

# December 3, 2019 Memo to Planning Commission from Citizens For Northville regarding the Watermark Cady Street Apartments Concept

To the Planning Commission (December 3, 2019) -

Following are key points, comments, questions from the Citizens For Northville for consideration by the Planning Commission in assessing the Watermark concept proposal presented at the November 19 Planning Commission Meeting.

## Key questions:

1. Is the Watermark concept the best use of the Cady Street property for Northville? Do we have data to determine what is the best use? Are we just guessing otherwise?
2. Is it wise to consider for approval the Watermark concept adding 300 apartments in an area of about 9 acres, without having developed the concept for the balance (about 39 acres) of the Downs Property? Would approving projects incrementally for the Downs property result in a less than optimal result?
3. Who will own and run the apartment complex? Watermark stated that they tend to own and operate their developments, but not always.

## Key concerns:

- the same high density of the June proposal is still the case with this most recent concept. For example, adding 300 household units in only 19% (9/48) of the Downs total property. The same infrastructure, traffic, etc. concerns expressed earlier this year remain.

Regarding Key question #1 above:

Sally Background Studies data from the November 5 PC meeting and citizens comments in brackets:

- 65% Single Family Homes {That leaves 35% for Condos and Apartments}
- 72% of housing units 2 or 2+ adults without children
- an assertion that young people might want apartments
- an assertion that empty nesters want to age in place (ie. Their current Single Family Homes), but those that do not, have no place to go? The inference being that they would be attracted to apartments. {For 60-80 year olds, highly doubtful}
- an assertion that young people and empty nesters are seeking affordable housing in Northville. {Would the Watermark concept be considered affordable or high end apartments?}
- {No data presented on married adults with children who want a Single Family Home and can afford one in Northville. It's as if these people no longer exist}

## \*Below is "2018 Building Permits Issued" data found on the SEMCOG

website: <https://semcog.org/housing#76290-residential-construction>

- Note for Oakland County: 60% Single Family Homes, 12% Condos, 28% Apartments. Wayne County (exc Detroit): 67% Single Family Homes, 6% Condos, 26% Apartments. {Northville from Background Studies data: 65% Single Family Homes, 35% Condos and Apartments}

## \*Other data as of 2017 from <http://www.city-data.com/city/Northville-Michigan.html> :

- The median age of Northville Citizens is 46 years. See age distribution below. 2800 housing units in Northville.

- So apparently, Single Family Homes are still in demand and are certainly still in demand in Northville. {The "Background Studies" material would have you conclude otherwise.}
- The current makeup of Northville's housing units is right in line with those of all of Oakland and Wayne (exc Detroit) County most recent building permits.

#### **Other Questions:**

1. If the current Northville housing mix is in-line with that of all of Oakland and Wayne (exc. Detroit) Counties, is Northville underweight apartments?
2. If there is a continued strong demand for Single Family Homes in the two counties, isn't that also the case for Northville?
3. Would the addition of the Watermark 300 apartment concept on the Cady Street property throw Northville's housing mix out of line with that of Oakland and Wayne (exc Detroit) counties?
4. Even if a case can be made for adding 300 apartments in Northville, should such apartments be located on the Cady Street property?

#### **Other General Comments from citizens:**

- regardless if the Downs is developed or not, the traffic issue needs to be addressed. What is the City waiting for?
- Many comments regarding the need to capture the vision (and many visioning suggestions) for the entire 48 acres through the re-opening of the Master Plan prior to any approvals.
- I do not feel that the initial development should be apartments. I am not sure that Northville needs more apartments, especially in that precious location. Downtown property is in strong demand currently, but for homes, not apartments.
- We only have one chance to develop this area with a strong mix of parks, river walk, and space for our farmers market.
- Northville does NOT need 300 more apartments (way too many!) and on that particular property. I am almost 57, and I would never consider living in an apartment to downsize, as I continue to age... I had my fill of "apartment living," in my 20's and some 30's, and no matter how nice (Or upscale) they are, at my age, the smarter financial move would be to buy a smaller home or condo, versus renting. (I did too much of that when I was younger and couldn't afford a down-payment on my own to buy versus rent).
- But here we are again....with another proposal that creates just too much density - ough!
- So my opinion is we should not go ahead with 300 apartment units now if ever if we want to keep Northville, Northville and we should not move ahead with this or anything with this without seeing how the reopening of the master plan proceeds.
- Additionally, the thought of opening "Hutton" up as another main artery North/South thru Town, is very challenging:
  - o given the FPCN preschool that has their main entry for upwards of 120 preschoolers on Cady at the corner of Cady & Hutton...increasing the density of traffic at that intersection is an accident waiting to happen...my opinion.
  - o especially north of Cady...considering the closeness of the sidewalk on the FPCN side to Hutton and the very narrow driving space between Longs and FPCN where perpendicular parking spaces exist...it was not designed to handle, from my perspective again, significant constant traffic both ways...
- Watermark appears to be a very good potential partner to work with, but the density they propose (as many have mentioned) is too much, which is 280 Apts. and 20

Townhomes inside of 10 acres. Also, the previous comments stating that you can't properly evaluate the impact of the Watermark proposal without a plan relative to the remainder of the property is spot on (40 acres). In terms of the Watermark's proposed density, I believe 100 residences is the max.

