

SKYLINE

NEWS OF THE LOOP, STRETERVILLE, RIVER NORTH, NEAR NORTH, GOLD COAST & OLD TOWN

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BY JANE LAWICKI

Near North Church considers high-rise development for its parking lot

Residents expressed sharp concerns Sept. 29 as Park Community Church [PCC], 1001 N. Crosby, introduced initial plans to sell its approximately half-acre parking lot to be developed into a 42-story apartment building.

The public meeting, hosted by the church and attended by 45 neighbors, church officials, and Tobin Development, explored questions around the concept of a 700-foot-market-rate skyscraper offering some 500 units, 20% affordable, and 235 parking spaces.

The current surface lot has 44 parking spaces that help get congregants off the street during Sunday morning services.

“This is intended to be a public process,” said Nathan Payne, PCC’s Near North pastor. “We wanted to reach out to neighbors first to hear concerns. It offers a better opportunity to talk through and exchange ideas.”

The project’s goal is to secure additional resources to help the Near North neighborhood and PCC’s 15 churches and ministries across the City.

As he introduced the initial concept, Kevin Tobin, president, Tobin Development, explained that in the last 10 years the area adjacent to Cabrini neighborhood has added more than 5,000 housing units.

“In the next 10 years, we can expect an additional 13,000 residential units,” Tobin said. “These are already planned, approved developments.”

Stressing that high-rises are coming to the neighborhood, he confirmed the heights of the buildings will be in the 700- foot range. Concerned

about green spaces, Tobin identified a nearby lot that could be developed into a park for the neighborhood.

As he described the plan, he noted additional benefits for the neighborhood such as a daycare center, coffee shop, and possible parking passes. “We live in a world of tension and trying to please everyone is impossible,” Tobin said. “The goal is to make it as much a win for everyone.”

Residents were quick to express concerns. Parking became a main sticking point as only 235 spaces would be available for more than 500 units. Prior to recent zoning changes, and the onslaught of Transit Oriented Developments, zoning for a project like this would have demanded that the developer provide at minimum 500 off-street parking spaces.

Its location one block east of the river also provides a bonus, and transportation problem. While a water view is magic for real estate, it also serves as a natural barrier for egress, cutting off any western access to and from the property.

Noting all other high-rise buildings are on major thoroughfares and traffic on low-rise residential side streets are already overwhelming, neighbors insisted on a traffic study and review of sewer capacity. In addition, the city is on a mad dash now to eliminate commercial street parking with the addition of privileged bike lanes with their concrete barriers and ‘Bus Only’ lanes on streets like nearby Chicago Ave.

Another neighbor worried about over-development as businesses leave Chicago due to high taxes.

Tobin noted that a traffic study and all other related engineering reviews would be conducted as part of the official planning and approval process which could take 24 months. He added that a healthy city usually has 30-40 cranes throughout its skyline.

“In Chicago we have two or three cranes – in the third largest city in the country, not to mention a \$1 billion dollar deficit,” he said. Stating that the proposed project would generate approximately \$30 million in tax

revenue per year, he added, “We’re either going to grow out of this or face an even greater deficit.”

Other residents shared ideas that could be beneficial for the neighborhood including adding a restaurant, entertainment venue, or grocery store. The City’s Interactive Zoning Map shows the property is now zoned for a mix of retail, service, and residential uses.

Neighbors were not convinced regarding the proposed development. Sharon Mills wondered how the church could profit from the sale and yet still be of value to the neighborhood. “Take [this idea] back to the Church board, to re-consider what are other options,” she said.

“Townhomes or low-rise neighborhoods across Cabrini... The 42 stories is just too much,” said Teresa Whelpley.

“We want to be good neighbors, but there are others,” Pastor Payne said.

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Noting that the Near North is one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the City, he added that the church’s mission was to the Near North, including Cabrini Green as well as a network of church ministries across the City.

“How do you define neighborhood?” he asked. Agreeing that dismissing the immediate neighbors’ concerns doesn’t work, he concluded, “There’s a lot to take in, to debrief about what we have heard. We need to think about that sensitivity.”

Founded in 1989 with a vision to reach young adults in an urban environment, PCC has grown from one church in one neighborhood to 15 churches in eight neighborhoods around the City. For more information, visit <https://parkcommunity>.