

Date: February 14, 2007
To: Chair of the Plan Commission, and Commissioners
From: Southeast Evanston Association Board of Directors
Re: Application for a Planned Development at 1001 Chicago Avenue.

We write to encourage the Plan Commission to analyze carefully the development proposal for 1001 Chicago Avenue. The Southeast Evanston Association (SEA) asks the commissioners to question thoroughly the value of the proposed public benefits the project promises, not only in light of Evanston's Comprehensive General Plan but also in light of the immediate neighborhood setting. A Planned Development must prove its positive worth in every criterion. We believe that claims of public benefit should be obvious and diverse. Nobody should have to guess whether height, density, or mass really is or is not good for a setting. It must be clearly evident from findings.

Key aspects of public benefit that we recommend receive close scrutiny in the case of 1001 Chicago Avenue are (§6-3-6-3 A), the preservation and enhancement of desirable site characteristics and open space, and (§6-3-6-3 D), the use of design, landscape, or architectural features to create a pleasing environment.

§6-3-6-3 (A) the preservation and enhancement of desirable site characteristics and open space.

The current structure at 1001 Chicago (known as 'The Autobari') provides open space at its lots by means of the north parking area, a second-story setback along Lee Street, and a moderate height. We count these as three current elements of land use that create open space in an urban context. The structure we see today is surrounded by an envelope of air and light. This is evident both from a distance and from close-up.

By comparison, the proposal offers two elements of open space. These are the courtyard on the northeast corner, created by a corner setback above the second floor, and the 'park' setback at Lee Street. The ground-level open space of the current north lot will be gone. Significantly taller elevations will dominate the immediate area. It appears that the envelope of light and air experienced from the close-up perspective may be greatly diminished.

The fact that the proposed northeast corner courtyard is promoted by the Applicant as a relief to the adjoining alley neighbors in the R-1 district raises red flags and many questions:

- What is there about the proposal that might create a need for relief?
- How could such relief actually be created?
- Is the corner courtyard enough to create open space for the community, or just the building itself?
- Could a smaller building solve the problem already identified by the Applicant?

§-3-6-3 (D) the use of design, landscape, or architectural features to create a pleasing environment.

We urge the commissioners not to give up on demands for building materials and decorative highlights that are appropriate to the Applicant's aspirations to design a "classic" looking building.

The alley behind the proposed development is narrow. Lee Street, onto which the alley opens, is also narrow. Lee Street has parking on both sides. The Applicant seeks to use this bit of public way both as an exit and entrance for over 60 condominium units. This raises questions not only as to the amount of traffic flow afforded by the public ways but also about the amount of non-congested maneuvering available to vehicles on these narrow public ways. We believe that the Applicant should provide not merely proof of a lack of impediment in traffic flow but also proof of not creating an adverse impact on neighbors, who also use the alley on a daily basis.

The SEA welcomes creative implementation of commercial and retail provisions in the burgeoning residential redevelopment of C1A on Chicago Avenue. However, we suggest that the proposed retail space size may create less of a sense of amenity and more a sense of congestion. We ask the commissioners to encourage designs that specifically promote pleasing environments rather than designs that appear to include commercial elements as an afterthought.

Mechanicals, noise levels, necessary parapets, and all exhaust and ventilation openings ought carefully to be evaluated as they are proposed. We note the appearance of what appear to be two large ventilation exhausts on the first floor of the south elevation. Maybe this is why so large a setback is needed at the south lot line. We ask the commissioners to investigate thoroughly all the proposed mechanical and ventilation features of any development at 1001 Chicago, to be sure the features fit appropriately into this compact, urban space.

Douglas Geyer, President SEA Board