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To: The Ad Hoc Committee, Reinders Property

Subj: Thoughts from Last Evening

Dear Committee Members,

I attended last night's meeting and thought you might be interested in the thoughts of one resident (make that two, as my wife agrees).

I thought the committee seemed confused about its role, when to recommend something, and what to recommend. Upon further reflection, this makes some sense. The role of ad hoc committees is never crystal clear and there are bound to be different opinions from different citizens.

I thought the developer was a little desperate to gain some direction. They have obviously invested time and resources and are anxious to move. I think it is obvious, as well, that the developer/partner has a prime piece of property, and their goal is to maximize return on investment. This led to a discussion of max density, and it was clear to me that the max return comes with max density, and that the developer would like to push the limit, either based on the code or what residents will accept.

I think it's clear to everyone familiar with Elm Grove, that the village has a certain character. I remember my first drive thru, upon moving from out of state, and I thought, "This is beautiful!" I was most impressed by the green, the trees, the large lots, and the open space. I also think it is clear to all concerned that the proposed development does not neatly match up with much of the other residential areas of the village. I did a quick calculation. The proposed development has 40% green space. My typical Elm Grove property has 95%+. My property has 1.3 units per acre. The proposed development has 17-20, depending upon how the calculation is made. Now I am not suggesting that a multi-family property should match the parameters of a single-family property, but the **large difference in magnitude** is, I think, worth considering. I will get to that later. The point, for now, is that there is a difference.

Another big difference is that the vast majority of Elm Grove properties are owner-occupied, even most of the multi-family properties. The fact that the proposed development contains 150+ rental properties is concerning. I don't think many would argue, that, on average, owner-occupied properties create fewer problems. While Wangard may be a great property manager, and may keep things up, what happens when Wangard decides to flip the property? Or what happens in 27.5 years when the depreciation allowance runs out, making it more attractive to sell this one and invest in new property? Who owns it then? What will their reputation be? The issue of owner vs. rental occupancy concerns other residents I have spoken with, as well.

The issue of downtown attractiveness, let's call it downtown "cool" came up. Tosa is cool. Elm Grove downtown is not. It has developed willy-nilly into a hodge podge. There is not a traffic flow pattern that favors cool. There is not a pedestrian flow pattern that favors shopping. The buildings are not placed right. You can walk west from a cool Irish pub, then to a chain restaurant, then a large multi-family, then a gas station, then railroad tracks, then a bridge, then a large expanse of asphalt...you get the picture. What COULD be a cool area is a vast expanse of asphalt serving a post office, some shops that do not face the street, an ill-conceived and hard-to-reach complex (890), a large food store, then a memory care center and a community theater. Not that there is anything wrong with those businesses they are just not convenient to access in a "cool" way.

The developers seem to indicate that by plopping a rental complex with 300-400 residents in the middle of all this that it will become cool. I have my doubts. If 7500 people who basically live within walking or biking distance of downtown have not already made it cool, will an additional 300? The developers indicated that they will have a hair salon, a pizzeria and maybe a coffee shop. Is that really going to have any measurable effect on downtown cool? Well, development will follow, they say. How? Where? What kind? It may be like Tosa, they say. Uh-uh. Tosa was already developed in a way that allowed it. Then big swaths of housing were knocked down. You cannot compare the two. Our downtown is a hodge podge, and the proposed development, on its own, will not fix that.

I would propose that two alternatives might be considered, as follows:

### **The Safe Way**

I would have the committee request that the current property owner to come forward with a development that included owner-occupied, two story town homes, patio homes...whatever you want to call them. Possibly 2-3 units per building with a nice surrounding yard. Trees, landscaping, etc. On-level garages. Included might be a few retail shops, a restaurant, and coffee shop at one end. If you subtract the area occupied by the "silo building" and perhaps an acre for the retail shops/parking, you might have something like 7.5 acres to work with. You could put 25 such patio homes on the property and each would have about 0.33 acres per building including garage, sidewalk, deck/patio and driveway. That is pretty dense by Elm Grove standards. Come to think of it, maybe 20 homes because you need streets. Well, something in that area. Advantages? Fits the Elm Grove "character" of more open space, owner occupancy, more typical building height, etc. Plus it adds maybe 50 residents, who could easily walk to existing businesses. I think if the homes were attractive, you'd get very little push back from the community. Safe, attractive, minimal disruption of traffic.

### **A More Risky, Time Consuming Way**

IF downtown cool is really a goal (is it?) then the logical way to proceed is with some kind of master plan. What is going to make it cool? Festivals? Venues with entertainment? Fine dining? High class food trucks (yes, they are very popular in some areas)? A gazebo with seating for concerts? How do you achieve cool? How would this be accomplished? What can be done with existing properties to create some kind of reasonable traffic and pedestrian flow? How would this be financed? What buildings would have to be purchased? At what costs? What kind of financing could be used? What kind of private/public arrangements could be made? Tiff?

Once SOME KIND of master vision is in place THEN decide if a three story, 150 unit rental complex fits. My guess is that if you made the necessary changes outside of the development, the 7500 residents of

Elm Grove (and some from neighboring communities) would make downtown a destination. But that is just me.

Here is the problem with proceeding along the current path: While I agree with John Galanis that SOMETHING needs to be done with downtown you are trusting that a big, some might call it outsized, apartment complex is going to lead to some type of further development to improve the village and its business climate. Really? Why? Because people who are renting demand it? My father would have called this a pig in a poke. Build something huge and you will get something? Will it be cool or traffic problems? I think there is a lot of conjecture. And, I think it is better to either take a safer path or a well-planned path.

I think the biggest point is that you, the committee, is really only looking at ONE alternative...a large rental property. Focus is how big you want it to be. There are other alternatives that perhaps should be the focus. The village has the right to determine what goes in there. If this development is to somehow feed a master vision, then what is the vision? If that cannot be determined, then do something safe.

That's just my opinion. I am not trying to denigrate the work of the committee or the developer. In fact, I think that it is only fair to give the developer guidance as quickly as possible. Maybe it is not their cup of tea to develop patio homes for sale or to wait for a master plan. Maybe they would rather move on. Or maybe they'd be interested in being part of either. I think the question needs to be asked.

Yours Truly,

Bill Armstrong