith
Commissioner
Heart of Peoria Commission