



C H A T H A M C O U N T Y - S A V A N N A H

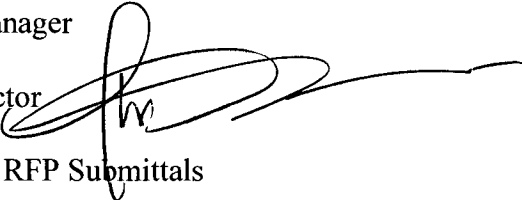
## METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

*"Planning the Future - Respecting the Past"*

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: December 11, 2020

TO: Michael Brown, Interim City Manager

FROM: Melanie Wilson, Executive Director 

SUBJECT: MPC Review of the Fairgrounds RFP Submittals

During the summer of 2020, the City of Savannah requested proposals from entities interested in working on the development of the +/- 67-acre tract known as *The Fairgrounds Property* located at 4701 Meding Street in Savannah. The proposed project is a large one that can both benefit the neighborhood and impact the entire City and County, therefore we appreciate being allowed the opportunity to assist with this effort.

The City of Savannah requested the MPC's feedback on the following three proposals (listed alphabetically):

1. Knott Development
2. P3 Joint Venture Group
3. Summit Smith Development Team

A Technical Memo summarizing the MPC's feedback is attached. Feel free to contact me with any specific comments or questions you may have regarding this review.

MW/jj

cc: Heath Lloyd, ACM-Chief Information Officer  
Joe Shearouse, Jr., Acting Assistant to the City Manager  
Pamela Everett, MPC Assistant Executive Director  
MPC Department Directors  
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# CITY OF SAVANNAH'S FAIRGROUNDS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT



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## **MPC TECHNICAL REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS:**

The Tatemville, Feiler Park, Hussars Terrace/Dittmerville neighborhoods are well established neighborhoods that surround *The Fairgrounds Property* to the north, east, and south. The adjacent census tracts next to *The Fairgrounds Property* have a median age of 33.4, a median household income of \$37,466, and a median home value of \$81,550, however, 62% of homes are renter occupied housing. It is important to note that most of the homes in the immediately surrounding neighborhoods are single-story, which will affect the massing and scale of any proposed buildings within the proposed new development.

Historically, the surrounding neighborhoods have struggled with traffic concerns when the property operated as a fairground. Staff has concerns that traffic will remain a challenge and should be heavily considered when reviewing all three proposals. In addition, it is vitally important for the selected proposal to address transportation, local job opportunities, access to amenities, and the scale and size of buildings as well as location of uses to coalesce with the well-established neighborhoods surrounding the property. Finally, the MPC recommends the project be developed through a masterplan and zoned as a Large-Scale Planned Development (L-PD).

### **COMMENT SUMMARY**

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The City of Savannah was seeking proposals for development, under a Public-Private Partnership (P3), of the 67-acre parcel the City owns at 4801 Meding Street, previously known as the Fairgrounds Property. The three proposals received were evaluated based on the RFP's requirement for a transformational project that would meet one or a combination of the City's strategic priorities: economic strength and poverty reduction, neighborhood revitalization, infrastructure investment, and increased public safety.

All three proposals proposed a mixed-use development as the fundamental urban design pattern and land use. Two proposals offered similar mixed-use development uses to include commercial,

residential, movie studio, work force training, and recreation. The third also proposed mixed-use but with a larger emphasis on recreation through development of a large sports complex that would market to both local and regional tournaments (softball, basketball, volleyball).

#### **IMPLEMENTATION:**

- 1) Community visioning meetings should be held to address any needs and/or services that are not currently being promoted.
- 2) Consider how development can merge better with existing neighborhoods.
- 3) Preserve the integrity of the existing tax base.

