

Architecture Field Office

2200 Zane Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55422

City of Edina

Cary Teague, Community Development Director
4801 W. 50th Street
Edina, MN 55424

To

From

Mic Johnson, FAIA

Date

July 6, 2022

Cary:

At your request, we reviewed the Sketch Plan submission for the proposed Life Time Living Edina development based on our experience working with the Greater Southdale Work Group to craft a physical vision for how their guiding principles may translate to the built environment. The resulting vision for development in the district is to create an enhanced human experience along existing major and new connector streets, with overall experience shaped via landscape setbacks, building step backs, a hierarchy of street typologies, transparency at street level, minimizing the impact of the car, and managing storm water as an amenity. The outcome of our collaborations with the Work Group is described in the urban design chapter of the Greater Southdale District Plan and resulted in the Greater Southdale District Design Experience Guidelines.

Unfortunately, there is not much to discuss in this proposal about how this proposed development aligns with the future goals of the Greater Southdale District. The project is located at an important access point into Southdale Center, a place where residents and visitors from around the region once spent time shopping and finding entertainment all located in one place. This was also a time when everyone drove long distances to get everything they needed. Those times have changed, which is why the Design Experience Guidelines were created.

New ways of how and where to shop, where to and how to work, where to find entertainment, where to find great places to be in and enjoyable ways to walk to them is having a great impact on community life everywhere. The Design Experience Guidelines is about how the physical environment can support the *whole* community, not just those who live and work in the district. This is why the Guidelines take great effort to respect and invite the surrounding neighborhoods as an important part of the district.

However in this particular proposal, the focus is not focused on how the proposed development has met the Design Experience Guidelines or the Urban Design chapter of the Comprehensive Plan – both of which offer to each proposer a background on why and how a new development is expected to meet the expressed intent the existing community...an effort in which members of the community Work Group, Planning Commission and City Council spent many hours over three years to define and develop – but rather is presented as a marketing package of how the developer and architects have designed a place that is exclusively about themselves and their interests, not the broader community.

“Life Time Living is a complete reimagination of where and how we live by integrating the Healthy Way of Life into a luxury living rental community with unmatched design, luxurious quality, and the conveniences demanded by active lifestyles. Not only do residents get a full membership to all of the amenities at the Athletic Resort, the project will have dedicated amenities just for residences, such as expansive work lounge spaces, private dining areas, a dog spa, exclusive parking, and private resident events.”

The above quote from the proposal describes an exclusive and elite enclave, **an inward-facing suburban development inside a suburban development** that will be isolated from the Greater Southdale District. This is a place where it is possible to live without ever having to leave the corridors that connect to the club, workspace, or apartments and when leaving by car is easy via direct access provided for parking. These characteristics mean that the potential contribution the development of a very richly appointed facility where *“(t)he tower is set back from the podium, exposed fully only at the base of a courtyard at the predominant corner, as a move to architectural emphasize the grandeur of the building”* without mentioning that 50% of the perimeter of the building is an exposed, unlined parking structure.

The Design Experience Guidelines were conceived to demonstrate how to integrate new development into the existing car-centric land use patterns of the last century to create a new form of 21st century integrated community where the scale and quality of the public realm is extensive, where every block and street room is designed for equal access for everyone and no one block is more important than any other.

The Developer and Architect have missed or disregarded the primary intention of developing Street Rooms and blocks throughout the District –which includes the perimeter of the Southdale Center site. Because the once functional retail mall of the 60’s is entirely surrounded by acres of parking under single ownership, the opportunity to convert the parking lots into a more integrated part of the Greater Southdale District would provide an engine for connection both north to the Medical District and Barrie Road, and south to the Galleria and the Promenade, extending the Promenade through the north-south axis of the District. We point the proposer specifically to pages 10 and 11 of the Design Experience Guidelines and preceding graphics from the Framework Plan regarding **Street Room and Seams**, and to DEG page16, **Street Room Form and Building Form** for a clear understanding of what is expected; excerpts of these pages are below.

Greater Southdale District | Design Experience Guidelines; page 10 and 11.

