

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

In public comment meetings in both September 2007 and again in March 2008, the Downtown Residents Association (DRA) stated its position on the 708 Church Street project. In light of the revised project proposal as presented by the developers at the April 8<sup>th</sup> P&D Committee meeting, we would like to reiterate our position:

*The City should not proceed with adopting the project as proposed until the Downtown Plan is finalized by the Plan Commission and presented, approved and adopted by the City Council. As the most significant and visible area of the downtown, this core block should serve as a key example of, rather than an exception to, the City's strategic vision.*

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

A summary of DRA's key objections follow:

## Public Benefits

The public benefits proposed by the revised project have not changed, nor has our position. The 708 Church project's contributions to the welfare of Evanston and its citizens are not substantial enough to warrant the developer's variance requests.

Although we applaud the developer's proposed acquisition of the landmark Hahn Building and the commitment to its restoration, we take issue with the request for \$3 million of TIF funds to offset the cost. We agree with the recent consultant's report that the requested TIF funding should be significantly reduced. We also would like a guarantee that with the restoration, the Hahn Building's office space will be preserved and will remain affordable for the current and future tenants.

## Commercial/Office Space

The current 708 Church site has 35 professional offices that represent 130 service-oriented businesses. Robust street level businesses have already been or would be temporarily or permanently displaced by the 708 project. The project would result in a loss of 46,000 square feet of affordable commercial/office space in an area of downtown that should serve as a key site for a growing entrepreneurial/technology-oriented business base.

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. With today's uncertain economy and depressed real estate values, it does not seem financially prudent to add additional residential capacity to what already may be a saturated market while eliminating occupied, tax-generating office space. Financing for other recently-approved residential projects in downtown Evanston has been unattainable resulting in project delays, extensions, and modifications. What is to prevent this from happening with 708 Church?

Building Heights

The 708 project does not meet DRA's suggested maximum height (with bonuses) in the proposed Central Core. This site should be limited to 30 stories with a maximum of 300 feet. Requiring underground placement of parking would reduce the overall height and also serve as a valued public benefit.

The new proposed building of 38 stories at about 400+ feet still 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).

Conclusion

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 lack of sufficient public benefits, loss of affordable commercial space and viable business enterprises, the economic balance between commercial and residential, height, zoning, impact on city services, and Evanston character-sustaining, quality architecture as reasons to reject this revised project as proposed. We ask that you make an enlightened, informed decision.