

2/10/2021

Re: Case Number 1-C-21-RZ property on Merchants Drive

Commissioners,

I am writing to share my thoughts on the development that is being proposed for the property on Merchants Drive. As a resident of Norwood for the past 20 years, upon hearing of a potential plan for something to go on this property I was excited. I know that our community could benefit from some new developments. However, the sheer volume that is intended for this property is not conducive to the needs of our residents. While we are very grateful for the open and honest communication from the developers and think that they do have some nice plans, it is simply unrealistic for a community of our size and special circumstances.

We already have many multi-family units in our neighborhood. What is being proposed is double the amount of any that we currently have. We are proud of the diversity of our community and we welcome all types of residents. Many of our residents are economically disadvantaged, and with that, often comes circumstances that can be difficult to overcome. We are trying to come together as a community to help one another and improve the quality of life for our residents. I feel that at this time a large multi-unit development will hinder our efforts and I'm afraid that it could potentially do more harm than good for our community.

As a parent I am also concerned about the safety of the children who walk along Merchants Drive and Pleasant Ridge everyday going to and from school. I witness many children from both the elementary school and middle school walking on the sidewalks, and often on the side of the road that does not have a sidewalk, and I see how close the cars are to them and how fast the cars often go. I'm already so afraid that there is a huge risk for accidents with our current traffic patterns. The thought of what traffic will look like if 250 units are added to this already busy road is alarming. Even half that number would still be very worrisome. I have noticed that there are already several staff needed to safely walk students in the afternoons at the elementary school. Traffic has to be stopped in at least 3 different locations on Merchants in the afternoons, with only 2 crossing guards provided by the city. That means one staff member from the school has to walk out into traffic to stop vehicles just so children can safely walk down the sidewalk to the crossing guard waiting at the crosswalk, as it is a risk to let the vehicles drive by while they're walking.

I have noticed that during pick up and drop off times at the elementary school cars are parked along Merchants waiting in line to turn right as well as cars in the median so they can turn left into the school. This presents a challenge for vehicles wanting to pass. They have to get in the median and cut between both lines just to get through. I can't imagine what this will look like with significantly more traffic that would be added from a large multi-unit development. There is a similar issue with the traffic build up on Pleasant Ridge from the middle school pick up and drop off line. The cars waiting in line to turn right into the school often back up to the light at the intersection of Merchants and Pleasant Ridge. There is also a city bus stop between the school entrance and the intersection. This is already difficult for the current flow of traffic at that location and adding to that seems like it would be an even bigger mess. There are also cars waiting in line on Pleasant Ridge to turn left into the school. There is no median on this stretch of road so vehicles are just sitting in the driving lane, disrupting the flow of traffic. This is dangerous because I've seen cars get caught in that line and then try to pull out into the other lane into oncoming traffic. There is a huge risk of an accident already and the added traffic will only increase that risk.

I understand that it is expected that the development will bring infrastructure improvements. However, from what I can tell, those improvements are already needed; waiting on something of this magnitude to be built is a disservice to the community. Some residents that I have talked to already feel that our community has been neglected. They now feel that the city is planning things that they do not want. It has been mentioned that there are intentions to make the Norwood community an extension of downtown Knoxville and to develop it as more of an inner-city area. I hope that is not the case. It would be very disappointing if those types of decisions are being made without community input. The type of development that is being proposed seems like it is more like the developments going in downtown and in South Knoxville, so it would seem that Norwood is next on the list. I want to be very clear that the residents of Norwood that I have talked to are opposed to this type of plan. We welcome multi-family developments, but we are more interested in seeing duplexes and condominiums, as that would truly be adding something different to the current multifamily and single family housing that we already have.

Lastly, I would like to add that the zoning that is being requested by the developer for this property is not equitable to the community. It financially benefits the developers, but poses disadvantages to the community due to the number of units they're wanting to build. I feel that the residents could benefit if the front and middle section of the property were zoned RN-3 and under special use, so that we could get something with significantly less units and the community is able to give input on it. If this is not possible then I strongly oppose any change to zoning at this time. However, with the way the land is, I do not see ROI being possible for any development other than the front 7 acres that are currently zoned CN. That is something I would like to be remedied. I feel that zoning is wrong and should be changed whether under this developer, or any other, if the property ends up changing hands in the future. The fact that 250 units at 45+ feet high could potentially go in on that front 7 acres under the current zoning is shocking and never should have been made a possibility. I hope we're able to correct this error.

Sincerely,
Charity Elliott