Street Room and Seams

*The intention in the design visioning process for the Greater Southdale District was to create a new paradigm for suburban mixed use districts, in which individual buildings respect their context and each other. The ensembles created as part of this process are **Street Rooms**. In this approach, the geometry of the city plays an important part in the definition of the street room, by width of street, length of block, solar orientation and axis as it relates to other grids defining other public rooms of the city like courtyard, plazas and parks. The real identity of the city is closely related to how the city is seen up close, making it possible to understand the true character of a place. It is these up close characteristics that make a city unique.*

Greater Southdale District | Design Experience Guidelines; page 16

Street Room Form

- *Building setbacks are to be considered as a part of the overall landscape and public amenities, and should be designed to create a continuous pedestrian experience along major corridors to support “pools of human activity.”*
- *Every new development should connect all publicly-accessible spaces such as pocket parks, courtyards and plazas to the street room typology.*
- *Along all major corridors, seventy five percent (75%) of face of building walls need to be at the setback line to support the creation of a ‘street room.’*
- *All new building façades in the district must have seventy five percent (75%) transparency at the ground level.*
- *All building façades are prime (including parking) and must be designed accordingly. There is no back side of a building.*
- *All facades on the first vertical 60 feet of a building (above grade) shall use natural materials facing the public realm.*
- *Above 50-60 feet, glass, precast panels with brick/tile are the preferred material palette. Metal panel can be used as a secondary part of a wall system.*
- *No building façade can be longer than 200’ without changing direction by a minimum of 90 degrees.*

Building Form

- *Ground floors should have a minimum ceiling height of 20’ for flexibility. This floor-to-floor height will allow the space to accommodate commercial, two floors of parking, or two-story townhouses.*
- *Above-grade parking structures should be designed with flat floorplates to allow for future conversion and lined with programmable public realm space to minimize the visual impact of car storage.*
- *Within 50-60 feet of the ground, it is preferred that rooftops be programmed to accommodate residential or public user activities (e.g. a restaurant or terrace).*
- *Rooftops facing the Promenades must be functional and programmed to provide interest and variety along these important pedestrian spines.*
- *All development services, including rooftop mechanical systems, should be located within buildings and should not be visible from the public realm, or semi-private and private areas of the development. The exception are rooftop-mounted solar panels, which should be located on the highest point of the buildings.*
- *Building footprints above 60 feet should be no greater than 12,000 SF for residential use and 24,000 SF for commercial space.*
- *Design buildings for flexibility and adaptability in the future, including use of structural systems that will allow a building’s function to fundamentally change.*

Culture is always changing. The Life Time Living concept may have a long life as an idea or place, or it may not. During the development phase of the Framework Plan, Comprehensive Plan and Design Experience Guidelines, many attributes of the 200 foot block were explored – primarily focused on its flexibility and ability to accommodate changes in program over time. Mostly, it was discussed as it relates directly to the public realm at the first floor where it was imagined that as needs of the community change, each building footprint would be designed to adapt to new social and cultural needs. The temporal program importance of any block would be designed both specifically and generically to offer long term integration into the structure of community needs and assets. Each block should be designed for below-grade parking that is also connected to adjacent below-grade parking areas to meet changing parking needs. In doing so, this allows the public realm above grade the greatest flexibility to meet social and cultural needs and activities while complimenting the blue and green network of amenities that are intended to be connected to the Promenade stretching from the south end of the district to the Crosstown and beyond.

The 200'x200' grid is the essential ingredient of any new development in the Greater Southdale District. It has clearly not been used as a guiding factor in the proposed development.

Greater Southdale District | Design Experience Guidelines; page 7

3. The Framework

Building Blocks to Support the Vision

THE 200'x200' GRID

There is an expectation of the street grid: it is democratic, it is uniform, it is connective. The uniform grid and the buildings that line the grid give the city its form. The space between buildings is used for access for pedestrians and vehicles; for entrance into both public and private buildings; and to provide light, air, and common green or social spaces.

In addition, there are three Street Room Typologies that apply to directly the proposed development—none of which are referenced or acknowledged in the proposal. As a reminder, a hierarchy of streets and pathways within the district is the framework for public realm development and related building form. Each street across the district has a role in how it serves pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles in connecting sub-districts, adjacent single family neighborhoods, and the overall Greater Southdale District and creating a unified sense of place. It is the intent that street typologies define the public realm experience: the space between buildings, dimensions of building setbacks from the street, heights of facades at the building face at the street and building step backs, where the façade of the building steps back from the volume of the street room. We have included excerpts from the Design Experience Guidelines below, and have included the pertinent pages as an appendix as reminder of their intent.

