



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Planning Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: The Urbana Plan Commission

FROM: Matt Wempe, Planner II

DATE: December 15, 2006

SUBJECT: Presentation of Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Neighborhood Plan – Prepared by the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association

Introduction

The Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association (HEUNA) has submitted the attached neighborhood plan for consideration by the Urbana Plan Commission and City Council. As stated by HEUNA, the purpose of the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association Neighborhood Plan (HNP) is to “facilitate discussion regarding the history, present use and future of the portion of Urbana in which we live.” Additionally, the plan is a statement of what is important to the neighborhood.

It is not a formal City-sponsored neighborhood plan. In preparing this plan, HEUNA did conduct a process of collecting input from residents, holding discussions about the plan, and submitted a draft document to the City for staff review and input. The HCP details a number of concerns, including preservation of neighborhood character, property maintenance standards, infrastructure needs, brick sidewalk restoration, incompatible infill development, and the lack of bicycle trails through the neighborhood. The plan specifically states how such concerns are impacting the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood and provides recommended solutions.

Since the HNP has been submitted as a statement of what is important to the neighborhood, not as a formal plan, staff is simply asking the Plan Commission to review the document and to recommend whether or not the City Council should accept the plan as an informational tool for future community development efforts in the neighborhood.

HEUNA Neighborhood Plan

The HNP was drafted with the intent of supplementing the goals, objectives, and implementation strategies of the 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan. HEUNA started work on their plan in late 2004 by gathering input from members, collecting data, and holding general discussions. A draft plan was formulated by December 2004, and a final draft was submitted to the Planning Manager and the Community Development Services Department in late January 2005 for review and comment. The City was concurrently completing work on the 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan, which included a number

of recommendations for the east Urbana neighborhood. In mid 2006, the Planning Division asked HEUNA to submit an updated version of the HNP that could serve as an informational tool for future planning efforts in the neighborhood. HEUNA once again collected member input and submitted a revised final draft to the City in November 2006. It is this revised document that is attached for consideration.

Trends and Issues

A number of specific trends and issues for the neighborhood are presented in the plan. The plan is summarized below, and is available in its full form in the attached HNP (see Exhibit A).

“Wear Down and Tear Down.” Poor upkeep of single-family residential properties may lead to their eventual replacement with higher density development that is inconsistent with a “small neighborhood aspect.” HEUNA advocates for both regulations and incentives that will prevent the spread of this problem.

Incompatible Zoning. Properties north of Green Street are currently zoned for higher-density residential development. This zoning is inconsistent with the majority of properties in the area which are single-family homes and encourages incompatible development.

Incompatible New Development. The result of several identified trends and issues is new development that that is inconsistent with the existing character of the neighborhood.

Property Maintenance. A significant number of homes, especially in the northern part of the neighborhood, are in need of repairs. Such repairs would require investment from both residents and the City, and may include funds from federal, state, and local programs. Some properties also have general maintenance issues, such as overgrown vegetation or household articles strewn about the yard. The neighborhood supports consistent code compliance and enforcement.

Infrastructure Needs. There is a significant need for infrastructure improvements, including storm sewers, curbing and sidewalks. A number of areas lack effective storm sewers resulting in hazardous conditions during winter months. HEUNA supports upgrading curbs, gutters, street lights, and sidewalks on all streets. Additionally, the preservation of brick sidewalks is a major issue for the neighborhood.

Vision

The HCP details a vision for the neighborhood, and includes a number of initiatives to address current and future needs. Each of the elements of the vision is discussed below, and relevant existing City plans, programs and policies are also discussed.

Neighborhood Identification Signs. HEUNA has successfully raised money and coordinated with Public Works to install signs at the entrances to the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts. The HNP promotes the use of neighborhood conservation districts (NCDs) in the east Urbana neighborhood. Any NCD ordinance should include design review similar to the MOR Zoning District and property upkeep standards.

As directed by the City Council as part of a larger report on neighborhood preservation, Planning staff is currently drafting a NCD enabling ordinance. This ordinance will establish the procedure through which neighborhoods may petition the City to establish individual NCDs. Under the proposal, the City will provide technical assistance to help craft a specialized NCD that will address the specific needs and desires of each participating neighborhood. A draft version of the ordinance should be presented to the Plan Commission and City Council in early 2007.

Incentives. As part of a NCD, the HNP supports a property tax rebate for participating owners. However, all properties in a NCD must comply with the specialized regulations. Planning staff will create educational materials that will complement a NCD application to ensure that all property owners are aware of the potential impacts.

Neighborhood Commercial Development – The HNP recognizes that there are limited opportunities for in-neighborhood commercial uses. Commercial zoning currently exists along the periphery of the neighborhood, and any future development should be compatible with surrounding properties. Properties along the north side of East Main Street are zoned B-3, General Business, while there is additional B-3 and B-1, Neighborhood Business zoning at the corner of Washington and Philo. A number of successful businesses are located in the neighborhood, including a restaurant, several auto-oriented operations, an animal hospital, a bakery outlet, and an auto repair facility.

