

**Takoma Junction Task Force
Subcommittee A/City Lot Development Meeting
Wednesday, August 17, 2011
Meeting Notes**

Task Force Members Present:

Lorig Charkoudian, Billy Coulter, Kay Daniels-Cohen, Steve Dubb, Seth Grimes, Howard Kohn, Lorraine Pearsall, Susan Robb, Dan Seligman, Ellen Zavian.

Community members:

Roz Grigsby

Guests:

John Urciolo, Jeff Topchik

These notes record important points brought out at this meeting, which was an informal subcommittee meeting was not subject to the Maryland open-meetings requirements. Points are presented grouped by topic rather than in the order they were discussed. The meeting was a conversation however, and so points aren't always consistent.

Potential Environmental Issues

According to John, former City Manager Bev Habada initiated discussions in 1988 with three developers about the Takoma Junction lot. The developers' message was that they would not undertake any kind of development without an assurance that the city would take care of any environmental problems.

Per Jeff, development-wise, "it is not possible to do anything with the site without environmental work."

The back part of the lot, away from the street, is paved over trash and rubble commercially dumped in past decades. Howard Kohn noted that Joe Klockner had talked to Melvin Dawes, who said that the dumped material included commercial waste. John believes that closer to Carroll Avenue is likely to be clean, roughly the area from the back (away from Carroll) of the concrete slab put down for the temporary fire station up to Carroll [extending the back line over toward the TPSS Co-op].

John and Jeff believe it could easily cost \$30-50 thousand to do soil tests – perhaps "\$100,000 or more for boring and analysis" – and developers would still require indemnification or guarantees. It is not really possible to put a cap on potential costs, which could run into the millions. John offered the opinion that it's worth it to the city to spend \$50 or \$75 thousand to find out the status, otherwise (or perhaps regardless), you would really need to use the paved area the way it is, even for community use.

John suggested that the city could do testing on the wooded lot first. If it is a separate parcel from the paved lot, then if environment issues are found, clean-up could be limited to the wooded lot – the "scratch clean-up" required wouldn't be as onerous as clean-up for the paved lot would be – and the city could decide not to explore, not to test, the paved lot. If no significant problem is identified in the wooded lot, the city could then decide whether or not to test the paved lot. Lorraine Pearsall, who consults professionally on environmental assessment and clean-up, cautioned that a site survey should be conducted before a decision to conduct environmental testing is made, including use of aerial photographs to determine the extent of dumping or fill on the site.

Size and Location

John offered that the lot isn't big enough – "The only thing that would make sense now is if the two adjacent business sites were included" (Johnny's auto shop and Healey Surgeons) – to justify a larger

commercial building or the cost of a retaining wall at the edge the developable area, which would need to be at least 25-28 feet, required for a larger building given the nature of the underground material.

Given lot surface area, development would be limited to three stories, or two stories if built over a slab.

A parking lot under grade could make sense if you do have to go deep, in particular as part of environmental clean-up.

Potential Use

John's read is that office space is not in demand, and condos and other residential demand is unknown. Also, identity, including the Ethan Allen address, is a problem for offices or commercial development that would seek to draw patronage from outside Takoma Park, and parking ratios would be a problem if there's significant additional retail (at the site and in the junction), especially a restaurant.

Kay Daniels-Cohen noted that the junction lot was a viable shopping area in the past.

Jeff offered that retail would be the development target. The TPSS Co-op is a community-scale anchor, but not one that brings in people from outside the Takoma community.

One particular idea raised by a participant was "Eco Friendly" shopping, similar to Conscience Corner in Clarksville (<http://www.consciouscorner.com/>).

John suggested that some form of cover for (part of) the lot area – to allow use such as a regular crafts market or a dance area (suggested by one attendee) or a variety of community uses – could be the way to go.