

West Side Development
City Planner, Mr. Snowden
McDonald Hughes Center
December 5, 2006

The city planner's presentation was held in the McDonald Hughes Community Center. According to the planner, Mr. Snowden, this was to be the last of the four presentations. The previous meeting had been packed, while this one was attended mainly by several of the leadership from the West Side. Councilman Harrison Taylor presented Mr. Snowden.

Mr. Snowden explained that due to some problems he had had with deafness, the presentations had been delayed. He gave a brief review of the City's actions with regards to an overall plan for the city. In 2002 there was a recognition that the last comprehensive plan ever made for the city had been done in 1972-1973. Part of this was initiated by Stan Pate's purchase of 35 acres of land near Forest Lake. Houses were bought and leveled, and the idea of Midtown Plaza began. Forest Lake residents were concerned about how this would impact their neighborhood, and city planners realized that Midtown would need to be carefully designed to fit the rest of the single family dwellings nearby. At that point, leaders began to work on a new comprehensive plan for the city. They sectioned off the city—by areas to the north, south east, and west--to examine what could be done in each geographic regions that would tie them back in to the city to enhance and organize the future growth of the city. In 2003, some 80 volunteers got together to draw up a strategic plan.

The areas for development were eventually broken into main projects: Forest Lake Neighborhood, the university area, urban renewal and the greater downtown area, the West Side of Tuscaloosa, the Greater Alberta City area, and the MLK Jr. Corridor.

The presenter gave details of what types of zoning were planned for each area to give a picture of how the West Side would fit in with the overall growth and development of the city.

The University Area

When President Witt arrived in 2003, he brought with him a plan to grow the university by 8,000 students. Those increases would begin to happen immediately, which led city leaders to recognize the need to meet with 3 disparate groups: landlords, students, and families from historic districts near the university who were already impacted by the enrollment increases. They worked together to come to a consensus of how the growth could be managed to meet the needs of all three groups. With President Witt marketing the university, the city planners realized they needed to meet with him to plan. From those meetings, they marked off the university area, realizing that this would need to look nice and be safe in order to appeal to parents, as this would factor into whether they would want to send their child to the university. They arrived at a consensus that student housing would be allowed to increase in certain areas of the city, while it needed to decrease in the historic districts. There is a plan for renovation/beautification that will

run 20th and 21st Ave back to the University from the downtown area to make the university living areas look more appealing.

Another part of the picture of the University has to do with transportation. With federal funds secured by Senator Shelby, there will be a \$9 million parking deck built in the downtown area that will connect with the transit system the university will be putting into place by August of 2007.

Greater Downtown Area

There is an area where urban renewal is earmarked. A piece of land purchased by the council 20 years ago now has 2 bids for a hotel and conference center. Along with this are the changes along the parkway leading north. This includes building condominiums on the River Walk as well as extending the parkway westward to connect with MLK Jr. to take advantage of the area covering the parkway, MLK 15th St., Greensboro, and Queen City Ave to open up the West Side.

Mr. Snowden gave details for the zoning that was planned for each sector. In all cases (for each strategy) there would be “Overlay”, which meant requirements would be made regarding landscaping, sidewalks, recessions back from main roads, and signage regulations. In the case of Stillman Boulevard, this would also include revising entrances off of the main road to eliminate the curves and current dangers of traffic accidents. Junk yards would be removed to enhance this area. Each sector of the city would also have business “incentivizing” policies in place. These incentives included several things to attract and enhance businesses. For example, a guarantee would be made that any tax monies paid by businesses would be invested back into the same area the business occupied. There would also be enterprise focus zones created in each area that would provide low interest loans for businesses.