Brick Sidewalk Restoration. A number of brick sidewalks exist in the east Urbana neighborhood, and the City along with HEUNA has already undertaken successful restoration efforts. The HNP advocates for measurable yearly progress in additional restoration and maintenance by Urbana Public Works.

The Urbana Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) identifies existing brick sidewalks that are protected by City ordinance. Brick sidewalks located adjacent to properties zoned R-1, R-2, or R-3 must be replaced with brick. Brick sidewalks in other areas may be replaced by either concrete or brick as requested by the adjacent property owner. The CIP identifies a number of sidewalks in the east Urbana neighborhood north of Green Street that will be replaced in the next five years. The proposed downzoning study (see below) may impact which sidewalks will be required to be replaced with brick per City ordinance.

Infrastructure Improvements. A number of streets in the east Urbana neighborhood are without curb and gutter, which creates problems with stormwater runoff/flooding and improper parking. The HNP recommends that the City accelerate the construction schedule for improvements, especially north of California Avenue. The CIP indicates a number of projects that will take place in the east Urbana neighborhood within the next ten years. This includes repairing the main storm sewer line that runs through the neighborhood, as well as a number of storm sewer installations. Green Street will be reconstructed, and will include new sanitary and storm sewers.

Bicycle Paths and Greenways. The HNP promotes the development of bicycle trails and walkways through the neighborhood. The *Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan* largely focuses on the construction of paths in the developing parts of the community. There are very few formal bicycle trails in the older portions of the City. This issue has been raised by a number of City Council members, and helped spur the creation of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. One of the tasks assigned to this group will be to create a bicycle master plan focusing on the creation of in-city trails and paths.

Pocket Parks. The HNP advocates for the expansion of public parks through the creation of “pocket parks” on vacant lots purchased by the City. In general, there are a minimal number of vacant lots in the City. There are also limited funding opportunities for lot purchases, most of which are supported by HUD programs. When lots are purchased, the City typically works with affordable housing developers to increase the number of such units within the City.

Public Art Placement. HEUNA supports adding public art in the neighborhood. The City has recently hired a public arts coordinator, who is in the process of identifying areas where art could be integrated into the community.

Tree Preservation. The HNP advocates for the preservation of large oak trees in the neighborhood. The City’s Arbor Division has a number of programs aimed at helping residents plant, grow, and maintain landscaping. Additional protection measures as necessary can be discussed between the City Arborist and HEUNA.

Waste Hauling. This service is privately contracted by residents, and any changes would need to be initiated by the neighborhood with service provider cooperation.

Existing City Plans, Programs, and Policies

A variety of plans, programs, and policies are related to the recommendations of the HCP. An overview of the plans, programs, and policies and how they related to the HNP is below.

2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan includes a number of goals and objectives that are related to neighborhood preservation, Urbana’s unique character, utilities, and community development programs. Many of the same issues the goals and objectives address are outlined in the HNP:

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| Goal 1.0 | Preserve and enhance the character of Urbana’s established residential neighborhoods |
| Goal 2.0 | New development in an established neighborhood will be compatible with the overall urban design and fabric of that neighborhood |
| Goal 12.0 | Preserve the characteristics that make Urbana unique |
| Goal 13.0 | Capitalize on Urbana’s unique heritage as a community with a mix of urban and small-town features. |
| Goal 33.0 | Provide maximum service and dependable utilities |
| Goal 39.0 | Seek to improve the quality of life for all residents through community development programs that emphasize social services, affordable housing and economic opportunity |

- Goal 40.0 Make affordable housing available for low-income and moderate-income households

- Goal 43.0 Provide for the distribution of social services to Urbana residents with diverse needs

Future Land Use Map #10 encompasses the “Historic East Urbana” area and largely identifies future land uses that reflect current land uses (see Exhibit B). The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the desirability of neighborhoods adjacent to downtown Urbana, and the need to determine appropriate zoning and regulations in these areas that will encourage desirable development as determined by the neighborhood. Additionally, various areas that have inconsistent zoning and land uses, particularly north of Green Street, should be addressed. Planning staff has begun a downzoning study, as discussed below that will address both issues.

HEUNA developed their neighborhood plan concurrently with the Comprehensive Plan which involved extensive public involvement. Accordingly, the HNP and Comprehensive Plan identify many of the same issues and present similar strategies for mitigating neighborhood concerns.

Community Development

The Community Development Services Department is undertaking a number of initiatives related to neighborhood preservation both city-wide and in the east Urbana neighborhood that pertain to implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. These initiatives are discussed as follows:

Neighborhood Conservation Districts. At the direction of the City Council, the Planning Division is currently preparing a draft NCD enabling ordinance. Under the proposal, City staff can provide assistance to neighborhoods that wish to propose a NCD.

