



Council Communication

Office of the City Manager

Date

October 13, 2008

Agenda Item No. 65
Roll Call No. 08-
Communication No. 08-609
Submitted by: Larry Hulse, Community
Development Director

AGENDA HEADING:

Approving the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan and adopting the plan as an amendment to the Des Moines 2020 Community Character Plan.

SYNOPSIS:

Recommend Council approval of this proposal to adopt the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan. The plan discusses maintaining and improving the housing stock, enhancing the commercial corridors, land use and zoning analysis, and proposed infrastructure improvements through the Neighborhood Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Amount: \$1,038,070

Funding Source: 2008/2009 Capital Improvement Program, Street Improvements, STR 205 CPO38PWK990000, Neighborhood Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program, page 27.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Background

The Merle Hay Neighborhood Association (MHNA) was selected to participate in the Neighborhood Revitalization Program in July 2006 as a "Transitional Neighborhood". Following their selection, the MHNA formed a planning committee to work with City staff to create a neighborhood action plan. On March 28, 2007, the planning committee and staff held a neighborhood input meeting at the Northwest Community Center. Input from this meeting set the planning committee's agenda for the next 18 months. A second neighborhood meeting was held on August 14, 2008, to present the goals and strategies of the plan.

The Merle Hay Neighborhood is the first neighborhood developed after World War II to enter the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). Because of the unique time period in which the area was developed, the neighborhood requires planning strategies that are slightly different from other distressed, transitional, and stable neighborhoods. The Merle Hay area is still a vibrant neighborhood, but the lack of amenities in the aging housing stock and commercial buildings raises concerns about the long term viability of the area. The strategies encompassed in this plan work to maintain the health of the neighborhood, while enhancing the area for future generations.

Summary of the Plan

The Merle Hay Planning Committee has met monthly since March 2007 to develop the neighborhood plan. The planning committee discussed a wide array of topics including infrastructure, housing, neighborhood identity, commercial development, land use and zoning, traffic and transportation, parks and recreation, and plan implementation.

Maintaining and improving the housing stock was the top priority of neighborhood residents at the input meeting. The neighborhood features modest, well-maintained homes built between 1940 and 1960. However, many of these homes lack the amenities that today's homebuyer's desire such as: second bathrooms, third bedrooms, and double stall garages. The market disadvantage of the housing stock is a concern for the long-term health of the neighborhood as it cycles to a new generation of residents.

The plan discusses two solutions for overcoming this market disadvantage. First, the plan recommends actively promoting and utilizing the NFC to improve the amenities of the housing stock. The neighborhood has been successfully promoting and utilizing the NFC. As of September 30, 2008, the NFC has closed 71 loans in the Merle Hay Neighborhood totaling almost \$2.4 million. Secondly, enhancing the reputation of the Merle Hay Neighborhood is another opportunity to improve the image of the neighborhood. By building a strong neighborhood association and creating events to highlight the area, the Merle Hay Neighborhood can become a place where people want to live and are willing to sacrifice home amenities to live in the area.

Merle Hay has a strong commercial corridor along with several commercial nodes. The proximity to shopping, dining, and jobs is a huge neighborhood asset. However, in recent years, competition from the suburbs has diminished the appeal of the area. It is important to the long-term health of the neighborhood that commercial corridors and neighborhood nodes remain vibrant. The plan proposes working with property owners, businesses, neighborhood residents, and political leaders to examine ways to enhance the commercial corridors. These enhancements may include streetscape improvements, façade improvements, and monument style entrance signs to the neighborhood.

The neighborhood features a diverse network of local, collector, and arterial streets along with multiple state highways. Several improvements are planned for the area. The intersection of Merle Hay Road and Urbandale Avenue will be rebuilt in 2010. The City of Windsor Heights is planning to improve the intersection of 63rd Street and Hickman Road as a part of a larger redevelopment project, which will include a stoplight at Westover Boulevard.

The Merle Hay Neighborhood features two major parks and a future connection to the Central Iowa Trail System. A complete renovation of Riley Park was completed in 2007 and a master plan and renovation for Tower Park is scheduled to begin in 2009. The completion of the Waveland Trail will connect the edge of the neighborhood to the Central Iowa Trail System. Future bike lanes and expanded sidewalks will help connect the rest of the neighborhood to the new trail.

Land Use and Zoning Analysis

A land use and zoning analysis was completed as a part of the planning process. There are three areas where staff recommends changing the 2020 Community Character Plan's land use designation. One area is the location of Riley Park. The plan calls for changing the land use designation of Riley Park from Low-Density Residential to Park/Open Space. The other changes in the land use designations are at the commercial nodes at 49th Street and at Urbandale Avenue, and Merle Hay Road and University Avenue.

The plan calls for changing the land use designation of these areas from Low-Density Residential to Commercial, Neighborhood Node.

