

McGraw House Proposed Expansion
Notes – Public Meeting #2

Meeting Date: June 8, 2009
Date Notes Prepared: June 11, 2009

Attendees: See attached sign-in sheet

1. Sue Kittel of the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency (IURA) gave a brief overview of the public participation process. She said when it became clear that there were many concerns about the initial McGraw House expansion proposal, the IURA recommended taking a step back. IURA provided funding for a public participation process for this project, and recommended that Trowbridge and Wolf facilitate the process. She emphasized that the goal of the process is to arrive at a design direction that is agreeable to everyone involved. However, the final design will need to be further developed following conclusion of the public participation process. She also noted that the IURA does not have a position, pro or con, regarding viability of the project.
2. JoAnn Cornish, Director of Planning and Development, City of Ithaca, said that when a final design has been completed, it will need to go through the city's formal site plan review process, which allows several opportunities for public input.
3. Nels Bohn, Community Development Planner with the IURA facilitated a Question and Answer session. Following is a synopsis of questions/answers:
 - Q – Why does McGraw have ads on the radio if people are waiting 5 years to get in?
 - A – McGraw House always has a waiting list. Currently it's about 6-8 months for a studio and 3-5 years for a one bedroom. McGraw has had zero vacancy for 13 years. Advertising to maintain an active waiting list is what keeps the building full.
 - Q – Why is public money being used to support only one location? Why was this location selected?
 - A – IURA funds are being used only to support this public participation process. This site is being considered because its where McGraw House/LUBS own property.
 - Q - If using public monies, why is this location in the best interest of the public?
 - A – The only public money committed for this project so far is the funding for this public participation process.

Comment: Concerned about being “shoehorned” into designing on this site. Advocating for an alternate site. Current site is being considered because it's “where you can afford to buy houses and tear them down.” Don't throw away the neighborhood with massive density. The Farmers Market found a new home. Use creative energy to look for a better site for this project.

Response: IURA will look at alternative locations for senior housing in the future but we need to focus on this site for tonight.

- Q – Where/when can we discuss the City's plan for senior housing and its location?

- A – The City has issued an RFQ for a comprehensive plan, which has not been updated since 1971. There will be venues for discussing the City’s need for low to moderate income housing and senior housing during the comprehensive planning process. Nels Bohn is willing to host another meeting to specifically address the need for affordable senior housing in the City.
- Q – The original McGraw House expansion project required variances that require establishing a hardship; what hardship is McGraw claiming?
- A – Variances for the original design would have been necessary for height, setback, parking, lot coverage, but not for use. It’s not yet clear whether variances will be necessary when the project is redesigned.
- Q – What if the owners of 225 Geneva Street decide not to sell their property? Will eminent domain be used to obtain it?
- A – PathStone has a purchase option on 225 Geneva. PathStone is a private entity and does not have the right of eminent domain. If PathStone does purchase the property, it has agreed not to tear down the house.
- Q – At the first meeting, it was stated that the project was not well received by the neighbors. Didn’t the Planning Board raise the same concerns, independent of neighbor input?
- A – The Planning Board had several concerns about the initial proposal, including height, access, parking, and the proposed removal of the house at 225 Geneva Street.
- Q – Was 225 Geneva the only house proposed to be torn down?
- A – The house at 116 Clinton also was being considered for demolition.
- Q – What about the Women’s Community Center? Could it be used as a McGraw House extension?
- A – Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services has not yet purchased the Women’s Community Center property. INHS currently is just doing a feasibility study RE that property.
- Q – What will happen to the Minnick House (225 Geneva Street)?
- A – A variety of uses are being considered; a residential use is most likely.
- Q – If only a portion of the 225 Geneva property is needed for the McGraw expansion, how much? Could it be subdivided, and the house resold?
- A – The garage portion is important for this project. Subdividing and reselling is one option.
- Q – Have there been any posts to the web site?
- A – Yes, one.
- Q – How many public meeting will there be? Is there a calendar available?
- A – There will be four meetings total. The next two meetings have not yet been scheduled. It will take a little while to draw up some of the design ideas from tonight’s session. The next meeting will be in about six weeks.
- Q – How are the meetings advertised?
- A – In the newspaper; on the web site, and through mailing/e-mails to property owners within 500 feet.
- Q – What’s the smallest project that would be feasible?
- A – Somewhere between 25-50 units.

4. The audience broke into four groups. Each group was provided with an aerial photo of the neighborhood, a scaled plan of the McGraw House and LUBS properties, and several pieces of tracing paper. Each group was asked to develop consensus on two or three basic building schemes to address building location and massing. Sketches and preliminary analysis of those schemes are attached.
5. The large group was reassembled, and schemes from each of the small groups were presented.

Prepared by,
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