Downzoning Study. As identified in the 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan and the HNP, there are a number of areas north of Green Street in the east Urbana neighborhood that have inconsistent zoning and land uses. The majority of properties north of Green Street are currently zoned for multi-family residential, although most properties are used for single-family homes. The Planning Division has begun to study the possibility of rezoning properties to reflect their current uses and the future land use identified on Future Land Use Map #10. This study is anticipated to be completed in 2007. The study will include extensive public participation to ensure that property owners are supportive of any zoning changes.

Housing Investment Corporations. As part of a larger study on neighborhood preservation, the City Council directed staff to investigate the potential for private, non-profit housing investment corporations (HICs). Initiated, funded, and maintained by private citizens, HICs are a grassroots effort to achieve a specific outcome, such as historic preservation or increased owner-occupied housing. The Planning Division hosted one workshop on HICs in November 2006, and will hold another in early 2007. Staff plans to provide technical assistance to neighborhoods wishing to set up HICs, including help establishing non-profit corporations.

Rental Registration Program. The City Council is currently holding hearings on a proposed rental registration ordinance. This program would require all rental properties, including single-family housing, to register with the City. A small fee would be assessed that would fund an additional housing inspector to increase the frequency of rental property inspections. Similar programs in other cities have shown to have a noticeable impact on the upkeep of rental properties.

Grants Programs. The majority of the east Urbana neighborhood is located in a community development target area, as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The determination is based on the percentage of low- to moderate-income residents located in a Census block group. Residents in target areas are eligible for a variety of social service and housing programs. Select programs are defined below:

Whole House Rehabilitation: Targeting homes that are in need of significant repairs, this program provides a grant/loan up to \$25,000 to qualified homeowners. City building inspectors determine all necessary repairs required to meet current building codes, and the Grants Management Division coordinates contractor bidding. There is currently a two to three year waiting list for this program.

Emergency Grant Program: This program is available to very low-income homeowners in need of repair of health or safety items, such as defective mechanical equipment, electrical or plumbing problems, building components and surfaces. A maximum of \$5,000 is available per household, and applications are subject to funding availability.

Senior Repair Services: Senior citizens 62 years or older may take advantage of this program that offers up to \$850 from a non-repayable grant. The program offers “handyman” services, such as repairs to furnaces, plumbing, porches, or steps.

Community Development Block Grants: The CDBG program is administered by HUD and is intended to benefit low- and moderate-income residents. The City has the flexibility to design its own program objectives and procedures for program administration and to develop criteria for selection of grant subrecipients. The City has decided to focus its activities to those that principally benefit extremely low- and low-income persons. The City’s CDBG program is intended to supplement the efforts of organizations in initiating and/or engaging in a community development purpose. Recent projects have included stormwater infrastructure improvements in the Scottswood neighborhood (in cooperation with multiple local government agencies) and the installation of streetlights on Webber Street in the east Urbana neighborhood.

Public Works

The Public Works Department has several programs that benefit the east Urbana neighborhood. These are described as follows:

Property Maintenance. The Environmental Control Division is tasked with enforcing exterior property maintenance standards in the City Code. In addition to specific standards, maintenance issues that cause “visual blight” can be considered violations, though require extensive documentation. The enforcement process is detailed below.

1. Observation/citizen complaint received
2. First notice sent to property owner (7 days to comply)
3. If not the violation is not address, Urbana Public Works will hire a contractor and charge the property owner the cost of cleanup
4. If the cleanup bill is not paid within 30 days, the case is forwarded to the Urbana Legal Department

Infrastructure Improvements. The CIP identifies a number of projects in the east Urbana neighborhood slated for completion in the next 10 years. This includes sanitary and storm sewer improvements throughout the neighborhood (especially in the northern portions) and sidewalk restoration/replacement.

Sidewalks are addressed as part of the annual CIP, which identifies a number of brick and concrete sidewalks in the east Urbana neighborhood that will be restored or replaced. Restoration of brick sidewalks is discussed above.

Options

The Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association Neighborhood Plan has been submitted as a statement of what is important to the neighborhood, and not for adoption as a formal City-sponsored plan. As such, staff is asking the Plan Commission to review the plan and consider whether or not to recommend that it be accepted by the City Council as a tool for future City-initiated community development efforts in the neighborhood.

The Plan Commission has the following options for recommendations to the City Council.

1. Forward a recommendation that the City Council accepts the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association Comprehensive Plan.
2. Forward a recommendation that the City Council does not accept the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association Comprehensive Plan.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Plan Commission review the attached HNP and recommend that the City Council **ACCEPT** the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association Neighborhood Plan as an informational tool for the Historic East Urbana Neighborhood.

Prepared by:

Matt Wempe, Planner II

Attachments: Exhibit A: Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association Neighborhood Plan (HNP)
Exhibit B: Future Land Use Map #10 – 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan

CC: Scott Dossett
501 E. High Street
Urbana, IL

Chris Stohr
405 E. High Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Tyler Finch
503 E. California Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801