



JASCULCA TERMAN
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

River Forest Community Dialogues – 9.11.24 – 7700 Block of Madison
Notes from Resident Comments

Who was in attendance?

- 5 residents
- Matt Walsh (Village Administrator)
- James Chase & Nell DeCoursey Brennan (Jasculca Terman Strategic Communications)

River Forest General

- Appeal of River Forest:
 - Connected, close-knit community.
 - “Small town feel.” People know each other.
 - “Charming”
 - Quiet
 - Lots of greenery
- Guests express that small town feel is changing.
 - Some parts of River Forest not as quiet.
 - Some parts of River Forest feel more like the surrounding villages.
 - Traffic has increased.
- River Forest needs to bring in younger families. For a healthy future community, the Village needs to attract the next generation of longtime River Forest residents.
 - There is very little housing currently on the market in River Forest. Especially housing that is affordable to young families.
 - Note: Guests clarified that “family” housing is inclusive of housing geared toward young couples without children.
- Parking is a concern throughout the village. Not just near Madison St.
 - Even so, proximity to Madison St. makes parking issue more acute than in some other parts of Village.
 - Small businesses without their own parking rely on customers having access to nearby street parking. This has already become a struggle in some areas, including near Madison St.
- Strong desire for more restaurants and other amenities, so residents can go out in River Forest. Guests express that they usually must travel to nearby villages for shopping, dining and entertainment. They would like more options within River Forest.
 - Travel distance is one consideration, but guests also like to support local businesses in their own community whenever possible.
- Guests prompted discussion of River Forest’s comparatively higher property taxes:

- Guests fully understood property taxes would be high when they moved to River Forest. Understood it was a trade-off for good Village services and quality schools. So, while nobody likes to see taxes rise, they always knew this was “part of the deal.”
- Guests also see paying higher property taxes as an investment in maintaining the character of the community.
 - A guest expressed that higher taxes are part of the price one pays so the community “stays like it is.”
 - In discussing goals for development in the Village, guests assigned low priority to lessening property taxes. They have heard and understand arguments for development that expands the tax base. However, they say they are comfortable paying higher taxes to avoid development that “changes the character” of the area.
- Some discomfort from guests living in a TIF that property tax increases are going to TIF fund instead of schools.

Concerns re: Madison Street and Empty Lot

- Living close to Madison St. is a “double-edged sword.” Nice to be close to retail, but also have to deal with noise, traffic, safety issues.
- Noise carries across Madison St. from Forest Park side.
 - Prior building on lot acted as a sound barrier. Noise is much higher now.
 - Nearby residents want the Village to take sound absorption into account when considering development proposals.
 - Much of the noise comes from late-night patrons of Madison St. businesses on the Forest Park side.
- Near-term asks for the Village to undertake with Madison St. lot, while empty:
 - Landscaping. Grass, bushes. Keep space better-groomed.
 - Upgrade to a nicer looking fence. Ensure fencing can keep people out of the lot—currently, people step over the fence to let their dogs run free/use it as a bathroom.
 - A recent positive: Village improvements on the lot have significantly reduced flooding.
 - Question from guest: Could River Forest Police help tamp down on late-night noise from patrons on Madison St.?

Future Lot Wants/Concerns

- Guests overall express that they very much want to see the Madison St. lot developed.
- Housing:
 - Desire for resident-owned housing. Concern that renters aren’t here to stay in the community long term.
 - Good with townhomes. Good with condos. If condos, want them to be geared toward families. Opposed to studios and other condos geared toward single occupancy.

- Opposed to a “high rise” or a “big building.” 5 stories feels too tall.
 - Example given of a building that’s too big: Condos on Forest Park side of Madison St., across from the lot.
 - Example given of an acceptable building: Condos at Gale and Madison.
- Strong desire for onsite resident parking.
- Want a visually pleasant addition to the neighborhood. Attractive building. Greenery. Trees.
 - Important for housing to look/feel like River Forest. Key word to consider when reviewing development proposals: “Charming.”
- Though some neighbors are concerned about outdoor space and privacy in their own backyards/homes
- Retail:
 - High-end retail would be nice, but guests acknowledge it may not be feasible at that location due to lack of density and general problems facing brick-and-mortar retail.
 - A nicer convenience store. Already plenty 7/11-type options nearby. Would like a White Hen or something of that nature.
 - A nice restaurant. Broad appeal for families, couples, singles, etc.
 - Some recent restaurants in the area have not succeeded and may have closed even sooner if not for video gambling onsite. If restaurant is interested in space, make sure it’s geared toward the local market and has a chance to succeed.
 - Village should consider how retail customers will affect nearby parking supply.

Other

- Idea from guests: Speak with real estate agents in the Village. They may have valuable perspective to share.
- Guests expressed a recognition that many of their wants and concerns are related to Village-wide issues or even issues stretching beyond Village boundaries. The hyperlocal issues around Madison St fit into those broader issues.
 - Related theme: Village should take a “holistic view” to development in this area. How does development fit into the Village’s larger, long-term plan? “What’s the Village’s vision?” Guests want to hear that whenever Village communicates about development and/or zoning.