The plan calls for two parcel specific rezonings at 6220 Hickman Road, where the recommendation was to rezone the parcel from “C-0” Commercial Residential District to “R1-60” Low-Density Single-Family Residential District and to rezone the parcel at 5739 University Avenue from “R1-60” Low-Density Single-Family Residential District to “C-1” Neighborhood Retail Commercial District. It will be the responsibility of the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association to initiate these zoning changes in the future.

One land use issue the planning committee discussed was the expansion of commercial uses and zoning extending into residential areas. Currently, one of the major drawbacks to redeveloping the commercial corridors is the lack of available space. Merle Hay Road and Douglas Avenue were platted as residential areas. The lots are typically 60 feet wide by 120 feet deep. These smaller parcels make it difficult to provide adequate commercial space that meets current parking and open space requirements.

Because of this, the planning committee believes the neighborhood should consider supporting the expansion of commercial uses and structures onto the “back sides” of commercial areas surrounding Merle Hay Road, Douglas Avenue, and Hickman Road. These proposals would need to be neighborhood-friendly and provide a sufficient buffer between the commercial buildings and the residential neighborhood. This would allow sufficient space for commercial redevelopment while minimizing negative impact to the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program (NIRP) Summary

Planning Committee members along with City of Des Moines Public Works staff examined the infrastructure in the neighborhood. Based on this examination, staff provided an initial list of proposed improvements which was amended and approved by the planning committee. The use and source of NIRP funds is listed below. NIRP funded improvements in the neighborhood should be completed by the end of the 2008 construction season. Along with these improvements, Public Works staff has been working on storm water mitigation issues in the neighborhood.

NIRP Improvements

Street HMA Overlay	\$ 397,100 – CIP NIRP
Curb Repair	\$ 150,000 – CIP NIRP
Concrete Pavement Restoration	\$ 143,000 – CIP NIRP
Sidewalk Repair	\$ 320,000 – CIP NIRP
Slurry Seal Coat	\$ 19,670 – CIP NIRP
Median Island Repair	\$ 8,300 – CIP NIRP
Total NIRP for Merle Hay	\$ 1,038,070 – CIP NIRP

Potential City Projects

- Approval of an Urban Renewal Plan and a TIF District for the area surrounding Merle Hay Mall (approved in Summer 2008).
- Creation and implementation of a master plan for Tower Park.
- Streetscape enhancements near Merle Hay Mall along Merle Hay Road and Douglas Avenue.
- Creation of enhanced entrance signs for the Merle Hay Neighborhood.
- Rebuild the intersection of Merle Hay Road and Urbandale Avenue.

Neighborhood Enhancements Projects

- Build a coalition of business owners, property owners, neighborhood residents, and political leaders to advocate for improvements to the Merle Hay commercial corridor.
- Work with property owners to improve the intersection of Merle Hay Road, Hickman Road and Merklin Way.
- Enhance the annual Riley Park celebration to create a showcase event for the neighborhood.

Approval Timeline

August 14, 2008 – Merle Hay Neighborhood Association Board of Directors

September 3, 2008 – Neighborhood Revitalization Board

September 18, 2008 – Plan and Zoning Commission

October 13, 2008 – Des Moines City Council

October 14, 2008 – Polk County Board of Supervisors

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: July 10, 2006

Roll Call Number: 06-1346

Action: Recommend approval of the Douglas Acres, Drake, Merle Hay, South Park and Waterbury Neighborhoods for selection as Designated Neighborhoods in the Neighborhood Revitalization Program. Staff recommends that Waterbury and South Park be the first two neighborhoods to go through the planning process. Upon completion of those two plans, the City Manager will reevaluate resource availability given current budget constraints to determine which of the remaining neighborhoods is most appropriate given available resources. However, the entire five neighborhoods will be eligible to receive assistance from the Neighborhood Finance Corporation (NFC). Moved by Kiernan to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

Date: March 13, 2006

Roll Call Action: 06-479

Action: Resolution approving recommendations from the Neighborhood Revitalization Program Evaluation Steering Committee to restart the Neighborhood Revitalization Program and to begin research on the creation of a Comprehensive Affordable Housing Policy. Moved by Coleman to adopt. Motion Carried 5-2.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Date: September 18, 2008

Board/ Commission: Plan and Zoning Commission

Action: Recommended approval to adopt the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan as an element of and amendment to the *Des Moines' 2020 Community Character Plan*

Date: September 3, 2008

Board/ Commission: Neighborhood Revitalization Board

Action: Recommended approval of the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Date: June 7, 2006

Board/ Commission: Neighborhood Revitalization Board

Action: Neighborhood Revitalization Board recommendation to designate Waterbury, Drake, South Park, Douglas Acres and Merle Hay to participate in the Neighborhood Revitalization Program with the City providing an implementation plan for neighborhood order and Neighborhood Finance Corporation to be approved and effective by September 1, 2006.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE

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