Greater Southdale District | Design Experience Guidelines; pages 18-19

4. The Guidance

Shaping the Greater Southdale District Experience

Street Room Typology 3: New Local Streets

These are new 60' wide streets internal to existing superblocks. These streets will be constructed as new buildings are added to the district, and will help create the new network of streets and pedestrian pathways throughout the Greater Southdale District. Some of these spaces between buildings may become parks or plazas, extending the public realm. Others will become primary vehicular access for drop off and pick up, as well as access to parking and primary building services.

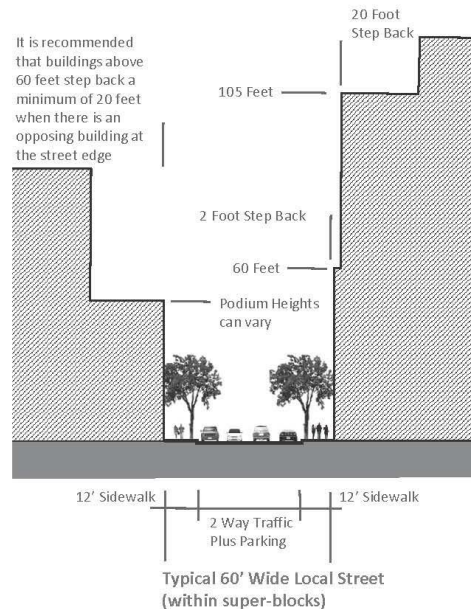
Street Room Typology 5: The Boulevards

France Avenue, York Avenue, West 66th Street and West 77th Street are the district's gateway streets. They carry the highest traffic volumes and are intended to have higher transit volumes than any other streets within the district. These streets will have the greatest impact in conveying the overall identity of the district: a consistent 50 foot setback with a double row of trees will extend the length of these streets, while consistency in building heights along the street edge will form the edge of the street room—bridging between the lower intensity and transitional areas and the higher intensity zones within the Greater Southdale District.

Street Room Typology 6: Central Spine

The Central Spine comprises the existing Promenade, its potential expansion northward, and future connections to the west to Fred Richards Park. This important pedestrian network is an attractive destination for both residents and visitors alike. New development along the spine must respond to and respect this important public amenity.

Dimensional Characteristics of Street Room Typology 3 *New Local Streets*



The street room experience within Typology 3 will be shaped by the following experience guidelines:

- New local streets should be 60 feet in width. Those streets which carry vehicular traffic should comprise two traffic lanes with two lanes of parking or pick-up/drop-off. Sidewalks should be located on each side of these vehicular streets as illustrated in the diagram above.
- Minimizing vehicular access to provide drop off, service and parking can be planned to share the vehicular needs of blocks allowing the remaining spaces between the remaining blocks to be used in a variety of ways for the benefit of the community. This "space between" buildings can be transformed into pocket parks, gardens, play areas, plazas, wetlands, and many other activities that support the health and wellbeing of the community.
- Building podium heights can vary, from 36 feet up to 60 feet.
- Above the 60 foot height limit, the long sides of a rectangular or "L" shaped building need to step back 20 feet from the street room facade (as illustrated in the building at left in the diagram above), and the narrow ends need to step back 2 feet from the street room facade (building at right in diagram above). This minimizes the impact of the taller building form on sunlight at the street, and provides a lower-scale building at the street, resulting in a more cohesive and comfortable pedestrian experience. The footprint on taller residential buildings should not exceed 12,000 SF, while taller commercial buildings are permitted larger footprints of up to 24,000 SF for efficient space utilization.
- All parking, other than short-term retail or guest parking, and building services need to be located below grade or hidden within the building. If on ground level or above, parking and/or building services must be surrounded on all sides by program space such as commercial or housing. Vehicular access to the buildings should be as close as possible to primary superblock streets (e.g. Typology 4 or 5).

