

Minutes from meeting Safeway Task Force Tuesday, July 24th

Attendance: Avis Black(regional real estate manager Safeway), Craig Muckle (manager Public affairs Safeway), Michelle Shelton (real estate representative – Eastern Division Safeway), John Herickhoff, Paul Ducharme, Bernadette Wolford, David Vanwagner, Mark Haynes, Patty Stern, Judah dal Cais,

Meeting called to order 6:10 PM

Mark Haynes started out by stating that the main purpose of the task force is to gather information and relay that information back to the neighborhood. One of the things that we have learned is that as part of the site plan process the county will reach out to the neighborhood primarily through its civic associations. It is in the best interests of the community and neighborhood to be as informed as possible. To that end, the task force recently had a town hall meeting at St. Ann's church where two citizen members of the planning commission spoke on the process of development that could occur at the Safeway site. Well over 100 people attended the meeting which shows the level of interest that the community has in the Safeway redevelopment.

Maura Quinn added, that it is important to note that in general the neighbors are excited about the plans for a new Safeway as the current store is not adequate. We are hoping to see a store that will fit well into the neighborhood.

Avis Black pointed out that she would hear our ideas of what the neighborhood would like to see for the Safeway site. Safeway is currently reviewing bids from developers and so she cannot discuss at this time any particular plans for the site. She would be very interested in hearing what we have to say as far as our vision for a new store. She is an Arlington county resident and is aware that that the county has a history of listening to its citizens and is hopeful that we can see benefit early in this process and come up with a plan that will work well. She pointed out that she has gotten letters of concern so she is very interested in hearing what our chief concerns might be?

Mark stated that the issue of height is for many the chief concern. A BCA survey that was done in 2010 showed that the majority of BCA members were reasonably happy with something that is up to 3 to 4 stories but less comfortable with something over that. The concern is that the drawing in the RFP showed that Safeway may have interest in building something closer to 6 stories.

Avis Black said that they didn't expect the RFP to say build to these specifications. This is generally something that comes from working through things with the developer. They expect to learn more as they pick a developer. Safeway generally states what they feel they need for area for the store and they get a better idea about the rest as they go through the development process. The process generally takes about 5 to 6 years. They look at the particulars of the site, they look at each site fresh. What comes to mind with this particular site is that it is not a huge site and that tends to drive you in certain directions .

Q. Can you elaborate what you mean by "drives you in certain directions"?

A. You need to look at, what are the constraints that you need to consider? You try to make it as close to a normal footprint as possible. You look at what opportunities are available, like perhaps outdoor seating.

Q. Do you discuss with developer what is suitable for each development?

A. Yes, we have different approaches to each neighborhood.

Q. Are all your stores unique?

A. Yes, there are opportunities to work with each environment to reflect the neighborhood. That is why we would like to hear your input.

Q. Where are you in the process of the request to make an offer?

A. We are evaluating the offers now, looking at what works best, should know something in the next few months.

Q. Do plans show store design?

A. Can't discuss at this time, would hope to pick a developer that would work well with the community.

Q. Will you take into account how aggressive a developer might be?

A. Can't go into the process at this time. Our hope is to get a nice store as a finished product.

Q. How long do you expect the process of selecting amongst bids to take?

A. Approximately 3 to 4 months.

Q. What is the process after the selection of a developer?

A. We will put together a development plan program for site.

Judah dal Cais, BCA president, thought it would be a good idea to have all members of the task force voice their opinions of what their concerns regarding the redevelopment at the Safeway site.

John Herickhoff – His general feeling is that a new Safeway store would be welcomed at the site. The concerns that he sees that would affect the neighborhood are chiefly issues of height and density, expected traffic/parking issues. One concern is that Arlington Traditional School might be undergoing construction at approximately the same time which would only add to the construction issues. Question is how to preserve residential area height while supporting development and how do you balance the two. One of the ways is to look at the area involved; tapering building height to residential neighborhoods, lighting/sidewalks. The Wilson Blvd sidewalks are narrow. The current residential street parking is tight. One of the concerns is that Arlington County has been known to okay minimizing parking ratios in areas close to metro. The fear is that new apartment residents will be parking in the neighborhood.

Judah pointed out that parking/traffic is a definite concern. Also, the idea of underground parking is frightening to some. How to make people safe?

A Avis Black stated that Safeway's criteria for their parking garages is that they are 10 feet clear to the lowest obstruction, they are all painted white. There is generally good acceptance to their parking garages. One of the things she would like to know is what are some things that people would like to see as community benefits?

Paul Ducharme pointed out that would like to see a more inviting neighborhood and a store that draws the community in. One of his chief concerns is the placement of the loading dock on one of the two narrow streets behind the Safeway and the difficulty of the trucks maneuvering into the site.

Bernadette Wolford- Agreed with the points that John Herickhoff made and wanted to see neighborhood issues addressed in a way that all were somewhat satisfied with the end result.

Patty Stern- agreed with the points that had been made and added that she would like to see a Safeway that represented our neighborhood, and was sensitive to the residents that lived directly behind the Safeway. Also another traffic concern is that people often cut-through neighborhood to get to the Safeway, this will only increase.

Avis Black said that is helpful to know what the perceived issues are in the neighborhood because she is constantly amazed at the different ways that architects can solve problems. She would like more feedback on what is the range of solutions that can be addressed.

John Herickhoff said that one of the things he thought would be a necessity with more density at the Safeway site would be a light at Emerson Street. One of the things that came up in the aforementioned survey is that 55% of respondents favored 3 stories or less. That is a healthy majority of the neighborhood, so the question is that can you make the plan attractive enough to counterbalance the added height. One of the things he feels is key is the idea of tapering to the housing in back, Residents do not like the monolithic look of a large development. One of the things the neighborhood favors is locally owned businesses , small local restaurants. He thinks it would be helpful to the acceptance of the plan if mixed use development was symbiotic to these locally owned businesses.

Q. Why is that in the plan for this store, the developer has to pay for the store?

A. Safeway looks at each project separately, does a constrained business analysis, looks at height/density added to store.

Mark Haynes added that he would like to continue to work with Safeway on the project and would not like a long fight over the new store. We would like to work cooperatively to have a project that everyone can feel good about at the end.

Q. David VanWagner raised a question about the number of parking spaces required by the development?

A. The Safeway store will require 170 spaces, one level below ground. The amount that is required by the developer will differ. Each developer uses a different formula from the rest.

Judah dal Cais raised concerns about the neighborhood fear of height, am/pm rush hour traffic. One of the things that he thought would be important to the neighborhood is the ability of residents being able to stay in the neighborhood. Advocate for affordable housing advantage seniors in the neighborhood to live in the affordable housing.

Q. One of the issues is that it is hard for people to envision how high a 45 foot building might be. One of the ideas is to have a neighborhood day at the Safeway and the firetrucks could come into the parking lot and raise their ladders to 35/45/65 feet and people could see what that would look like on the street.

A, Avis Black would take the concern back. She thought it might be a better idea to look at various buildings that have been built in Arlington that would be of similar height.

Maura Quinn pointed out that one of the things that the county would do for the community as part of the site plan process would be a balloon study that would do similar thing , float balloons to the various heights and that the information could be beneficial for people in seeing the various options.

In closing, Craig Muckle said that he wanted to let us know that Safeway representatives do not go away after a developer is chosen. He stressed that as a local retailer, Safeway has an incentive to work with the community throughout the development process and hopes to work cooperatively with developer and the civic association. They would make themselves available for a future town hall meeting. We will touch base towards the end of August.

Meeting adjourned 7:40 pm