#### **LAND USE:**

- 4) MPC supports an expansion of the adjoining neighborhood's historic development pattern. MPC also encourages compatible new development within this area. However, we must ensure the preservation of existing greenspace as permanent open space to meet the active and passive recreational needs of residents.
- 5) The MPC wishes to ensure that the development is compatible in scale, height, and purpose with a seamless transition from the new development to the surrounding neighborhoods such as Tatemville, Feiler Park, and Hussars Terrace/Dittmerville. A well-defined land use and zoning review will ensure that any proposed mixed-use and future housing developments will be successful.
- 6) Aspects that should carefully be considered during design should, at a minimum, include:
  - street types,
  - the public realm,
  - building height,
  - design and architectural standards,
  - parking,
  - environmental,
  - landscaping,
  - public art,
  - fiber/high speed internet, and
  - signage.

#### **TRANSPORTATION:**

- 7) The Fairgrounds Property has the potential to create passive open space, parks, and passive trail systems. Ideally, the project should connect with nearby existing and planned bike, bus, and trail networks.
- 8) Easy and direct access to multiple modes of transportation within the new development is fundamental to its growth and sustainability. An evaluation of access to existing transit options and overall connectivity should be completed to determine the needed enhancements that will benefit the nearby neighborhoods, larger community, and visitors. Mixed-use areas connected by reliable transit service can lead to large reductions in per

capita vehicle miles and hours of travel leading to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a smaller carbon footprint for the community.

**HISTORIC RESOURCES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES:**

- 9) Consideration should be taken to identify and recognize the history of the communities both onsite and nearby when developing the area. The physical, cultural, and environmental history of the area should be considered for representation in the final project possibly with signage or public art.

**NATURAL RESOURCES:**

- 10) An obstacle for this area of the City is drainage. The area is vulnerable to the social, economic, and environmental stresses of both current and future flooding. For this reason, density must be considered with parking, building development, and housing.
- 11) Strict sustainable building design and site development that allows for shifts over time due to changes in the environment (i.e., climate change) should be implemented.
- 12) Consider all possible resiliency best management practices to include solar installation.
- 13) Also, for consideration, is the impact that the large amount of impervious coverage areas will have on the temperature in the development and surrounding neighborhoods. The direct “Heat Island Effect” due to this development could be noticeable in the area. Heat islands can affect communities by increasing summertime peak energy demand, air conditioning costs, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, heat-related illness and mortality, and water pollution. Therefore, a dense tree canopy (either through later plantings or preservation) and implementation of green infrastructure and low impact development best management practices will be crucial to ensuring the community is not impacted by temperature increases often seen in similar developments.

A more thorough review of each proposal follows.

**PROPOSAL #1: KNOTT DEVELOPMENT**

The proposal submittal by Knott Development offered a mixed-use development design with an emphasis on affordable multi-family housing, hotel, retail, and a large emphasis on recreation. In general, however, the MPC does not feel that a large sports-plex and related hotel is viable in this location.

**Land Use:**

- Discourage treatment along Meding Street relative to landscaping/buffers and entry points and instead encourage the scaling of building height and land use intensity from east to west.

- Improve location of public open spaces to invite adjacent neighborhoods to use these spaces.
- Consider how nonresidential portions of the development could be multipurpose in the event of changing market demands.
- Potential impact of excessive lighting and noise from uses towards some of the existing residences.

**Transportation:**

- Ensure truck traffic and additional traffic from events are not routed through the adjacent neighborhood streets.
- The design will ultimately have an impact on the east / west connections to Montgomery along 62<sup>nd</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Streets.

**Natural Resources:**

- The amount of parking developed (surface /structured parking) should be strategic to promote a better use of land and less stormwater runoff from the amount of impervious surfaces.

