

Merriam, Kansas West Antioch School Site 2004 Comprehensive Plan Addendum

Introduction

The Shawnee Mission School District placed the West Antioch Elementary School at 7101 Switzer Road and land for sale in September of 2004. The School District contacted the City of Merriam to see if they were interested in purchasing the site and school building. The City Council evaluated this option and elected not to purchase the school site.

The site is currently designated as “City Hall and Schools” according to the official zoning map. This designation restricts the redevelopment of the site or re-adaptation of the building. City officials recognize the former school site needs to be zoned appropriately in order to accommodate redevelopment of the site or facilitate the re-adaptation of the building.

The 2000 Comprehensive Plan shows the school site as public/quasi-public/institutional, which provides no guidance to how the site should be rezoned. The discovery of the current zoning designation and future land use contemplated in 2000 Comprehensive Plan prompted City officials to initiate the process of amending the city’s comprehensive plan to guide the rezoning and development of the former school site.

Shockey Consulting Services was hired by the City to amend the comprehensive plan and facilitate the involvement of the neighborhood surrounding the school to participate in the planning process and decision-making on determining an appropriate long-range land use for the West Antioch Elementary School site. A public meeting was held on October 19, 2004 to allow for citizens to help prepare the comprehensive plan addendum. The approach taken at the public meeting was to allow the participants to voice their opinions about alternative land uses. The intent of the meeting was to receive public input in selecting a preferred future land use.

Neighborhood Character

What follows below is a description of the neighborhood character near the West Antioch Elementary School site. Understanding the character of a neighborhood in order to identify potential future uses of the former school site is an important planning step.

Description of Neighborhood Boundary

For the purpose of this study, the boundaries of the neighborhood include 67 Street on the north, 75 Street on the south, Burlington Northern railroad tracks on the east, and Neiman Road on the west.

Existing Zoning & Land Use Pattern

Existing Zoning & Land Use Pattern of the Neighborhood				
	North	South	West	East
Zoning	R-1 Single Family	R-4 Multi-Family	R-1 Single Family	R-4 Multi-Family
Land Use	Meyer’s Estate subdivision is a low-density single family development.	Edelweiss is a mixed-density residential development containing single-family, two-family, and four-plex housing.	The Thousand Oaks apartments are west of the school site, as well as the Tomahawk Hills single-family subdivision.	Edelweiss is a mixed-density residential development containing single-family, two-family, and four-plex housing. Several single-family structures are situated at the end of 71 st Street before reaching City park land and the linear trail.

Major Road Access and Circulation

The West Antioch Elementary School is located adjacent to Switzer Road at the intersection of 71st Street. Neither of these streets are through streets. Switzer Road terminates approximately one-half mile north at 69th Street. This forces traffic west to Mastin or Farley to the east. 71st Street basically functions as a private road providing access to several residents.

The table below summarizes the arterial and collector streets that generally serve the neighborhood.

Major Arterial and Collector Streets Serving the Neighborhood			
I-35 Highway	Located approximately ½ mile east from the school site, I-35 provides convenient access to residents for trips into the metroplex or other areas of Merriam		
Arterial Roads	Shawnee Mission Parkway is located approximately one mile north from the school site. However, Switzer Road does not provide a direct connection to Shawnee Mission	75th Street is located approximately ½ mile south of the school site. 75 th Street is a major arterial serving Johnson County.	Neiman Road is located approximately one mile west of the school site. This is another major north/south arterial road serving Johnson County.

	Parkway. Traffic is required to use 75 th Street or 67 th Street to head north, use I-35, or Carter Avenue.		
Collector Streets	67th Street is located approximately ½ mile north of the school site. 67 th Street moves traffic east and west in the neighborhood connecting to arterial streets and I-35.	Switzer Road is located adjacent to the school site, but generally functions as a collector street moving traffic north and south to 67 th Street and 75 th Street.	