Dimensional Characteristics of Street Room Typology 5 *The Boulevards*

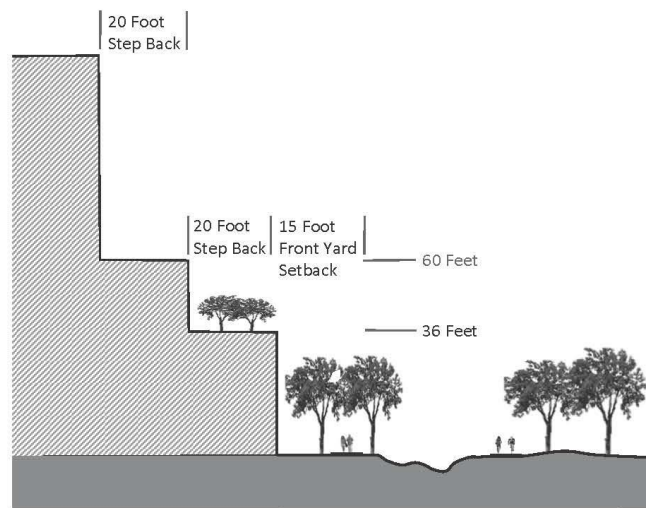


On these wide streets, a sense of scale is maintained by creating a uniform street wall of 60 feet, with taller structures stepping back from this 60-foot datum. This consistency in building heights along the street will form the edge of the street room—bridging between lower intensity and transitional areas, and the higher intensity zones within the Greater Southdale District.

The street room experience within Typology 5 will be shaped by the following experience guidelines:

- On France Avenue, a 50 foot setback is required from curb to face of building with a minimum building height of 60 feet (diagram at left). Above that 60 foot height, the building face should step back two feet to create a cornice line, and can then extend to 105 feet. Above 105 feet, building faces must step back an additional 10 feet (as illustrated in diagram at right, above.)
- Building podiums along these streets need to maintain as closely as possible the 60-foot height limit while still adhering to the guidance of 75% of building face at the setback line to create the fundamental experience of the street room.
- All parking, other than short-term retail or guest parking, and building services need to be located below grade or hidden within the building. If on ground level or above, parking and/or building services must be surrounded on all sides by program space such as commercial or housing.
- Parking and building services should not be accessed via these streets.
- Incorporate 10- to 12-foot wide sidewalks that create opportunities for gathering, outdoor cafes, pavilions, etc.
- Within the 50-foot setback, trees should be planted in a double row to add a strong canopy for pedestrian activity.

