



INFLUENCE OF NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS ON PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT

Kelsey Jensen

Fall 2008

Architectural Programming

Prof. Jean VonBargen

My thesis project centers on the Conway property in North West Portland. It is a former industrial area, zoned very liberally which unease's many residents who take pride in their urban, yet "human scale environment". The neighborhood surrounding the site is a well established residential neighborhood consisting of a diverse collection of dwelling types. Walking along the streets you will see everything from a detached single family home, to a low rise apartment building. Nestled within the quiet neighborhood are local shops, schools, churches, restaurants and a great urban park. At the dismay of the community, Conway has hired consultants that proposed a high density development similar to that of the Pearl district. The projected increase in density, while profitable, does not show consideration to the neighborhood plans and goals. Our studio objective is to work out a design solution that counters the proposed CONWAY development and solves the challenge with respect to the values and aspirations of the community by following the agreed upon neighborhood vision.

The intention of the Northwest Neighborhood plan is "To guide public and private decision-making and investment in the Northwest District... The plan provides policy direction in a number of key areas, including land use, urban design, transportation, housing and economic development... The NWDP is intended to protect and enhance the livability, urban character and economic vitality of this inner-urban area while providing a means for guiding change over time." (Northwest, A-1) But one must wonder **can a neighborhood plan actually assist in successfully integrating a privately owned development back into a city network?**

I analyzed two recent developments in the greater Portland metro area that were similar to the Conway site, The Round of Beaverton, and the South Waterfront District of Portland. Both are privately owned, constructed on vacant lots, and were a part of a bigger city network. The difference between the two is in the process. The Round, had virtually no zoning constraints or neighborhood plan to influence the development of design, therefore it was become solely a private project. The South Waterfront on the other hand had city involvement from the beginning. Guidelines and objectives were set every step of the way steering developers in a planned direction.



The city of Beaverton is located just seven miles west of Portland. In the 1960's the city saw a huge population boom as housing demands increased and people began to move out from the big city. Today Beaverton has a population of nearly 80,000 people and remains a suburb in the greater metropolitan area. The increasing sprawl of the 60's, suburban development and auto dominated land use patterns decentralized the city diminishing it of any central focus. Beaverton had planned to densify in the 70's however a bad economy put a halt to any new development. When the light rail was proposed in 1997, they took the opportunity to bring rapid mass transit into the core and began soliciting for proposals from developers. They chose a design from BCB developers called 'The Round'. It was pitched as "a suburban regional center, a model for smart development along the light rail," (Anderson). The design had intentions to re-establish a city center in an attempt to encourage new development around the site, consequently reinstating a downtown. Unfortunately this was a huge failure due to lack of careful planning.

In 1998, BCB Group encountered financial difficulty which stalled construction of the Round for three years. In June, 2001, the City took back control of the site only to sign a Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) that increased the project to include approximately 264 housing units, 123,485 square feet of commercial space, and 341,926 square feet of office space. (McNamee, 2) Shortly after the agreement, they sold the development to Dorn-Platz Properties, a California investment group, to finish the project. In 2004 Dorn-Platz was declared default on their agreement, and was heavily fined. The city allowed them to sign a new agreement which called for a 2008 completion. As of now only 64 condos have been built with no plans of additional units, and three mixed use structures are open but are not fully occupied. The project has been defaulted four times since proposed in 1997 and remains a questionable investment. (Anderson)

The design itself didn't help the project move ahead either. The site plan made access difficult to get to by car due to its awkward position between main arterials. The lack of city

involvement allowed developers to make street connections that didn't support the overall infrastructure of the city. Instead they may have lead to more chaos. In order to access the site you must enter at minor streets. The lack of major access points isolates the development and creates congestion, thus assisting in the unsuccessful nature of the project.



From the failed project came many lessons learned. A goal and a vision established can help guide developers in a direction that takes in account a bigger picture. In 2005 the Beaverton Planning Commission reevaluated their mission and completely rewrote the Beaverton Development Plan. Not only did they rezone the entire city, but they also established neighborhoods, boundaries, district focal points, and design objectives for each, in order to prevent the disorganized mayhem that occurred at the round. (Beaverton)



The South Waterfront district used an entirely different process. Instead of developers being the Key Players in a large scale development, the city recognized the site potential and planned for a phasing development to occur. In the 1980's, North Macadam was a vacant, industrial part of town that laid on a Brownfield, needing extensive clean up. By 1999 the city saw the sites potential as prime waterfront property, close to downtown. Instead of giving the land to a private developer the planning commission drew up the Macadam District Framework Plan. It included "Guiding Principles for Greenway Phasing" which stated clearly the goals and objectives needed to accomplish the desired vision at a conceptual level. The principles recognized the need for a greenway implementation along the river, transportation connectivity, and public-private partnerships. (South) It explained a vision that would infuse a "rich mix of urban-scale offices, housing, hotels, parks and retail uses."(Adopted)

In 2000 the planning commission published a set of proposed development standards and held public hearings, giving the community ample input in the design process. With community input and goals set in place, the city was able to clearly and efficiently create a South Waterfront District Plan which includes project goals, a development plan, zoning codes, and design guidelines for developers to follow. It was unanimously passed in November of 2002. (Adopted)

The exclusivity and aesthetics of the project are bringing critics to compare it as an "import" from Vancouver, BC, however generally it has been greatly received from the public and has yet to face any developing problems. The success of OHSU has brought in 4500 jobs, and the area is without a doubt revitalized with a new sense of urban life. A feeling of pride emanates from within the community as it is Oregon's first green neighborhood and the largest green development in the country. The whole district uses bioswale filtration, incorporates LEED certified buildings, and has exceptional public transportation. As a result of the successful planning, the district works flawlessly with the existing city infrastructure as well. The neighborhood web site proclaims "living in the South Waterfront is good for you, and the planet." (We Are Here)

After examining the two case studies in Portland, it is clear that the implementation of a Neighborhood Plan is vital to the success of a project. The establishment of a vision or a goal can help steer a developer in the right direction. By infusing the bigger picture with the individual development, it is inevitable that the project will work with the existing infrastructure and fabric.

Therefore it is likely that the Conway development will be successful if it gives the right attention to the already established neighborhood plan.

WORKS CITED

"Adopted South Waterfront Plan." Portland Online. 2008. City of Portland, Or. 7 Dec. 2008 <http://www.portlandonline.com/planning/inex.cfm?c_34291>.

Anderson, David R. "Developer of Round in default on loan." The Oregonian 27 July 2007.

Anderson, David R. "Opposite angles on the Round." The Oregonian 21 Sept. 2006.

Beaverton (OR.). Downtown Beaverton Regional Center Community Plan. Beaverton, OR, 18 March 2005.

McNamee, Bill. Microclimates. Tech.No. CA25. Pubic Utility Commision of Oregon. 1-4. 12 July 2002. 6 Dec. 2008 <<http://www.oregon.gov/puc/meetings/pmemos/2002/061802/ca25.pdf>>.

Northwest District Association, *Northwest District Plan*, November 5, 2003: A-1.

South Waterfront Greenway Guiding Principles for Greenway Phasing. Working paperNo. Bureau of Planning, City of Portland, Oregon. Portland, OR, 05.

"We Are Here." South Waterfront. 2007. 6 Dec. 2008 <<http://www.southwaterfront.com>>.