

Flatwater Mews

Scoping Report

Structura Naturalis Inc.

Qamar and Associates Inc.

Parametrix Engineering, Planning, Environmental Services Inc.

DRAFT
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FLATWATER MEWS
Scoping Report

July 12, 2020

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- A number of technical issues were identified that should be manageable, including grading within floodplain parameters, setbacks from railroad and critical areas, management or remediation of critical areas, management of stormwater and outflow, existing fill materials and/or old waste sites, street access points, traffic study requirements, and utility connections.
- A number of entitlement processes were identified, with the general conclusion that entitlement should be feasible using a PUD overlay on the existing B-2 zoning. Some additional procedures will be necessary including negotiated PUD provisions, and review by other agencies (e.g. Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, et al.)
- A major challenge for the development is the status of the City parcel and the tow lot, a significant liability. We recommend that the City be approached to explore win-win proposals for a relocation plan.
- There may be opportunities for win-win co-location of ballfield facilities. This should be investigated both for the 60.45 acre site, and for other adjoining sites. (See our separate white paper on background issues.)
- The site does offer major environmental amenities including the network of paths and trails, and the very strong ecological amenities and “story to tell” about that. This is a remarkable site combining quasi-rural amenities with a very close-in, walkable location.
- A number of other parameters were identified, including connection to The View apartments and the wetlands to the south, the relationship to Oak Lake and its future. future improvements to trails and creek areas, the issue of the Office Innovations site, and the potential for bus and/or rubber-tire trolley lines.
- A TIF application will need to be completed with a compelling story about the benefits of this site for the City’s economic development.
- The general environment for this development appears very positive, with the stipulation that the COVID-19 pandemic throws an element of uncertainty into the mix. Nonetheless, that uncertainty appears to be focused on timing rather than on other development factors identified herein. It is reasonable to proceed with planning and phasing, with the hypothesis that a vaccine and/or treatments will bring conditions into focus before the planned project start in 2021.

BACKGROUND

The subject property is 60.45 acres, adjoining a City parcel of 27.01 acres. The site is well-located in the Lincoln city core, approximately 1 mile by walking from the Historic Haymarket District and the University of Nebraska. Vehicular access is excellent to both downtown Lincoln and the Lincoln Airport via Sun Valley Boulevard and N. 1st Street. The site adjoins an existing student apartment complex to the west with over 600 beds, as well as a small office park and mini-storage to the north. Environmental amenities are notable, including many hike and bike trails, a wetlands and nature center to the south, a park and lake to the north, Oak Creek to the west, and Salt Creek to the east. Major sports facilities are also located to the east, including Pinnacle Bank Arena, Haymarket Park, and Bowlin Stadium.



The site appears well-poised to accommodate primarily residential development of up to 1,500 units, with an increment of commercial. A walkable mixed use format seems likely to distinguish the offering and create an attractive regional destination.

PRELIMINARY “SWOT” ANALYSIS

We examined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the site (“SWOT”). More research will be needed on a number of these issues, as well as any other issues to be identified through the masterplanning process.

Strengths

- Excellent proximity to downtown, Haymarket, University, airport.
- Remarkable combination of close-in urban and rural ecological qualities.
- Excellent connection to hike and bike trails, good vehicular connectivity.
- Cooperative, helpful jurisdiction with largely aligned goals.
- Two major points of ingress egress from NE 1st Street/Charleston, and Sun Valley/Line Drive.
- Flat site is relatively buildable.

Weaknesses

- Poor connectivity to Charleston and to Oak Lake. (Existing parcel.)
- “Land-locked” on east and south sides, with no immediately adjacencies to existing mixed-use neighborhoods.
- Limited frontage on Sun Valley. (Existing parcel.)
- Strict constraints for grading to meet floodplain requirements.
- Significant setback issues from railroad line.
- Mitigation requirements for wetlands.

Opportunities

- The site seems well-positioned to accommodate multi-family and single-family residential as well as an increment of commercial (perhaps 90-10%). This could include a range of housing types that respond to the market and that offer innovative and competitive options.
- A win-win agreement for co-development or acquisition of the City parcel could be a “game changer” to improve orientation to the attraction of Oak Lake, and commercial visibility to Charleston and Sun Valley traffic.
- Potential for recruitment of major institutional user(s), tie-in to regional economic development and recruitment.

Threats

- Tow lot presents an imminent threat to livability and attractiveness (“LULU”).
- City plan for baseball diamonds could also pose a disruptive influence of periodic congestion followed by empty, even dangerous areas (“border vacuums”).
- Competition from other developments.

ENTITLEMENT ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The existing B-2 zoning appears to offer a ready foundation for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) entitlement that should be able to accommodate the uses contemplated. A number of issues will have to be investigated and negotiated further. For example, we noted that there are no provisions for accessory dwellings in the B-2 zone.

MAJOR REMAINING ISSUES

As described previously, a major issue is the status of the City parcel and, especially, the tow lot. We recommend that the City be approached to explore win-win proposals for a relocation plan. An “A-B Plan” approach could then be pursued.

The question of future ballfield locations needs to be investigated, both on the 27 acres and potentially on other adjoining sites.

The railroad setback issue, and any future plans for the railroad, needs to be confirmed.

URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS

We developed a number of preliminary schematic urban design configurations. Each of these illustrates the pros and cons of various grid orientations and configurations, especially in relation to a mixed-use center and/or proximity to visitor movement. A major question remains about whether the adjoining City parcel could be available for co-planning or acquisition. In our opinion, this would be a win-win for both the City and Oak Lake Development. However, because nothing would be certain until the very last phase of any transfer, we recommend that both options (with or without) be planned concurrently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the following steps be taken:

1. Review the report herein and preliminary schematic design options.
2. Proceed with the full masterplanning charrette in mid-July, 2020, and associated research, aiming for completion of the master plan materials by end of August.
3. Prepare associated application materials, some of which are within the scope of our existing proposal, and some of which should be completed by the local engineering team, by a land use attorney, or by Oak Lake Development staff. Additional parties could be retained, and/or our team can also assist with the entitlement phase (narratives, exhibits, presentations etc)..
4. (Optional) Engage a market analysis firm to assess the market for residential product types as well as retail components.
5. Concurrently, continue with recruitment and negotiation regarding potential on-site location and/or co-locations.
6. Concurrently, continue discussion with the City regarding relocation of the tow lot and acquisition of the 27.01 acre parcel to the east.