Dimensional Characteristics of Street Room Typology 6 *Central Promenade Spine*

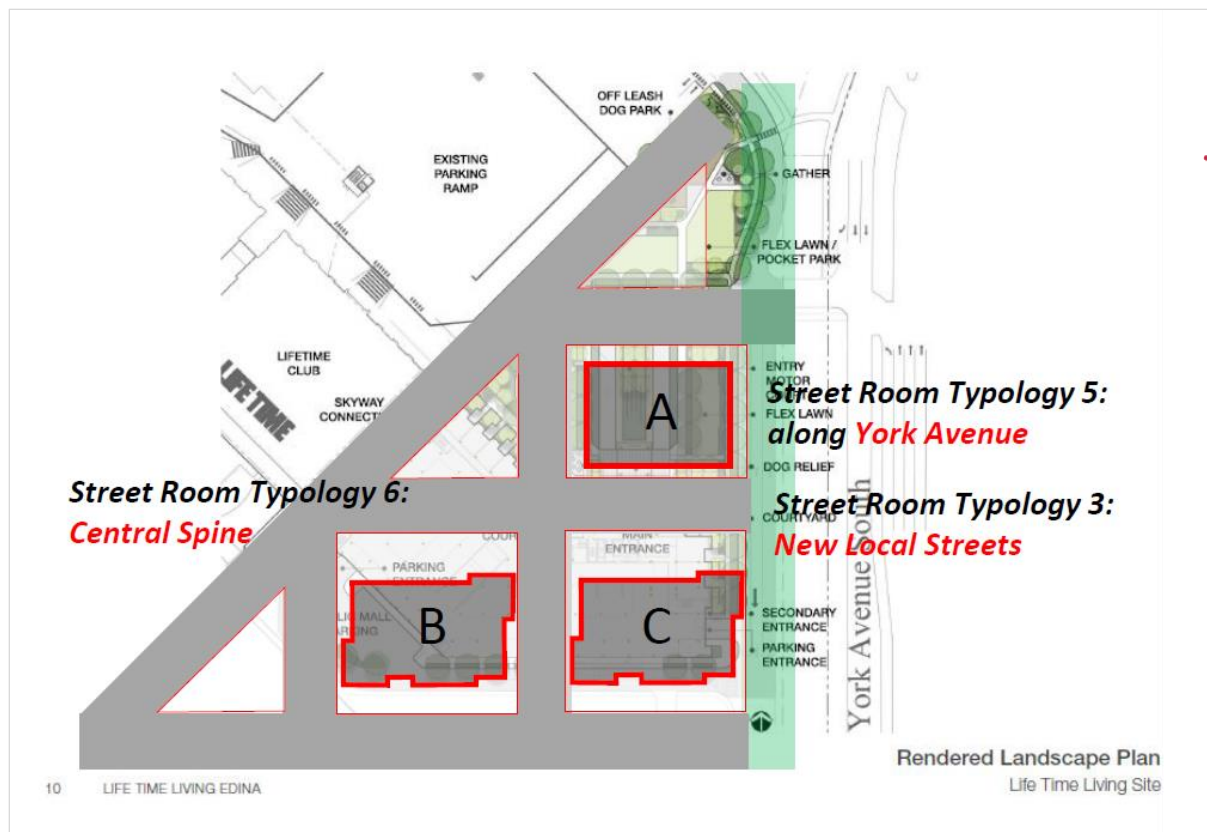


Central Promenade Spine

The street room experience within Typology 6 will be shaped by the following experience guidelines:

- The 36 foot height along the Central Spine encourages a mix of uses focused on entertainment venues such as restaurants, gathering places or community-oriented facilities that provide destinations to come to and stay at. These lower-scale buildings that line the Promenade should reflect its stature as a special community amenity, with a rich variety of architectural experiences that front this park-like environment.
- Above 36 feet, buildings shall step back 20 feet to the 60 foot podium height. Above 60 feet, buildings shall step back an additional 20 feet.
- Buildings above the 60 foot height limit should be oriented to maximize the amount of sun on the Promenade.
- Locations where Typology 6 intersects Typology 4 and 5 are critical to reinforce the idea of the linear public spine that connects this entire district. These intersections are the gateway to the Spine and should have a unique architectural response.
- All parking, other than short-term retail or guest parking, and building services need to be located below grade or hidden within the building. If on ground level or above, parking and/or building services must be surrounded on all sides by program space such as commercial or housing.

At a minimum it is expected the development team would show a proposed 200'x200' grid plan and where the typologies are applicable such as the diagram below. In this three block scenario example each block A, B and C would offer different building heights. For example B and C could be a 8 to 12 story tower and 18 to 22 story tower – all of which are consistent with other taller buildings outside the neighborhood overlay zones. Each podium base could support townhouses that would add a more neighborhood character to the development while site C could offer a lower scale housing block with possible affordable housing, which is not discussed in the proposal. All three sites could be connected below grade to meet parking requirements.



Transit Hub

We do not disagree that moving the transit facility to a more central location, a location that is supportive of greater activity and on the primary pedestrian spine of the district is an important move. The urban plan for the Greater Southdale District promotes pedestrian connections by extending the promenade north through the Southdale Center site either through the mall or around it. It is on this primary pedestrian alignment that a mobility hub would be best suited to be located. The suggestion by the development team that locates it on West 66th, along a primary street disrupts the continuity of the Street Room, with its the 50 foot setback for landscaping to promote pedestrian comfort and primary building site for a drop off and transfer location and on-grade parking lot. ***It is also important to note to the architect that a current site plan showing the entire Southdale Center site to include all existing buildings and how the proposed new development fits with existing road/street patterns would be helpful in evaluating both the proposed building site and its relationship to the transit hub.***

