

To: Plan Commissioners, City Council, Consultants, and City Staff  
From: Southeast Evanston Association  
Re: Draft of Downtown Plan

The Southeast Evanston Association has reviewed the Draft Downtown Plan dated October 19, 2007. After careful review and with SEA representatives at each of the public hearings conducted by the Plan Commission, we have the following comments.

The Southeast Evanston Association generally supports the Draft Plan in the following areas.

- The creation and maintenance of open public space in the downtown area.
- The concept of form-based zoning in Evanston.
- The elimination of Planned Unit Developments as a way to circumvent the intent of the zoning ordinances.
- The encouragement of green buildings (LEED certification) and the inclusion of sustainable building practices in the zoning code.
- The adaptive re-use of existing buildings whenever possible.

The Southeast Evanston Association has genuine concerns about the proposed plan in the following areas.

- Many of the base-height designations in the proposed core zones seem excessive. If such heights are to be allowed "by-right", we support a public review process triggered by specific building characteristics. Quite apart from height, it is not appropriate to eliminate the Plan Commission and public comments from all future downtown planning considerations, which this proposal would do. Form-based zoning is not a substitute for public involvement in community development.
- The proposed plan is weak when it exchanges allowed height in feet for allowed number of stories. This approach provides far too much potential for variation in future proposals, thereby undermining the goal of form-based zoning.
- We endorse the attempt to provide appropriate guidelines for the edge or transitional zones. However, these guidelines should be consistent. We support a base height of 6 stories, with a maximum of 8 stories in all transitional areas. We are specifically troubled by the guidelines established for the Northern transitional zone. It appears that the consultants have used the height and density of recently-approved buildings as a precedent rather than the context of the surrounding area.

- We question the large variation between base heights and maximum heights in the proposed zoning districts. The range from 15 to 30 stories--a 100% variation—implies that the City doesn't know what it wants in its core district.
- We question the process by which the consultants came up with a 42-story maximum in the Fountain Square block, when this was clearly not reflected in the documented workshop sessions. After reading the minutes of the closed-session meeting of the City Council (March 27), we have even more doubts of the validity of this part of the process.
- We question the composition of the focus groups whose input seems to have been given more emphasis in the plan than that of the citizens of Evanston. There are a number of established community groups in Evanston, and they should have been included in focus groups during the week of the charrette.
- We question the conclusion of the consultants to decrease the recommended residential parking requirements and the methods of reaching that conclusion. We believe the data sample was insufficient, and that the results of the downtown resident survey clearly contradict the findings.
- We admire the idealistic belief that people move into Evanston urban areas and leave their automobiles behind. But they do not. It is a mistake to reduce parking requirements based on misplaced ideals.
- We question the emphasis on residential development as a primary method of fueling the economic engine of downtown Evanston. There needs to be more of a balance between retail, office, and residential uses. The decline in Class B office space as it is replaced by residential uses is troubling.
- We question the wisdom of changing the major one-way streets into two-way.
- While we feel that many of the public benefits suggested by the consultants are good, we encourage diligent and careful consideration when codifying the final list. As residents, we require the benefits offered by developers to be measurable, significant, and of lasting value.

In conclusion, we feel that the Draft Downtown Plan is a good start. However, much future discussion and revision is needed before such a plan, as a petition for amendment to the zoning ordinance and zoning map, is adopted by the City of Evanston. The changes made today will affect Evanston long after the final plan is approved.