



December 16, 2020

414 E. 12th Street
Kansas City, MO 64106

RE: Ordinance 201050 - City-owned lots at 5th and Main

Mayor Quinton Lucas and Members of the City Council:

The Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) represents residents in the CBD and River Market areas in Kansas City. We have a history of supporting dense, walkable infill development and look forward to the eventual redevelopment of this site.

However, we were surprised to see **Ordinance 201050** authorizing an option agreement on the two surface parking lots at 5th and Main. The neighborhood association strongly opposed the selected proposal for this site in 2014 (see attached letter), and we were relieved to see it not move forward. Since that time, the City has not engaged the neighborhood association on the future of this site, but it is now bringing the proposal before the Neighborhood Planning and Development Committee. This is unfortunate, because **publicly-owned property should have the highest standard for neighborhood engagement and public benefit.**

The RFQ/P for this site is now six years old. So much has changed in Downtown and in the River Market since then. Six years ago, the streetcar starter route had just begun construction. Multiple privately-owned surface lots in the River Market have redeveloped. There was a different City Council with different priorities. City-owned properties at 5th and Main are so much more valuable than they were in 2014. In this context, giving away this valuable site seems particularly short-sighted.

There are many tangible issues that remain unresolved about this proposed project. While the design can be later finalized through development review, every design decision has a financial impact and can therefore impact the feasibility of a project. Oftentimes this leaves the neighborhood with minor concessions at the point of development review rather than the resolution of fundamental flaws in the design program. The current proposal has several issues. It creates a "tunnel" over Main by bridging over the public right-of-way. It ignores the context of new proposed development on the north side of 5th Street, which is also likely to add

significantly more parking, leading to potential additional traffic impacts to an unsignalized intersection off the streetcar line. Additionally, it appears to add a new inactive parking garage facade on Independence Avenue, which the neighborhood hopes to see transformed through the removal of I-70 from Downtown or other measures proposed in the Beyond the Loop PEL study.

In order to provide higher value to the City (either financially or in terms of public benefit provided by the redevelopment), this ordinance should be put on hold and the neighborhood association should be more directly engaged. Ideally, a new solicitation would be issued for this site. The solicitation should emphasize:

- Increasing the share of affordable housing in the River Market
- Aggressive reduction in off-street parking
- Mobility-as-a-Service amenities for residents and the public (e.g. car sharing, rideshare subsidy, bike share) that enable car-free or car-light living
- Quality design that is context sensitive and contributes to the architectural character of the neighborhood in a non-historicist way
- Contribute to the public realm and walkability
- Maintain and encourage pedestrian circulation in the public right-of-way and at ground level rather than enclosed indoor spaces
- Entertain multiple developers for each lot, or even parcel out the parking lot into multiple lots, encouraging more incremental development consistent with the historic character of the River Market.

We encourage the City Manager and City Planning Department to engage the Downtown Neighborhood Association as a partner in the redevelopment of this site. We look forward to working with you!

Respectfully,

Derek Hoetmer
DNA Vice President
for Planning and Development

Josh Boehm
DNA President

Enclosed: December 2, 2014 Letter of Concern

Cc: Mr. Jeffrey Williams
Mr. Brian Platt



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Mr. Bob Langenkamp, AICP
Mr. Claude Page
Mr. Jeffery Williams, AICP
City Planning and Development
414 East 12th Street, 15th Floor
Kansas City, Missouri 64106

Dear Gentlemen:

I am writing on behalf of the Downtown Neighborhood Association regarding the recent Request for Proposals (“RFP”) issued by the City for the city-owned lots at 5th and Main.

This is an exciting time in Downtown Kansas City, with the construction of the streetcar starter line, rehabilitation of multiple historic buildings underway, and a number of new developments moving forward. We are pleased the City recognizes the potential of the 5th and Main parcels to fully contribute to River Market’s vitality seven days a week. They can be so much more than seasonal, one-day-a-week surface parking for our historic City Market.

This is a new, precedent-setting process and it is therefore crucial the City achieve the highest and best use for these parcels. As such, we are concerned both with the RFP requirement to maintain the status quo on parking, and the overall inattentiveness to urban design. As presented, the RFP and winning proposal risk undermining the future success of the streetcar and the City’s proposed transit-oriented development (TOD) policy. The RFP also fails to mention the Greater Downtown Area Plan (GDAP) or the City’s comprehensive plan (FOCUS) and consequently omits critical information about civic expectations, City policies, and the social and physical conditions of the site and its context.