Greater Southdale District Plan – Adopted December 18, 2018

Section 4.2, Urban Design, page 52

Figure 4.5: Concept Illustrating Potential Public Amenities and Mobility Hubs

The strategy for providing public gathering space within the Greater Southdale District includes the following:

- Provide parks within a short walk of residents, workers and visitors alike. These green spaces not only support the health of the community but also become the foundation of common understanding of how individual needs are enhanced by a larger network of green and blue space.
- To support a rich daily experience, these gathering spaces should accommodate a range of activities and activity levels—from casual walking to running to vigorous activity, or simply sitting and people watching.
- Public gathering space throughout the district should accommodate the full life of an individual, making it possible for an individual to live a healthy, complete life without leaving their community.
- Where possible, integrate public art (either fixed or temporary) to enhance the cultural experience.
- Year-round programming of these public spaces can provide for greater variety of use and an ever-changing experience.

Figure 4.5 depicts the location of mobility hubs overlaid on an amenities-location concept characterizing the experience of having destinations and events that are easily accessible from the mobility hubs.

The red dots represent mobility hubs and the yellow circles represent ½ mile walking distance. The intent of the Mobility Hub location is to encourage pedestrians to use the central-spine-like Centennial Lakes Park and or the Promenade as the main corridor to get to events, shopping and home. For residents, the experience of walking home should be the best part of the day, marked by a chance encounter, a pickup game of basketball, or an early meal out. The same can be said for visitors arriving at one the three Mobility Hubs: "It's never too far to walk to where you want to go within the Greater Southdale District!"



Entry Motor Court

It appears from the architect's plan diagram that 30% of the land use is devoted to the roadway leading up to a "grand and formal" entry for residents and their guests with the remaining lawn areas left for possible public use. These park area literally and figuratively fall under the shadow of the 32 story, 400-foot-tall tower, which would make them shaded spaces most of the year. This does not seem appropriate for a shared public realm experience or prone to create a place that would encourage its use by anyone other the occupants of the building (and their dogs). Secondly, it is owned by the residents of the tower since it is formally attached to the tower, and third, any sunny space is two stories above the ground, which is for resident use only.

Architecture Field Office

In addition, as a potential northward extension of the Promenade, this site offers the opportunity to address stormwater as a resource and amenity, adding to the District's 'blue' network.

Greater Southdale District Plan – Adopted December 18, 2018

Section 4.2, Urban Design, page 55-56

Infrastructure as Public Amenity

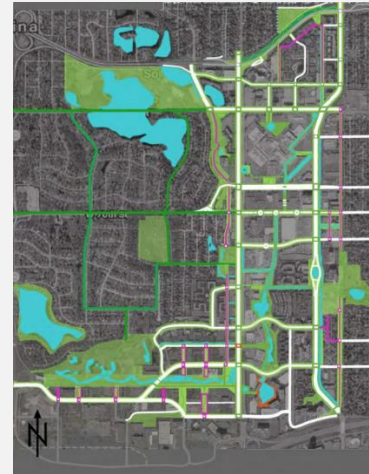
Understanding how infrastructure works—and what infrastructure can be—is an essential part of creating a unique sense of place. When considering the possibility of adding, subtracting and/or adjusting streets, open space and buildings, viewing infrastructure as an amenity becomes an important step in determining a complete vision for the future of the Greater Southdale District.

The District's streets and open spaces, both formal and informal, contribute to the experience of how people live in and use these places. Each street, garden, courtyard, park, and building represent the interconnectedness of a larger district. Each new development influences the other and influences the overall structure of public rooms and the overall experience.

Figure 4.7: Concept Existing and Potential Waterways

The new "blue" network will:

- Manage stormwater runoff as a resource and amenity.
- Provide landscapes, street side planters, or swales that capture and to some degree treat stormwater runoff.
- Replenish groundwater supplies that feed fresh, cool water to rivers, waterways and streams.
- Reinforce place-making for individual sites.



Trophy buildings often have little to do with the community that surround them, and offer little in the way of broader community public realm experiences. I would hope that the development team would take a closer look at the Design Experience Guidelines as a way to reach deeper into the wealth of design opportunities to mold an integrated development that meets the goals of both the developer and the Greater Southdale District community.

Thank you for the opportunity to review. Please let me know if you have any questions.
Mic