

Westport High and Middle – Phase II Meeting

Thursday, September 15, 2011
All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church
5:30-7:30pm
12 attendees

The following is a summary of the discussion/feedback from the Phase II meeting for the Westport High and Westport Middle school sites:

RECAP OF SITE TOUR FEEDBACK

During the site tour, the district received great feedback about community needs and reuses that could address community needs. Key things that the district has noted from the site tour discussion:

- *Desire to attract and retain young professionals and families to area; reuse of buildings could be an engine to inspire investment in housing stock*
- *Concern about vandalism/graffiti issues and overall maintenance of building and grounds*
- *Buildings are a gateway, symbol of the area, desire to maintain the architectural integrity for neighborhood image and character*
- *Size of buildings is daunting – worry about how this might limit reuse opportunities*
- *Variety of reuses discussed including: education – ranged from college extension, adult education), community arts/theater, housing, administrative office for KCMSD*

Participants confirmed that this was a good summary of the site tour feedback.

REUSE FEEDBACK

Based on the technical assessment and feedback from the site tour, several types of reuse have been identified as viable options for Westport High and Westport Middle. The following provides a summary of the community feedback received in discussing reuse options.

Overall, due to the sheer size and magnitude of Westport High/Middle and the anticipated cost to redevelop/operate the facilities, participants stressed the importance of financial stability/viability of any entity/group(s) interested in these buildings, regardless of type of reuse, as reflected in the discussion points below:

Community feedback on Educational Use:

- The participants were open to an educational use from an entity with a proven, successful academic and financial track record. Participants encouraged the district to seek partnerships with Kansas City Art Institute and UMKC based upon their proximity to Westport High and Middle and the neighborhood preference for an educational reuse.
- There were several concerns raised by participants that would need to be addressed by groups interested in the site:

- The neighborhood's perspective is that the district was not invested in the community (schools closed without community support and lack of attention to the grounds since the schools have been closed)
- Need to demonstrate sustainability- track record
- Parking for Westport High- off-street in neighborhood would be an issue

Community feedback on **Residential Use:**

- Residents expressed concerns about residential use, based on their experience with the new development along Armour Blvd, which has included a significant number of Section 8 housing and associated crime, negative effects. In addition, some participants were concerned about residential reuse increasing the density of the area (this concern was not shared by the entire group)
- Any residential proposal needs to be from a stable organization with a proven track record
- Additional feedback:
 - Market rate condos (viewed as more stable)
 - Market rate rentals also acceptable, although condos viewed more favorable
 - Parking needs to be ample and well thought out
 - The reuse of the buildings should act a gateway that can attract additional businesses and investment into the area
 - Single family houses could be built on the back side of Westport High, replacing the current track

Community feedback on **Mixed Use:**

- Participants were supportive of a mixed use development, if the proposing group is financially stable. Many participants were concerned with the potential for deterioration with the property if the tenant does not succeed.
- If funding could be secured, the participants were open to a community center or business incubator as part of an overall redevelopment project.

Community feedback on **Commercial Use** – office, retail, non-profit, community center

- Participants would be supportive of a commercial reuse that would make the area more walkable (walk to work/shopping).
- Participants were open to cultural arts center, arts incubator, or community center that is connected to a stable organization.
- Participants did express concerns about several aspects of a possible commercial use: amount of money to redevelop school, parking, track record of group, financial stability of group.

Participants indicated that of the reuses that were discussed, the following would be their priorities:

1. Educational
2. Residential
3. Commercial

DEMOLITION

For every site, the district is gathering community feedback on the possible demolition of the building.

Community feedback for **Demolition**:

- The participants were not supportive of demolition for the sites. The district should evaluate all options before considering demolition an option.
- Participants suggested that the district could donate the building to entities that can support the size or donate the tract to Gillham Park.
- Out of the two buildings, participants emphasized the presentation of Westport Middle because it has more architectural features.
- This will be a painful conversation to have with the neighborhood in the future, but should be done if any demolition is being considered.

SOLICITATION PROCESS

The district has a few options available to it when it disposes of surplus property:

- Choose to sell or lease
- Use one of three methods to sell/lease (as required by state statute):
 - Market a property through a broker
 - Formal bidding process (award to highest bidder)
 - Negotiate directly with a community group/governmental agency

During the meeting, participants were asked to provide their feedback on the solicitation process. The following summarizes their feedback/comments.

Community feedback on **Solicitation**:

- Participants indicated that using a broker would be the best opportunity to market Westport High and Middle.
- There was no preference for a sale over a lease. Preference should be given to whichever option provides security and stability for the community.

INTERIM REUSES/ACTIONS

In the event the district doesn't receive viable proposals for Westport High/Middle, or if it takes several years, the district solicited feedback from the community on interim actions/activities.

Community feedback on **Interim Uses**:

- Until the district has a reuse for the buildings, they should properly maintain the property.
- Many organizations are currently renting out the field space; this has been a positive experience for most community members.
- Participants stressed that the community would like to be included in the process of reviewing proposals for the sites. For future communication to the neighbors, the district should contact:
 - President of Hyde Park Neighborhood
 - President of Southmoreland
 - President of Old Hyde Park