**Urban Design:**

- Building Footprints are out of Scale to Existing Single-Family Footprints. MPC suggests a less intense use with more compatible scale and massing.
- Ceremonial Street (Fountain Street) internalizes the Development, creating an island in the existing neighborhood. The MPC suggests changing the orientation of the ceremonial street and consider 62<sup>nd</sup> Street the important connection instead of fountain. Additionally, the MPC suggests pulling 62<sup>nd</sup> Street all the way through the site and creating the connection to Stark Street.
- The Fairground District Commons is isolated. MPC Suggests fronting the proposed buildings along the Commons and integrating is closer to the existing neighborhood.
- Fairground District Community Park is isolated. MPC suggests integrating the community park element into the commons, which would help with activating the public space.
- The proposal states that and extended Coleman Street will be the primary access point, however, the MPC feels that Meding and 63<sup>rd</sup> Street will more likely be the primary points of access for visitors. Due to this, an integration with the existing street network is highly recommended.
- Meding St. through this section of the neighborhood is not a frontage street. MPC suggests treating this section of Meding St. as a buffer thus providing a larger setback for development.
- The proposed uses along Meding Street (Commercial/restaurant, aquatics & community center, and multistory mixed-use buildings with structured parking) are not compatible with the existing scale and fabric of the adjacent neighborhoods and the MPC suggests less intense uses with compatible scale and massing as the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Coleman Street is not a proper primary access point into the site, 62<sup>nd</sup> Street as a primary connection into the site is recommended. However, if Coleman Street is ultimately utilized as the primary access point, take note that the first visual seen is the rear of the parking garage. A visual screening or buffer along the rear portion of the garage is recommended.
- The connection from 62<sup>nd</sup> Street to Stark Street is ideal for passive connectivity. MPC suggests this route as a better connection through the site for the Tide to Town Urban trail link.

## **PROPOSAL #2: P3 JOINT VENTURE GROUP**

The proposal submittal by P3 Joint Venture Group also offered a mixed-use development design with an emphasis on affordable multi-family housing, recreation, creative/institutional space, retail, and a movie studio. It is the MPC's opinion that offering commercial space such as a grocery store in addition to a police substation would highly benefit the adjacent neighborhoods.

### **Land Use:**

- Parking does not seem to be adequately addressed, mostly for the playing fields. The MPC recommends integrating additional parking (if needed) near the proposed mixed-use buildings.
- Landscaped buffers/setbacks should be provided in order to insulate existing property owners in the adjacent neighborhoods, specifically from the studio and careers center.
- The proposal creates an internal main street with a mixed-use section on site, but it is too isolated from the existing context and does not fit a typical commercial pattern in Savannah. MPC suggests removing the internal Main Street concept, as there is zero visibility for retail to flourish, and the street is bookmarked by 2 dead ends.

### **Transportation:**

- The conceptual plan shows a connection from 62<sup>nd</sup> Street to Stark St. and a connection on Kimball. MPC suggests providing more detail in how those connections would be implemented.
- Ensure truck traffic and additional traffic from events or studio are not routed through the adjacent neighborhood streets.
- Opportunity for Park and Ride or upgraded transit stop.

### **Natural Resources:**

- No connectivity of the new development to the nearby Tide-to-Town passive recreational trail system is proposed.
- Address both passive and active recreation in the final design.
- The amount of parking developed (surface /structured parking) should be strategic to promote less stormwater runoff from the increased impervious surfaces.

### **Urban Design:**

- The building footprints are a proper scale with the existing neighborhood.
- The Central Commons is out of place on the site and feels isolated. It is suggested that the Commons be integrated with the existing proposed development. Additionally, the Commons need active uses around its perimeter and should be moved closer to the existing neighborhood to the east.
- The studio/career center appears out of place on the site. MPC suggests moving the studio and career center to the western portion of the site.
- The indoor recreation center seems isolated. MPC suggests moving the indoor recreation center to the location of the proposed studio and career center.
- MPC suggests less retail and focusing development on the perimeter of the proposed commons.
- MPC suggests expanding the buffer along Meding Street to help create a nice transition into the proposed development.

### **PROPOSAL #3: SUMMIT SMITH DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

The proposal submittal by Summit Smith Development also offered a mixed-use development design with a wide range of uses to include multi-family, community gardens and greenhouses, and a movie/production studio.

