

Notes from the March 19 meeting of the Committee on Land Use and Economic Development O'GARA'S SITE redevelopment

Dan O'Gara, the current owner of O'Gara's, and Tony Barranco from Ryan Companies presented on preliminary plans for the project, which includes demolition of current O'Gara's buildings and construction of a new O'Gara's with apartments above.

Dan's father expanded the main bar in 1982 and the nightclub in 1985. While the nightclub used to be heavily used, Dan indicated that "those days are gone," and he's got 20,000 square feet that rarely is full. He is facing competition from taprooms and other restaurateurs, and his building is aging. Although it has been an emotional decision for the O'Gara family, to stay viable and keep O'Gara's on this corner, they need to "reinvent ourselves." Their roots are as an Irish neighborhood bar and restaurant, and they'd like to return to those roots. So, the proposed project will entail:

- A new O'Gara's anchoring the corner, that will be 4,000 to 4,400 square feet (similar to current main bar, holding about 300 people). O'Gara's is the only retail proposed on the site.
- High quality rental housing options similar to the Vintage, in an overall project about half the size of the Vintage. They leased the Vintage "way faster" than they anticipated, and have a mix of demographics there, including a lot of empty nesters. So, they see continued demand in the area, and are proposing approximately 150 units.
- Parking for residential uses will be below grade; commercial parking will be embedded inside the building on street level.
- The original O'Gara's building, the Shanty, and three houses adjacent to the current parking lot would be removed. The Hague-facing part of the building will include some housing (walk-up units) and site access.
- They would like to start construction in late 2018; ideally, O'Gara's will reopen before St. Patrick's Day 2020.

Comments and Questions from the Community

- ***Can't you save the façade of the original building?*** The team reported that it is financially impossible to save the façade and incorporate it into new construction – the cost would have tripled. There is community interest in designing the corner to look exactly as current one does.
- ***Isn't it a missed opportunity, not to have other retail on the site? Small local shops give this neighborhood its character.*** The team reported that it is a space issue. A community member noted that "O'Gara's could have left. We could have had CVS on this corner. Thank you for staying here."
- ***Adding 150 units can mean 300 cars. People cut through residential streets any way they can to avoid the congestion at the main intersection. Can the city insist on contributions to traffic calming? Can we look at one-way streets on Hague?*** The team recognizes that traffic is difficult in this area. They will do a traffic study and create a Traffic Demand Management (TDM) plan to submit to the City. MnDOT is in the mix, too, as Snelling is under MnDOT's jurisdiction. Community members noted that they need to consider the impact on the surrounding area, not just on the immediate streets. And, there was concern expressed about delivery trucks on residential streets.
- ***Please consider how you will encourage and incentivize people not to drive to this business. How could you encourage people to walk, bike or bus?***
- ***There are serious pedestrian safety concerns here. Is this an opportunity to make the Selby-Snelling corner safer for pedestrians? The corner of Saratoga and Hague is also very dangerous.***

- ***There is a need for affordable housing in our community. We would love it if O’Gara’s staff or Whole Foods staff could afford to live in this building.***
- ***We are lamenting the loss of three historic homes.*** The team is looking into moving them, and has met with Better Futures Minnesota to discuss potential de-construction of the homes and reuse of the elements.
- ***Is there contamination on the site?*** There were \$700,000 worth of cleanup costs at the Vintage. The team has been taking core soil samples at the O’Gara’s site and is looking at environmental impacts now.
- ***We’d like to see the memory of Charles Schultz preserved, perhaps through public art.*** The O’Gara’s have a lot of Schultz memorabilia, which they intend to incorporate into the new bar.

There were some comments opposed to increased development and density in the area, and concerns about solar access for surrounding properties. Many others supported the development: “I like more housing. We live in an urban neighborhood.” The sentiment was expressed that development creates an “active, vibrant” place to live and provides more establishments to walk to. There was a request for more green space incorporated into the development. There also were opinions expressed both for and against the continuation of O’Gara’s shuttle service.

There was a sentiment that it is great that we are partnering with two local businesses for this corner. “There’s a track record here that gives me great confidence.” Union Park intends to help set up a task force, similar to one established during the Vintage project development, to figure out transportation issues, especially around traffic volume and flow, and pedestrian safety.

Tony and Dan will be back to future meetings, and they will have some open houses for more immediate neighbors. They will bring a site plan that incorporates community feedback in the months to come.