- .....makes me think the City of Northville would be wise to hire a community development consultant to consider their options and get guidance on how to manage the process. "Once in a century opportunity!!"
- I think that the first thing that has to be determined is the traffic flow in and around the city. It just seems to me that before the city can start planning on density issues, types of units, number of units and the total usage of the Downs area they need to have a plan for how the traffic patterns are going to effect the area. I think the roads should be done FIRST, not during or after the construction of many of hundreds of new apartment, condos and homes. Traffic is a nightmare now I can only imagine what it would be like during construction or after there are hundreds of more homes in the area. To summarize, whoever is responsible at the City they should start the ball rolling now about analyzing the traffic problems so they can make an intelligent decision about all the other issues they are going to have to decide on that are going to be effected by the traffic.
- regarding traffic: while the City of Northville has stayed status quo the Township has not. The only reason we have been impacted as we have with the current traffic issue is because of the construction going on around our city and not within our borders. Currently the Township has 2 projects being built that are quite similar in size to our one. So we have been given a problem which is caused by others and before we can go forward we must solve. One important question should be is what is the township willing to do to help us resolve this overwhelming traffic problem they have created?

### **Specific Comments from Kathy Spillane:**

1. Many people (including the Planning Commission) have expressed that they struggle with making sense of the Cady Street development without knowing what will happen to the rest of the Downs. That tells me that we should not have two separate overlays in the Master Plan. The two areas are far too inter-connected. In addition, I believe the east side of S. Center should also be included in this overlay. Cady St., the Racetrack area and the east side of Center St. should be master planned under one umbrella.
2. The Master Plan calls for the greatest density along Cady St. and a gradual reduction as it moves to the south. This is not yielding a good result. The old proposal and even the concept sketch that Greg showed us are producing similar patterns. In both cases, it is driving enormous parking requirements in a concentrated section of the property. It also concentrates the inbound and outbound traffic in a smaller area. The density goals have to be dispersed away from Cady St. There are many small, exemplary, towns in the United States that *intersperse* their single family and multi-family housing. I can send you pictures of these clever layouts that combine greater density along with more public green space and beautiful streets.
3. I would like to have our local real estate experts (Northville, Novi, Plymouth) weigh in on the demand for apartments and other housing types. They have more contact with people who are looking to move into our town. What's flying off the shelves? What is not? I'd ask our local builder as well.
4. I have yet to see these proposals provide sensitivity to the terrain and pattern of the site. The Master Plan should resist the urge to jump straight to the building types and instead work with the natural features and views from surrounding roads.

If you walk the site, imagine that there were tall apartment buildings running east and

west on Cady. I think the effect is rather imposing to someone who is standing on the Racetrack level. Kind of like Castle Doune.

Alternatively, imagine standing on 7 Mile, there is the historic, Presbyterian Church. Why would we shield it from view? Most exemplary towns use terminating vistas to create interest. I think we're missing a perfect opportunity to do this. Imagine if the south side of Cady in front of the church were a public space framed by some type of buildings on each side. There could be a fountain, a green area moving down the hill and a small park the lower level. This would be visible as one enters town, and would acknowledge the importance of our historic identity.

If one stood in this new public space, looking south, the restored river area should be the terminating vista. That would be a very scenic view from the Cady St. level.

So, all of this suggests that a north/south axis is a strategic part of this development. It does not have to be all street. I don't think the right place for this is to the west of the property.

5. There was a lot of concern about the preschool drop off/pick up. I would suggest a traffic calming boulevard in front of the church. Cady could be slightly curved and widened in this area to accommodate this. I do have some concerns about running Church St. into the development. This is due to the presence of Starbucks. Would this drive an excessive number of morning commuters into the neighborhood?
6. I agree with the suggestion to locate some restaurants near the river. Great ambiance. This also relieves the center of the site of some of its parking and traffic issues.

**Comments from Patti Mullin:**

What I believe the downtown area is in short supply of is some temporary housing such as what Main Centre offers. Many homeowners that are in between homes or even snow birds are looking for short term commitment housing that is of high caliber but does not need a mortgage or long term commitment. I think the planned condos on Cady street are going to be a wonderful addition but there are only 6 planned and those are long term housing. I receive several requests from homeowners that want to live in the downtown area for a short term while they build or until they find a home to purchase. I think that if the density can make sense, we can offer this housing to residents and bolster the shops, restaurants and businesses with residents in a walkable community.

Thank you,  
Bill Poulos  
Citizens For Northville  
248-345-1878