



Date: December 3, 2014

To: Des Moines City Council

Re: Recent Petition to Reconsider the 420 Court Avenue Development Plan from Hy-Vee / Knapp Properties

Over the last couple of weeks there has been lots of chatter around the proposed Hy-Vee / Knapp Property Development Plan for 420 Court Avenue. A downtown business association, the Historic Court Avenue District Association, started a petition on change.org asking for the City Council to reconsider their support this project. It appears this petition has garnered over 700 signatures to-date, but I question how many of those signers are residents of downtown.

The Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) has been the voice of residents for over the last 14 years. As President of the DNA, and a Board Member for the last five years, I personally know we've worked hard to review development plans for downtown and to make sure that what is being built in our neighborhood meets the best interests of the downtown residents. No development is perfect in satisfying everyone's needs, but we consider a lot of factors and question the developers prior to offering a letter of support.

Earlier this year when this project was first announced and again a few months ago, we met with developers and spent time in gaining a better understanding of what they proposed. It is our understanding that Hy-Vee does not plan to build a "retail suburban grocery store...dead center in the middle of the Court Ave. District" as improperly characterized in the petition. Hy-Vee / Knapp Properties has worked hard with their architects to build a retail urban concept store with several levels of apartments above it. This will not look like any Hy-Vee we've seen before and it will bring the badly needed housing we need for a growing downtown neighborhood.

Since I moved downtown over six years ago, all I've heard is "Where do you buy groceries?" a question more often coming from non-residents. When this plan was announced, almost every resident I spoke with couldn't wait for this project to be completed. I am a patron of most restaurants and bars on Court Avenue. I don't see how a wonderful new amenity such as an urban grocery store will negatively impact local businesses on Court Avenue. I believe we are lucky to have such a great development team offer this amenity to us, especially in this location. This is in walking distance to most of us that live downtown.

Some have suggested that the development be moved to the south-side of MLK, but doing so would kill it's most useful feature, the ability to do a short walk to a local grocery store. I for one will probably shop there 3-4 times a week as opposed to just once a week where I'd probably use my car if it was south of MLK.

The petition also brought up the idea that the city wasn't thinking about parking. This is not the same message we hear from City Council. The Council understands the parking needs for Court Avenue and will act responsibly in assuring that parking is available for downtown residents, downtown workers and local business customers. There are additional plans for parking and entertainment venues that are being considered only with additional housing and traffic. The Hy-Vee/Knapp Properties project will bring that housing and traffic to Court Avenue.

I do not think many realize that parking is available on evenings and weekends and close to Court Avenue. I feel that the City and the Historic Court Avenue District can work together to highlight all the parking garages open to the public evenings and weekends within 2 to 4 blocks of most Court Avenue businesses. Public education and signage could alleviate parking concerns that some have.

Our city is growing up. Most of us that have traveled to larger cities don't think anything about parking in a lot or ramp and walking 3-4 blocks for a good restaurant or bar that we want to patronize. We can do that here, too.





As President of the DNA, the voice of residents downtown, I'd like to share with you such a few quotes from the many letters of support that I've received for this development.

"I was disappointed to see that many of the downtown business owners are backing a petition drive against building a Hy-Vee on Court Avenue. I'd guess that few, if any, of those owners make their homes downtown. It can't be emphasized enough -- downtown Des Moines is now a residential community, not an "entertainment district" or a "historic district". It is a residential community and it's time that some of the amenities planned for the area focus on that community rather than on businesses alone. In accordance with the long-term planning of the City Council, downtown Des Moines now has a good-sized population of residents. We happily put up with noise, crowds, street closings for special events, limited parking, and all the other downsides of city living because we love our location and we chose it, but we need a grocery. " – Isobel Osious, Downtown Resident.

"People not only party downtown and on Court Avenue, they live downtown and on Court Avenue. We not only party, but we work, cook, entertain in our homes, and like to walk to the things we need, including groceries. WE WANT A GOOD GROCERY STORE WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE DOWNTOWN. We want not only the best in entertainment but the best in services, like other great American cities. That is a perfect location." – Paula Feltner, Downtown Resident.

"I am very excited about the possibility of having a grocery store downtown. After living in Chicago and having a grocery store in the heart of downtown, it is one thing I have always hoped for in downtown Des Moines. I look forward to being able to walk or ride my bike to get groceries rather than having to drive which makes the 420 Court Avenue location perfect for many of the residents who live close by. I do believe that parking needs to be part of the solution to allow people who may work downtown, but live elsewhere or people who want to drive don't have to worry about parking." – Rena Bandstra, Downtown Resident.

"I have been involved in an organization seeking to make Des Moines an Age Friendly City. One of the initiatives for that is to assist all ages living in Des Moines to have access to critical services in the community. A grocery store within walkable distance is a key ingredient of an Age Friendly City." – Thomas Tarbox, Downtown Resident

The Downtown Neighborhood Association urges the City Council and Hy-Vee / Knapp Properties to continue their development efforts at 420 Court Avenue and help downtown become a true 24-hour fully functioning neighborhood. For this to happen, this project, at this location, will be the key to spur even more development in the Court Avenue District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Bradshaw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Larry Bradshaw
President of the Downtown Neighborhood Association