### **Land Use:**

- The overall development pattern seems exclusive to the new residents/tenants and not inclusive of the existing community. Size, scale, location, and massing can address this issue.
- The scale and intensity of the buildings are not compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, especially in Zone 1.
- Zone 3 should be more accessible to the surrounding neighborhoods, especially if planned for a community garden and greenhouses.
- A surface parking lot is not suitable for frontage on Meding Street. Parking of this magnitude should not be at this location.
- Connection should be made into neighboring Summerside community to the west.
- The location of the Training Center is accurate.
- The community green house is not ideal. MPC suggests moving the greenhouse to the southern portion of the site.

### **Transportation:**

- Ensure truck traffic and additional traffic from events or studio are not routed through the adjacent neighborhood streets.

- The connections to the larger context of the community are lacking. MPC suggests integrating the Tide-to-Town connection into the proposal along 62<sup>nd</sup> Street to Stark Street.
- MPC suggests creating the connection from Coleman Street to Kimball Street.
- There is an opportunity for Park and Ride or upgraded transit stop.

**Natural Resources:**

- No connectivity of the new development to the nearby Tide-to-Town passive recreational trail system is proposed.
- Address both passive and active recreation in the final design.
- The amount of parking developed (surface /structured parking) should be strategic to promote less stormwater runoff from the increased impervious surfaces.

**Urban Design:**

- The Residential building footprints proposed are out of scale to the existing neighborhood, (feels very suburban). MPC suggests alternative residential building typologies instead of the mid-rise types.
- Meding Street should not be fronting a surface parking lot. Removing the surface parking lot is suggested, however, if parking is necessary, consider a larger green buffer with screening.
- The pedestrian central spine connection is respected however, MPC suggests turning it into a woonerf, or “living street” which would still integrate vehicular uses.
- The park is isolated to the southern portion of the site. A better suggestion is to integrate the park into the proposed pedestrian connection.
- The perimeter street connections are out of scale to the neighborhood and creates an island of development. MPC suggests reconsidering the boulevard type streets and use existing street types and ROWs for the proposal.

**GENERAL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PLACEMAKING**

- A continual sense of “activity” and use of the amenities being provided (Mon – Sun, Day, and Night).
- The City should consider:
  - Adding spaces for gatherings and events.
  - Adding greenspace, murals, sculptures, public art, creative crosswalks, benches, and trees.
  - Additional lighting, signage, and wayfinding is necessary to connect and define the development’s edges and character.
- Implement a wayfinding system in and surrounding the development.



## **MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT**

- Reviewers recognized the desire to create a true mixed-use neighborhood to better serve existing uses and attract the desired entertainment, recreation, and retail uses. However, there are concerns about the ability of the development community to deliver these products, especially at the price points currently supported within the marketplace.
- Concerns and observations include:
  - Affordable housing will be needed to support the new residents.
  - Residential needs to provide various types and price points to serve all demographics (middle aged, empty nesters, families).
  - Concerns with parking, safety, lack of amenities, and cost of housing.

Ideally the development will have a wide range of sustainable uses the neighborhood is currently lacking (medical, community garden, restaurants). Similarly, there should be uses that attract the new community members.

## **CONNECTIVITY**

- The development's entrance should be improved, as well as connectivity between area uses.
- Better connections are needed between the new development and westside neighborhoods.
- Public transportation services need to be expanded to serve both the new and existing populations. Integration of park/ride or transit stop into the fabric of the plan should be done early so that it is inclusive and not an "afterthought".
- Ensure pedestrian connectivity within the development, to the adjacent neighborhoods and the neighborhood amenities.
- Connectivity of the new development to Tide-to-Town passive recreational trail system.

## **LAND USE**

- Ensure scaling of building height and land use intensity from east to west are taken into account. No natural buffers exist so development should incorporate additional buffers to protect them from noise and light.
- Address both passive and active recreation.
- Ensure adequate ROW to address future development
- Green development should be utilized to include areas for solar and improved broadband/fiberoptic infrastructure.
- Limit traffic impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods.

## FAIRGROUNDS SITE



## FAIRGROUNDS SITE AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH

