

Architecture Field Office

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City of Edina

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

To

From

Mic Johnson, FAIA

Date

January 19, 2024

Cary:

At your request, we reviewed the revised Sketch Plan submission for the proposed redevelopment of the Macy's Furniture Store site 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.

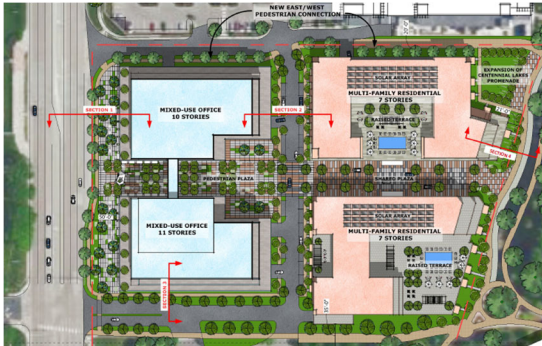
Upon our review of the initial sketch plan concept in March 2023, we were optimistic for the potential of the development and the spirit of its alignment with the community's vision for the District—especially notable given the prominence of the site and its connectivity to important existing public realm assets. We felt the proposed four block concept was working in important ways to meet the Design Experience Guidelines, demonstrating positive attributes as it relates the creation of an active public realm, and general consideration for the neighborhood. However, we are less enthusiastic about the current iteration of the proposal. While we recognize that the primary ask from the development team is related to infrastructure improvements such as accommodations made to connect the development and Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail across France Avenue, we also note there have been significant changes made to the massing of proposed buildings that warrant consideration by the Planning Commission and City Council.

The revised proposal is only presented in plan format with very limited detail—including no references to proposed building setbacks at any location other than along France Avenue. The form of three of the four buildings has changed, in particular that of the southeast building and its relationship to the Promenade. The proposed mixed-use buildings on the east side of the site are far less integrated into the public realm asset that bisects the site from east to west, eliminating the interior public plaza in favor of a road realignment to accommodate a possible bridge across France. Locating the taller mixed-use building at the southwest corner will also cast a larger shadow over the northwest building.

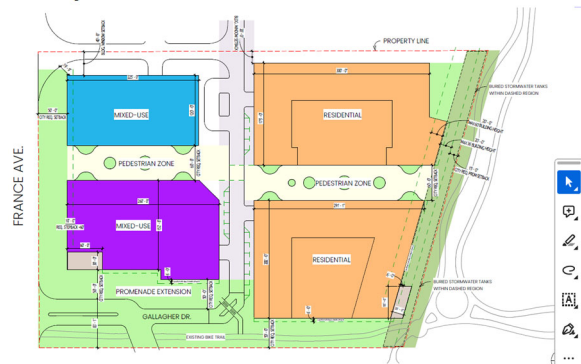
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Following is a graphic comparison between the first submittal of March 2023, illustrating characteristics as outlined in our comments from that project review memo, and the current plan of January 2024, showing the same four block, four building layout without the same detailed exploration of the qualities of the building shapes and stepped facades that was illustrated in the first submission.

March 2023



January 2024



Note the shape of the residential buildings along the Promenade in the March 2023 proposal, where a rich variety of human-scaled spaces were folded into the landscape of the Promenade, creating an integrated building and landscape experience. The configuration of the southeast building from the March 2023 proposal can accommodate a park or a retail pad, or any number of things yet to be determined. It fits well in that it is on the Southeast corner of the site where it opens to great light, which is essential to providing a high-quality experience, particularly in a northern climate. There was porosity between the public realm and public spaces within the residential community, shaping a more integrated experience. There is no longer an accommodation in adjusting adjacent spatial relationships that can determine the characteristic qualities of varied facades, with low-scale building walls along pedestrian corridors that enhance human experience. It appears that the character and shape of each building has been reduced to the bare minimum.

And lastly, the statement made by the development team that identifies specific infrastructure or public realm items for review at this stage in the process is somewhat disingenuous based on the current concept's lack of detail on design attributes that would enhance the pedestrian experience. To

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suggest the community provide feedback on relatively inconsequential elements such as the location of a retail pad when the rest of the project needs further refinement seems premature. Based on the original scheme and further articulation of that scheme, we suggest the upcoming conversations should revolve more around how the buildings could receive amenities into them, such as a park or retail, rather than pick locations that could be anything at any time. The buildings' massing, their relationship to one another, and material qualities that provide continuity while still providing individual expression are all important considerations in expressing the character of what these places might become.

The issue of a bridge over France Avenue should not be a force that impacts these four buildings. It is infrastructure that should be addressed as a larger question affecting the whole city and the Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail corridor. A study is warranted that should look at the whole of France Avenue to determine whether a bridge is even necessary and if so, identify the right location along France.

This is an important, large scale site—one of the most pivotal within the district in terms of its overall impact on shaping the characteristics of a future Greater Southdale District, the focus should be on articulation of a scheme that has strong characteristics that would accommodate all the things that have been mentioned by the developer to move the scheme forward (with the exception of a bridge) and bring it into alignment with the design goals of the Greater Southdale District.

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

Mic