1. The RFP parking requirements conflict with the City’s investment in streetcar and planning goals for walkability.

We are in the midst of a transformation from a “drive-first” city to one where walking, biking, and transit in the urban core are utilized before driving. These parcels should be a poster-child for this shift, emphasizing transit-oriented, mixed-use, high-quality, dense urban infill development that utilizes the adjacent streetcar line and walkable character of the River Market. Such a transformation will have a profoundly positive impact on property values, retail sales, and residents’ quality of life. While this shift has been a strategic planning goal of the City since FOCUS was adopted in the late 1990s, most new development occurring downtown remains auto-oriented.

The City must support a quality pedestrian environment by focusing active uses and amenities at street level, orienting buildings toward the street, and encouraging the transparency, variety, visibility, and interactivity of ground level uses fronting the sidewalk. The RFP and proposed development fail in this respect. Instead, the RFP requires existing parking capacity be maintained, resulting in new parking



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capacity to serve residents of the development. There appears to be a disconnect between the desire for development spurred by the streetcar and the embrace of the streetcar as a catalyst to shift transport modes. Once the streetcar is operational hundreds of parking spaces will become available a short, *free* streetcar ride away from City Market. Leveraging both the streetcar and existing parking assets should be a critical component of the effort to achieve the highest and best use for these parcels.

2. GDAP discourages suburban-style design and parking.

The lack of emphasis on urban design during the RFP process is also disconcerting. The design quality of a project has a significant effect on its long-term financial success and that of the neighborhood. By failing to mention the GDAP or FOCUS plans, the RFP omits crucial design guidance to assist developers in crafting a proposal that harmonizes civic expectations, City policy, and the social and physical conditions of the neighborhood and parcels.

Consequently, the winning proposal touts suburban strip mall and big box development in its project portfolio. This may signify that the developer lacks an understanding of urban design, and how to build a project appropriate to this specific context. The most alarming feature of the winning proposal is the transformation of the north parcel into an unscreened, single-use parking garage—something explicitly discouraged by the GDAP. Best practices suggest designing new parking structures so that they are not visible at street level, but rather underground or wrapped with other uses, including an active ground floor. “Parking podiums”—where new development is placed above structured parking, limiting ground-level activity and “eyes on the street”—are discouraged.

The appearance of the buildings in the proposed renderings is also problematic. Historicist architectural design is explicitly discouraged in both GDAP and FOCUS. Some buildings may be traditional and others contemporary in style, but each must complement the whole through appropriate attention to scale and detail. Traditional-style buildings should not be a caricature of historical styles, or a faux-nostalgic reproduction; rather, they should include the depth of articulation, fenestration, and thorough execution of detail befitting their style while using materials in a meaningful way. True to our City’s strong arts focus, the participation of local artisans/craftsmen in detailing and materials should be encouraged.

3. The City’s RFP scoring and decision-making process is not sufficiently transparent.

Analyzing the individual proposals, it is difficult to discern how each was scored and the weight given to each metric. One reasonable expectation of the City should be to achieve a market rate return on these properties. The parking requirement may inhibit the City’s ability to achieve this. This requirement reduces the flexibility available to developers by forcing them to devote significant project square footage and expense to parking for market patrons, space that will remain largely unused outside of seasonal Saturday mornings.

We sympathize with the desire for local firms to be employed on these projects; however the winning proposal indicates that its developer may lack sufficient experience with this type of project. To ensure that the pool of participants is not artificially restricted, future RFPs should be submitted to Smart Growth America’s LOCUS development network and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Marketplace.



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In closing, we ask that the proposed development be held to the highest standards of contemporary urban development while embracing the neighborhood's character and the streetcar. The developer need look no further than the GDAP for direction on these core issues, and we hope that the City Planning Department uses the same plan to guide decision making throughout this process. River Market is one of Kansas City's most exciting and beloved urban neighborhoods. Well-executed development of the 5th and Main parcels will draw people to the neighborhood not just on seasonal Saturdays, but every day of the year.

Sincerely,

James W. Rice
Vice President of Planning & Development,
Development Committee Chairman
Downtown Neighborhood Association

cc: Mr. Robert Long
Mr. Gary Sage
Mr. Troy Schulte
Councilman Jim Glover
Councilwoman Jan Marcason