Conclusions

The neighborhood follows the classic land use formula for creating housing diversity in a neighborhood. Single family residential is the predominate land use, yet there are King’s Cove and Thousand Oaks apartments, along with town-homes and two-family structures in Edelweiss. The housing is structurally sound and in good condition, and property values appear to be stable, if not rising. The neighborhood is served with convenient access to major arterials, along with I-35. Commercial retail centers are located along 75th Street, Neiman Road, and Shawnee Mission Parkway. The development of the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Center illustrates that reinvestment is occurring in the retail sector, which also indicates a viable and stable neighborhood.

Alternative Land Use Configurations

Introduction

In order to arrive at recommending a preferred future land use, a public workshop was conducted on October 19, 2004 with property owners near the West Antioch Elementary School invited to participate. The objective of the workshop was to evaluate the merit of different potential land uses and receive the opinions and recommendations of the people living in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Allowing neighborhood residents to be involved in the planning process enables them to have a voice in the future of their own neighborhood. It also allows property owners to understand how local planning decisions are made. This, in turn, informs residents about the zoning process and what their role will be when the West Antioch Elementary School is rezoned.

Two distinct possibilities exist with the West Antioch Elementary School site. The first possibility is that the school will be demolished and the site will be redeveloped. The second possibility is for the school to not be torn down, but simply re-adapted for another use. This second option may or may not include construction of new structures. According to City officials in their discussions with School District officials, the property will not be sold to a purchaser that intends to use the school for any type of public or private school, but there still are options for the use of the former school building site. A few potential examples include a place of worship, recreation/arts center, nursing home, YMCA, and public health care facility. Depending on the underlying zoning classification, these uses may be permitted by right or require a Special Use Permit (SUP).

Land Use Evaluation Criteria

Five evaluation criteria are listed below to evaluate the positive or negative impact that a potential land use may have. These factors focus on traffic, compatibility, security, connectivity, and sense of place. Several other criteria were considered but not included, such as environmental, storm drainage, and availability of utilities.

Traffic Generation

This factor seeks to assess the potential impact created by increased traffic generation created by the land use category. Will the new use create traffic congestion; degrade the level of service of streets serving the neighborhood?

Compatibility with Neighborhood Character

This factor evaluates if a land use is compatible with the established character of the neighborhood. Is the new use considered neighborhood-friendly, similar in intensity, and well-matched to complement the livability of the neighborhood?

Security Concerns

This factor is concerned with public safety and sense of security of nearby homeowners. Does the new use create a sense of danger or threat? This includes not only a sense of personal security, but also relates to predictability of real estate values.

Connectivity

This factor evaluates how a land use relates to the established fabric of the neighborhood and the larger community. It is important to assess how a land use relates and functions in the larger scheme of the community, as well as looking at connectivity to the immediate neighborhood. Since each neighborhood is related to and part of the larger community, land uses should have a link to the community. At the same time, the character and intensity of a land use may necessitate separation and privacy between land uses.

Sense of Place

This factor evaluates if a land use contributes or distracts from creating or maintaining a sense of place. Successful neighborhood planning seeks to create a place where people and businesses can co-exist in harmony and a context where people living in the neighborhood possess a feeling of security, happiness, and well-being. At the same time, neighborhoods should offer an appropriate mixture of commercial and various housing choices. Modern suburban neighborhoods are often criticized for being too homogenized and lack diversity, as well as being totally dependent upon the automobile. Contemporary planning focuses on providing compact, mixed-use development connected by safe, convenient, and interesting networks of streets and pedestrian paths.

Table of Potential Land Use Options

The table below lists future land use categories that were considered as potential uses for the former school site. The purpose of the table is to generate a dialogue amongst workshop participants to discuss the merit of various potential land uses. When contemplating future land use options it is important to keep in mind that the future land use map deals with broad categories of land use. The rezoning of private property is the tool where specific restrictions on the use are achieved.

