

# Downtown Residents Association (DRA) Position Paper on the 708 Church Street Project

In September 2007, the Downtown Residents Association stated its position on the 708 Church Street project:

- The city should not proceed with adopting the project as proposed until the Downtown Plan is presented, approved and adopted.
- It would be in the best interests of the citizens and the developers for the city to postpone its decision until the city considers the benefits of or difficulties with form-based zoning code.

The DRA carefully reviewed the Draft Downtown Plan and presented its recommended changes to the Plan Commission on December 17, 2007. DRA holds that the 708 Church proposed building does not comply with the Downtown Plan as presented, nor to DRA's suggested changes.

## Building Heights and Form-based Zoning

The 708 project does not meet DRA's suggested maximum public benefit heights (maximum height with bonus) in the central core (DC-3). This site should be limited to 30 stories with a maximum of 300 feet.

Also, the proposed building of 49 stories does not conform to the 42-story recommended height with yet undefined bonus benefits of the Downtown Plan, and at 500 feet it far exceeds the existing building heights of Evanston's tallest buildings: the Chase Bank Building (277 feet), Sherman Plaza (276 feet), and Optima Views (265 feet).

Form-based zoning could determine a prescriptive framework for height and architectural design. One promise of form-based zoning is transparency with the opportunity for public review and feedback on a "significant project" as it is developed in the fresh air of openness. In that light, new development would not be subject to "compromised processes" that shade this 708 project.

## Public Benefit Bonuses

The 708 project's contributions to the welfare of Evanston and its citizens are not substantial enough to warrant the developer's variance requests. Strict zoning administrative controls would resolve the variances the developer seeks such as height and the number of loading docks necessary for commercial and residential use.

- Proximity to transportation and TIF potential are realities of the site, not the current proposed 708 project.
- DRA holds that the 708 project development should specify in detail goals toward achieving gold/platinum LEED standards and other quality bonus ideas such as underground parking.
- New replacement plantings along the sidewalk will enhance the pedestrian experience. However, the green landscape promised for the area above the proposed parking section is a benefit to only those who live above this recessed area in the 708 Church Street tower.
- Impact studies on services such as water/sewer, street surface condition, and traffic are incomplete; those the developer has offered on wind, traffic, and appearance are insufficient proof that the project will not seriously overwhelm the area.

- The design and materials for the façade on the above-ground parking floors constitutes un-appealing window dressing that will contrast negatively with the Galleria building and the storefronts along the west side of Sherman Avenue.

The DRA does applaud the developer's acquisition of the landmark Hahn building and the commitment to its restoration. Restoration carries no guarantee that its office space will be preserved and will remain affordable for the current and future tenants. DRA takes issue with the developer's recent request for \$3 million of TIF funds to help with the cost of renovation. This request suggests that TIF funds will be used to support the developer's claim that the Hahn restoration is added to the benefit list.

#### Commercial/Office Development

The DRA views the downtown business district as a prime economic engine for Evanston, and key to the quality of life for the downtown resident community. This project does hold the promise of attracting national and local businesses; however, the promised national chains and higher office rents should add to the economic health of the downtown, not replace economically thriving businesses.

- The current site has 35 professional offices, (27 occupied) that represent 130 service oriented businesses. At street level, 10 robust businesses would be temporarily or permanently displaced by the 708 project.
- The 708 project would result in a loss of 46,000 square feet of affordable Class C office/commercial space.

The 708 project will substantially increase the number of residential units while reducing the number of commercial spaces.

The loss of these commercial enterprises would negatively impact the downtown economy. This cannot be viewed as a public contribution. Where do these stores and professionals do business during construction? Will they return after the project is completed?

Without a crystal ball, no one can foretell the economic health of downtown Evanston when this projected building is totally occupied. Could the new zoning include a quantitative measurement that would determine the size of the residential community for the area along with the number and kind of economic ventures needed to support that population and serve the wider community?

DRA asks that before you vote on this project you carefully consider the opposing reasons the downtown resident constituency and the larger Evanston community have voiced about this 708 Church Street project. In your deliberations consider height, zoning, impact on city services, loss of affordable commercial space, loss of viable business enterprises, economic relationship between commercial and residential, and Evanston character-sustaining, quality architecture as reasons to reject this project as proposed. We ask that you make an enlightened, informed decision.