

## **President's Report**

**April 12, 2012**

### **Valentino's Block**

The ECCO meeting held at Valentino's March 29<sup>th</sup> to hear about plans for the block was well attended. My husband counted 65 people in attendance, I counted 55 so I will call it 60 people. We had a sign-in sheet but not everyone attended. I explained to the group that the purpose of the meeting was to find out what was planned for the development and to get community feedback from the neighborhood. I expressed ECCO's appreciation of the willingness of WRK and Valentino's to share their conceptual plan with us and get our input at this early stage in the planning.

Valentino's not only offered us meeting space but provided a very ample buffet and boxes to take home the leftovers. Many were wishing they had not eaten dinner. Tony Messineo, Anthony Messineo, and Mike Alesio from Valentinos were all there. Tony said it wasn't easy to decide to relocate Vals and staying on Holdrege in the East Campus neighborhood was important. He emphasized that many of the characteristics and décor from the existing restaurant will be in their newly constructed building, including the Pizza sign.

From WRK, the developers, were Jordan Berger and Kent Seacrest. They provided an overview of the project but emphasized that the designs to date are still very preliminary and will change. No permits have been obtained. The current conceptual designs include a new Valentino's restaurant (3500 square feet) and two 8200 square foot three story buildings with shops on the ground floor and either offices or apartments on the second and third floor (see attached designs). The height of the buildings would be similar to the new AGR Fraternity House. The apartments would be upscale with 2-3 bedrooms designed to discourage a dormitory style lifestyle. The concept is to create "a little pocket of main street." WRK said they intended to maintain ownership of the building and added that with the Innovation Campus nearby, they see this part of town as being a very good place to invest.

The current plans also call for blocking of 35<sup>th</sup> Street between Holdrege and Starr Street. In addition the project has asked the city for TIF funds. Mayor Beutler was very insistent that if the project were to receive TIF funds, they would have to make improvements to Idylwild Drive medians and Idylwild Park, including arrangements to maintain these areas in perpetuity. To obtain TIF funds, the area will be declared "blighted", which basically means that the area needs improvements. The "blighted" area will include the Valentino's block and Idylwild Street itself and the median. The houses outside of the Valentino's block along Idylwild Drive will not be in the area designated as blighted. Valentinos and WRK will also contribute money to this project with Valentinos contributing 150,000 to create a maintenance trust fund to take care of the median and park. The Duplex at 1405 Idylwild, which is an historic building, will be maintained and rehabilitated.

The hope is to break ground this summer. Once started, WRK hopes to complete the project in eight months.

A number of people asked questions and made suggestions. In general I thought the project was well received. No one spoke in opposition to the project or to blocking off 35<sup>th</sup> Street, but many were concerned about doing something to prevent traffic from exiting the parking lot and traveling south through the neighborhood. A suggestion was made to design the exits from the parking lot to encourage cars to go immediately to Holdrege. Establishing a break in the median on Idylwild to allow cars to turn north would be required. Other comments related to improving the design of the parking lot and adding trim to the buildings.

The shops on the first floor would be designed to serve East Campus and the neighborhood. WRK asked what types shops people would like to see in the building. Suggestions from the neighbors included a coffee shop, small whole foods store, and a beauty shop.

The next steps will be for WRK to apply for permits. WRK will also be forming a committee to design Idylwild Drive. ECCO will be included in the planning meetings. Richard Sutton was also asked to help in the finalizing of the designs. We are very lucky to have Richard in ECCO.

Another outcome of the meeting is that ECCO received some publicity (see the news article) and new members. Tony Messineo said he did not know ECCO existed and said he would join. He also agreed to help fund Discover ECCO. The next day I got a call from the owner of the apartment building to the west of the development, 1405 Holdrege. He wanted to join ECCO so that he could be informed about activities in the neighborhood.

Following the meeting I also talked with David Landis, from the City of Lincoln, and told him there were no objections to blocking off 35<sup>th</sup> Street at the meeting but that people were concerned about the traffic exiting the project through the neighborhood.

### **Easter Egg Hunt**

Several folks have thanked me for ECCO's contribution to the Easter Egg hunt. I have also been told that the delivery of the ECCO newsletter before Easter was a big help. My understanding is that the event was attended by around 150 kids, who all got a stuffed toy.

**Newsletters:** A big thanks to Brian Striman and Rebecca Carr for pulling the Newsletter together and to all who delivered the Newsletters: Mary Eisenhart, Roy Maurer, Denny McCumber, Danielle Shea, Peter Bleed, Tom Madsen, Marcus Plouzek, Gary Gerking, Matt Perlinger, Patti Piersen, and Rebecca Carr.

### **Insurance**

To help the Board get a better understanding of the issue of purchasing insurance, I sent an e-mail out to all the neighborhood associations in Lincoln. Out of a total of 46 neighborhoods, a total of 17

responded and of those 17, two UPCO and the Country Club, have insurance, two are considering purchasing insurance and 13 said they do not have insurance. One respondent told this story:

In my 25 yrs involvement, we were sued one time and one board member's home-owner's insurance paid the legal fee. It was a bogus suit. Child Guidance used ENA as an example--they sued us claiming we interfered with the right to fair housing for teen boys who were sex offenders & had gotten in trouble w/ the law in other ways also. We didn't think they should be housed in a group home in a neighborhood where they had the freedom to walk out anytime they wanted. It was a mess, bottom line-Child Guidance wanted to open several group homes for juvenile sex offenders & didn't want neighborhood associations to interfere. The case was dropped. There was no charge. But their tactic worked, other neighborhood associations backed off.

## **Parking**

I received an e-mail from Marvin Kraut, the Planning Department Director regarding parking for fraternities and sororities. The Department is now planning to establish a defined "Greek Row" area that has an exception of no parking required. In other words, treat it like downtown because of its similarities – metered, short-term on-street parking that prevents the problem of spillover parking (similar to how you have discussed the possibility of a parking permit program for East Campus), and UNL controlling the surrounding garages and lots. Apparently UNL thinks this will work for them, so we are going to meet with UNL and those houses in couple of weeks, and then expect to come back to the Council with that "exception area" as another amendment.

Marvin Kraut also mentioned that Ed Patterson of the Malone neighborhood also communicated to me and his Councilmember Carl Eskridge that he did not want us to reduce fraternity parking requirements for the east side of the City campus. Apparently they have problems similar to ours. He also indicated interest in setting up a parking permit program and seems to have done some of his own research on the subject. There is a possibility that staff of Public Works, Police, and Urban Development may host a meeting with staff and representatives from ECCO and Malone to discuss the parking permit idea further. Wynn Hjermstadt thought she would try to do that. So you may hear more on that in the next month.

## **Mayor's Neighborhood Round Table**

There were two major topic of the Mayor's round table was a discussion: feather signs and dealing with dilapidated properties.

Feather signs are those vertical banners that flap in the wind. They are not legal, but the city has not tried to enforce the existing sign codes. The question the Mayor asked is what should be done about these signs. He does not like having laws on the books that are not being enforced. Opinions among the folks around the table varied from we don't like them because they quickly become faded and ripped and no they should not be banned because they are useful.

The city does have a process for going after dilapidated properties. There is a \$250 fine and a three strikes and you get an injunction policy – i.e. you have three chances to get in compliance, but if you

fail you can either be put in jail or the city can get a court order to go in and clean up the property. You are then under a permanent injunction. The latter process has been used successfully.

People can complain to the city and can do so anonymously, but action is not swift and can get complicated. There was discussion about a session to train neighborhood volunteers to help document problem properties for the city,

Submitted by

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