North Strategy

- \$150 million to be invested in redevelopment around the River Walk, this is a link by the river walk to connect from the bridge to west end park and the Country Club land.
- Connect River Walk with Capital Park and West End Park and MLK
- Move the Corps of Engineers and use the property for commercial development
- Convert old ball fields into an amphitheater

West Strategy

- Mallisham Parkway needs to be developed—this is a major arterial roadway that is greatly underused—only about 500 cars travel on it daily right now. All other exit ways from the city are utilized except this one. At present, trucks cut through the city rather than avoiding the traffic lights and going around the city on this road to get to the light industrial areas located on the West Side. The city council would like to make Mallisham Parkway a truck entranceway. It would need to work with Northport to be able to do this, as

there is a toll bridge on this part. They would like to buy this toll bridge and create the truck route and make this sector an industrial corridor.

East Strategy

- There is the private investment of \$125 million with the Midtown Plaza
- Residential/commercial incentives
- Proposing extensive development past the New Central High to Midtown; this includes 19th Ave, 15th Street and Greensboro; this is a response to the 8,000 university student increase; this will have a residential/commercial mix area as housing is right close by to shopping areas people can walk to instead of driving

South Strategy

- Annex Springer Property: this is the property near Palmore Park. It is low and wet, so would require engineering to develop; originally they had thought to use this area for commercial development, but that never happened, so use for this area will be residential; because it is a wetland, the city can participate in a federal swap program to exchange this one for another in order to be able to develop it
- Westlawn—use as an entrepreneurial center and the back of the building as a park--since the land is earmarked for that and cannot be used for anything else; making it into a training area would help people living in McKenzie Court/new Hope VI site to acquire skills for jobs

5 Main Points in Plan (the slide changed quickly—I could not record them all)

1. 15th Street development focus: mixed residential/commercial
 - Business incentives—reinvesting taxes to upgrade areas
 - Change zoning for planned commercial development
 - Overlay requirements (access with curved driveways corrected, signage regulations, landscaping requirements, etc...)
2. Tenth Avenue
 - Business incentives
 - Overlay requirements
 - Armory redeveloped
3. Greensboro Ave.
4. Tenth through 15th Sector
 - increased commercial focus
 - upgrade housing
- 5.

Overview of Goals for West

- increase employment

- increase income
- increase mix of development [residential with commercial]
- increase (roads and or usage of roads--traffic) ways into the West Side
- Mallisham parkway—overall truck route plan will be done by the Dept of Transportation
- MLK revitalization (Hope VI, etc)
- Foster’s Ferry annexation of property
- Business/Industrial development incentives for the industrial corridor along Mallisham Parkway—light industrial
- There was mention of seeking new housing starts for homes in the \$140,000 to \$200,000 range for people who want to upgrade as well as for people who moved out of the West Side who would want to return IF there was adequate housing (this had been a request at earlier public meetings); concern in hearings by those with \$80, \$90, to \$100,000 homes wanting to upgrade on the West Side
- Tenth Ave—logical connection to I-359 and Culver area—potential development in this area--substandard housing needs revitalization

Other Comments

Note about annexations: It used to be that it did not matter whether one was in the county or the city regarding the provision of water and sewer. The City Council wants to change that so that any business or housing that receives water and sewer services from the city must be part of the city.

It takes 1 ½ years of public input before the zoning changes can be made. The planner will then have to advertise the voting in the paper for two weeks before there is a vote.

There will be a new neighborhood planner—Jessica James—her appointment will be announced soon.

Stillman College: Presenters commented that Stillman College has not approached the city council to ask what the city can do for it. (President Witt approached the city to ask what they could do to help the university.) The city council and planners have not had the same outreach from Stillman, but would like to have more involvement with them in the future. They mentioned that there is commercial property across the street from Stillman that might be suitable for a hotel.

Country Club land: Several comments were made about this. It is a “crown jewel” just sitting there in terms of value. An 18-hole golf course is a great misuse of such highly valuable property—so will probably change use. They foresee the golf course being used as waterfront property, with possibly some shops in that area. The Country Club Circle - area is now designated Historic, which will constraint what an architect can do as there will be requirements to preserve the architecture.

Schools: None for the West Side “unless the population increases”