List of Potential Land Use Options

Land Use Category	Advantages	Disadvantages
Low Density Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most compatible with residential neighborhood ▪ Consistent with existing traffic pattern and demands ▪ Consistent with existing security and safety expectations ▪ Can be readily connected to existing neighborhood fabric with minimum disruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Least likely land use to be economically feasible for a developer ▪ Least likely to create economic return to school district and land developer ▪ Need to limit the number of driveways on Switzer Road
Moderate Density Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reasonable transition use from a busy street ▪ Increased density creates opportunities for site amenities and open space ▪ Increased density makes site development more economical ▪ Consistent with existing traffic pattern and demands ▪ Consistent with Edelweiss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appropriate covenant and deed restrictions are important for issues of outdoor storage, property maintenance, etc. ▪ Architectural review of structures may be important.
High Density Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased density creates opportunities for site amenities and open space ▪ High density makes the economics of site development feasible ▪ Potentially offers a new housing product that might be suitable for Merriam residents looking to downsize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most likely an increase in traffic generation ▪ Increase in concerns regarding safety and connectivity---not insurmountable but require site sensitive design
Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commercial uses makes the economics of site development more feasible ▪ Can potentially introduce goods and services that are conveniently located for nearby homeowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The site is not on a high-traffic arterial for accessibility and visibility ▪ Important to control types of commercial uses to ensure compatibility with residential neighborhood. ▪ Hours of operation could interfere with residential uses ▪ Increased concerns about traffic, noise, lighting, trash, etc. and their impact on neighborhood character
Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Office uses makes the economics of site development more feasible ▪ Many office uses are compatible with residential uses—employees leave in the evening. ▪ Could lend itself to re-adaptation of the existing structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in concerns regarding safety and connectivity---not insurmountable but require site sensitive design ▪ Increased concerns about traffic, noise, lighting, trash, etc. and their impact on neighborhood character

Conclusions and Recommendations from the Public Workshop

Over 50 citizens attended the public workshop. Each participant was asked to rank what they viewed as the preferred future land use. In addition to the ranking exercise, many of the participants remained at the open house for an open discussion. Shockey Consulting conducted the discussion to allow citizens a chance to voice their ideas, concerns, and suggestions. The following key findings came out of the public discussion. The following list is not listing based on priority, nor was an exact count of those voting taken. A show of hands of those at the workshop indicated if a majority was in support or opposition to a potential land use.

- Single-family *is* an acceptable use although may not be feasible due to economics of the site
- Moderate density *is* an acceptable use
- Multi-family *is not* an acceptable use
- Neighborhood commercial *is not* an acceptable use
- Office *is* an acceptable use
- Extension of Edelweiss *is* an acceptable use
- Community park *is* an acceptable use
- Church (i.e., place of worship) *is* an acceptable use
- Recreation center/gym *is* an acceptable use

Recommended Land Use

A Steering Committee was held on October 20, 2004 with Shockey Consulting facilitating the meeting and presenting the findings of the October 19, 2004 public workshop. A discussion and evaluation of the various potential land uses was conducted by the Steering Committee. Generally, there was agreement that the site is capable of supporting several potential land uses. These uses include moderate density residential, mixed-residential that is consistent in density and intensity as Edelweiss, and office. At the same time, the site is suited for being used for specific land uses, such as a place of worship, independent and assisted living quarters, private recreation/gym, or even a community health center. The Steering Committee discussed the importance of not limiting the re-adaptation of the school or redevelopment of the site with an overly restrictive approach to the future land use. To summarize, the Steering Committee wants to offer flexibility to the new owners of the school site to develop the site. Yet, at the same time, the redevelopment of the site or re-adaptation of the school must be respectful, sensitive, and compatible with the residential character of the neighborhood. To achieve the objectives of flexibility and compatibility, site-sensitive site planning is a requirement.

The Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a zoning device that allows a development to be planned and built as a unit, and requires a site plan review by the Planning Commission. An integral part of a PUD is cluster development, under which housing units are grouped to allow for open space and economies of development. Another benefit of a PUD is it allows flexibility in site design, better design and arrangement of open space, and retention of natural features. The approval of a PUD also requires negotiation between the planning staff, Planning Commission, and the developer. According to the Merriam Zoning Code, Article 9 Planned Unit Development, an application for rezoning can be submitted for "Residential Planned Unit Development" or "General Planned Unit Development". The Residential PUD is intended only for residential land use, while the General PUD is intended to accommodate office, commercial, or to mix these uses with residential uses.

Based on the need to place a compatible land use that is basically surrounded by a residential neighborhood, it seems appropriate the City of Merriam use a Planned Unit Development approach to achieve the objectives of flexibility and compatibility.

The recommendation of the Steering Committee is for the site to be shown as a "Planned Unit Development" on the future land use map. This indicates to nearby homeowners, as well as potential

developers, that the City of Merriam understands the unique character of this site and recognizes that a variety of potential land uses may work at the site, subject to site plan review and negotiations between the developer and city regarding how the site is developed and used.

The “Planned Unit Development” designation on the future land use map implies that the developer of the site may submit a PUD rezoning request for either “Residential Planned Unit Development” or “General Planned Unit Development”.

While there is language in the zoning code suggesting that industry may be considered in a General PUD, as pertains to the West Antioch School site, no industrial uses will be permitted. Likewise, any request for commercial activity must clearly demonstrate that the retail businesses are intended to provide goods and services to the neighborhood and do not attract customers or clients from the community at-large or Johnson County.

Site Design Considerations

Introduction

Successful land use planning is supported with wise site planning practices. There are many instances where lack of attention to site planning details can make a seemingly compatible land use incompatible because of poor site planning and attention to the interface with existing land uses. A brief overview of what are considered to be important site design considerations with regard to the West Antioch Elementary School site is presented below. The following topics should be considered by the City planning staff and Planning Commission when working with a developer to prepare a site plan under Article 9 Planned Unit Development.

Building Height, Bulk, & Setbacks

The development of new structures on the former school site must be sensitive to adjacent residential uses in terms of building height, orientation, bulk, and setbacks. Careful attention to the high-power electrical lines and easement will be necessary when designing the site.

Site Screening and Buffering

A well established natural buffer exists on the north property line and east property line. It is critically important that these mature trees remain on the site and continue to offer buffering to surrounding properties. There are also several trees on the south property line that need to remain in place. Depending on the type and intensity/density of any new use, it may be appropriate to increase screening and buffering through fencing, berms, and landscaping.

On-site Circulation

Access to the site is most likely to occur from Switzer Road. It might be possible to create a point of second ingress from 71st Street, subject to review and approval from the City Engineer. Depending on road configuration, a second ingress may be necessary because of the depth of the site from Switzer Road.

Storm Drainage

City staff will review any site development proposal for its potential impact on surface drainage. There appears to be a natural slope toward the east, with a drop in elevation at the southeast corner of the property.

Open Space & Linear Trail

The City should work with the new owner of the former school site to evaluate how to construct a pedestrian trail connecting the site to the Turkey Creek Linear Trail. It appears that it may be possible to create a trail connection. If feasible, and depending on the overall density, an outdoor area for use by residents should be contemplated. Moreover, a pedestrian trail could possibly extend into the City of Shawnee in the power line easements.

Pedestrian Circulation

If practical from a compatibility viewpoint, an effort should be made to link the school site to nearby residential areas so that people can safely walk in the neighborhood.

Landscaping

An overall approach to landscaping should be adhered to ensure the planting of street trees, creation of privacy screening, and to complement buildings.

Plan Implementation

Below is a list of action steps that should be followed to accomplish the implementation of this addendum:

Implementation Action Steps		
	Action	Responsible Body
Step 1.	Adopt comprehensive plan addendum	Merriam Planning Commission and City Council
Step 2.	Prepare a conceptual plan showing a pedestrian connecting trail to the Turkey Creek Linear Trail.	City Council directive to City Administration