

## **Concerns regarding the quality of the pedestrian environment offered by the Water Street proposal.**

There is a charm, a sense of place in downtown Naperville, and perhaps the best way to describe it is a small town feel that brings shoppers and diners back time, and time again, to this increasingly rare environment.

To my mind, there is no question that the atmosphere of our downtown is almost unique. I'm sure we all know that the charm and economic vitality of our downtown is the envy of many towns and cities. This is something rare, and something to be protected at all costs.

I am concerned that the Water Street Proposal fails to live up to the example, and standards of our downtown, in both new its construction and old. I disagree with its claim that it will be a pedestrian friendly development for the following reasons:

The developer has attempted of maximize the space for structures by minimizing the street, sidewalk, and plaza; the public spaces. Amazingly, they are asking for a 9' vacation of the Right Of Way that will be added onto the building on the South side of Water. All of the Right Of Ways, or the distance between buildings downtown, is 66' or greater. If approved the distance between buildings on Water will be just 57'.

The rationale that reducing the width of the street will cause it to have an European, "Old World" feel, is wholly unpersuasive to me, and reminds me of the old joke about the best defense is a good offense. Unless we are all going to trade in our cars for Mini's, and overlook cars parking on the sidewalk as you see all over Europe, the result will be an uncomfortable pedestrian and vehicular experience, especially when you consider having 5 story buildings on both sides of the street. If you read about Urban Planning today, one of the most important themes is the extensive use open or green space, with generously sized sidewalks to make the area pedestrian friendly, there is simply no accepted rationale for narrowing a street this excessively when you consider the proposed height of the buildings.

The buildings on the south will jut out in front of the existing Moser Bldg in two steps, 2' at the Moser Bldg., and the remaining 7' after the pedestrian passageway. The reason given is lots are too shallow for retail and garage depths without the additional 9'. The results of this decision are as follows:

## Width of sidewalks are inadequate.

Compare the proposed width of the sidewalks and parking vs. the new in Downtown Naperville, Main Street Promenade and the old, Jefferson at Main.

For Water St. the total for parking and sidewalk envisioned is 17'

### South side of Water St.

10' sidewalk and 7' wide parking stall (Variance required to reduce width of stall from 8') Clear width is 8' past the planters.

### North side of Water St.

9' sidewalk and 8' wide parking stall **There is only 5', yes 5'** clear width past planters. This is the width of the sidewalk in front of your house.

Main Street Promenade has essentially a 20' wide sidewalk **BEFORE** any parking stalls, comprised of an 11 ½' clear width sidewalk, 6' wide planters, and a 2' buffer at curb. All before the parking stalls. This allows for comfortable strolling, and the space between the planters allow people coming out of Hugo's to wait for the valet attendant without blocking the flow of passerby's. This is an excellent example of the current thinking of how you create a pedestrian friendly streetscape. There is simply no reason why this can't be accomplished on Water Street.

You could put Water St's sidewalk AND parking on Main Street Promenade's sidewalk and still have 2 ½ ' left over. This is simply inadequate, and will not create any kind of pedestrian friendly atmosphere. Quite the contrary it will feel narrow and cramped. So the question is which will serve the needs of the shoppers and diners better, and entice them to return again and again? Main Street Promenade or Water Street?

On the North side of Jefferson at Main it is much the same, the sidewalk here is 17' wide and as we all know allows for a very pleasant pedestrian experience. People can get in and out of cars without interrupting the flow of pedestrians. People can walk comfortably next to each other and pass other couples going in the opposite direction with ease.

## **The heights of the buildings are too tall for the width of the street and the plaza.**

Here I am reproducing the comments made by a planner I discussed the project with.

1. ***The height and massing of the building will inhibit pedestrian activity:*** *Given the mixed-use nature of the project, residents, planners and developers can likely agree that fostering new street activity will be crucial to the project's success. Unfortunately, it is far too tall relative to the street and will discourage pedestrian mobility. Water Street and its sidewalks, for example, have been planned at 57' in the site plan given to me. The cornice line on both sides of this street is just above 52', but the slight setback actually puts the top floor of the project at 61' just beyond that cornice line. As a general rule, buildings taller than the width of their street tend to discourage pedestrian activity. The height of the buildings relative to Water Street is probably best illustrated by the massive shadows it casts on PC-4 of the site plan.*

In the same vein is the plaza is even a worse example of to narrow a space between buildings. The width of the plaza is 47' between the buildings to the south and 39' between the buildings on the north. So we have quite a narrow plaza that I fear is significantly overwhelmed by buildings that are 60' and 72' tall beside it. All the concerns about the pedestrian friendliness of Water Street itself are magnified here, as instead of 57 feet apart they are on average 43' apart.

Again let me quote my young planner. These are his statements when he was of the understanding that the plaza is 50' wide, not an average of 43'.

***The Gateway Fountain fails as a plaza concept:*** *Only 50 feet wide, the massing of its neighbors ensures that the Gateway Fountain will not succeed as a public space. Public spaces tend to fail when surrounded by shade and canyon-like human development. This is problematic, as desolate public spaces tend to discourage human activity, which in turn can increase crime and vandalism. Naperville does not need a poorly planned plaza space immediate to its Riverwalk.*

This is troubling in and of itself, but when you consider this is right on the riverwalk, the crown jewel of our downtown, it is imperative that anything built here is clearly an asset to the riverwalk and an example of excellent pedestrian design.

Lastly, I note his comments about desolate public spaces possibly increasing crime and vandalism. I will say that my wife looking over the plans was concerned about the pedestrian tunnels from Water Street to the parking garage behind. Frankly, she wasn't too keen on the parking garage being so isolated. Her comment was she would not feel comfortable in the passageways, alley, or the garage itself late at night. She immediately contrasted this to the Van Buren or the Chicago decks which are right on a busy public street. It's these details of making people feel safe and comfortable that often make the difference in whether a project succeeds or fails.

**Buildings are too close to the river walk, and will forever change the character of the river walk for the worse.**

The Naperville Township Bldg. is 48' from the river at the West corner and 53' from the East corner. The structures that will be torn down are 24.5' at the west corner, 22' where the two buildings join and 13' at the east end. The Theatre Bldg. is to be from 32' to 36' from the river and the Loggia from 29' to 30'. This is simply too close to be respectful of the importance Naperville places on the river walk today. The thought of 5 story buildings this close is extremely troubling. I will be an armchair architect here, but to my mind the plaza as designed is nothing more than a large walkway between the two buildings. I would place the plaza, with its water storage under it, at the rivers edge. You will get a larger setback from the river and the plaza, acting as an integral part of the river walk, would be lovely. Talk about pedestrian friendly!

**11' wide traffic lanes will create congestion, and frustration with people attempting to park and delivery trucks.**

There are not any dedicated delivery areas for trucks except for the connected 8' wide parking stalls on the North side of Water, supposedly to be restricted to early hour delivery only. This is being sold as a "temporary" solution as when the North side of Aurora behind this development is developed, they plan on asking for 2' as an easement for a wider, now 20' wide alley, for delivery's there. Still, remember this is the only access to the parking facility. I question the ability to safely have drivers accessing the garage while large delivery trucks are blocking a lane of the alley.

In closing, it seems that this proposal is a big time rule changer, in height, density, and for the first time a significant reduction in the ROW, this proposal is a significant change in course from Naperville's distant past as represented by Jefferson between Washington and Main, but also the present, as Main Street Promenade illustrates. It's up to you, and the council, to decide if it is in the best interests of Naperville, and its citizens.

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