

Caroline Farrar – Executive Director
Nick Colby – President
Eileen Hack – Land Use Committee Chairperson
Meridian Kessler Neighborhood Association

December 4, 2015

RE: Objections to MKNA Final Plan Draft, and recommendations for corrections

Dear MKNA Land Use Leadership:

We write you this letter today to request your attention to general neighborhood concerns, your amendment to the Meridian Kessler Neighborhood Association Neighborhood Plan Final Draft, and to seek your assistance in protecting our portion of the neighborhood from the negative impacts of over-development. The Meridian Kessler Neighborhood Association (MKNA) plays an important role in the establishment of community land use values, development initiatives and future community planning efforts, and serves as the recognized voice of community development to the City of Indianapolis. We feel compelled to express to you our concerns both generally – in terms of the potential negative impacts to the community – as well as the specifics of the MKNA Final Draft Plan currently pending adoption by the City of Indianapolis.

BACKGROUND

Since the recent public disclosure of the proposed TWG plans for the recently acquired (subject to conditions) AT&T property on College Avenue, I and many of my neighbors have become aware of the multiple planning entities that have focused attention on the Meridian-Kessler neighborhood and its prominence as a critical north/south transportation route in Indianapolis. These initiatives are raising great concerns among residents due to the potentially transformative nature of the Meridian Kessler Neighborhood Association (MKNA) endorsed plans.

These impacts are wide ranging from changes and limitations in College Avenue traffic patterns, to the endorsement of high density housing development along College Avenue, with each creating potential “winners and losers” in residential property value. Contrary to the public relations messages issued by the Red-Line, Midtown Indy and the City of Indianapolis that, essentially, property owners will see an increase property value, we foresee parcel by parcel instances of negative impact that none of the planning entities seem willing to accept as part of the potential outcome. This is a very important matter, in that we strongly believe that concerted public efforts such as the endorsement of the Red-Line bus, changes in land use planning to the advantage of high density residential development, and public Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funding will all change the real estate market, but some may see negative impacts to their housing values. The risks associated with this possible outcome must be properly presented to residents and properly acknowledged by neighborhood associations, planning districts, and city authorities if we are to avoid negative impacts on the neighborhood.

Development projects have inherent risks to them. We are concerned that, with TIF funding, neighborhood endorsement, Federal Funding and most planning agencies advocating these changes, the matter of the burden of the risk has not been properly addressed. At present, it is the individual homeowners who accept the risk of increased taxes, negative impacts from development mistakes, and decreased property values (parcel by parcel) due to proximity to, and the density of development.

We are highly concerned that our portion of the neighborhood, with its close proximity to the ATT site, Red-Line, traffic flow changes and general land use repositioning will bear more risk than others in terms of bearing negative impacts to the neighborhood. For example: higher traffic counts through our neighborhood from turn lane restrictions, increased alley traffic, the high number of units

on the ATT site, combined with a potential for increased crime are potential risk factors to our home investments.

MKNA PLAN

Notwithstanding concerns regarding publicity and public involvement in the development of the plan, we disagree with a number of elements of the plan, find that it has omitted some very important additional sections that are generally included in such neighborhood plans, and wish to bring to your attention issues with its current presentation to the public.

We have been advised that comments on the plan are closed, however, we believe that, since the plan still exists in draft form and the City has not yet adopted it, there should be no reason that facts that have developed since the draft of the plan should not be taken into account and included in the Final Draft, but the omission of important elements should be addressed prior to adoption as they are critical pieces of a comprehensive neighborhood plan.

Following are our objections and recommendations:

- *List of authors, professionals, and key MKNA leadership that created and approved the plan.* In its present iteration, no list of authors, creators or professionals is associated with the plan. These parties should be listed so that current and future residents can seek guidance on interpretation.
- *The full document is not presented in its complete form.* The document listed on line omits an addendum section and supplemental data used is not referenced.
- *The stated plan purpose is lacking.*
- *Omission of key elements included in the prior MKNA plan.* Housing conditions, crime, recreation, and other key components of the neighborhood plan from 1979 are missing.
- *The plan accepts the Indy Connect premise that the transit portion of the plan will be transformative.* Further definition is needed. What transformations are anticipated and when should they be expected? Residents should have an understanding of what the professionals anticipate in terms of impacts.
- *Unstated, but implied goal needs to be stated clearly as it is the basic foundation of the underlying components of this plan:* Raising the tax base for the City of Indianapolis by supporting and encouraging the development of dense, multi-family housing along College Avenue and elsewhere in the neighborhood.
- *Portions of the plan are in conflict, Part 1.* Preserve and enhance vs. transform and re-develop. These conflicting statements need to be further clarified and presented to the public for full understanding of what support should be expected by residents from MKNA in the future.
- *Portions of the plan are in conflict, Part 2.* Conflicting statements in the plan alternately promote “transit-oriented-development” while other statements are made regarding retention of neighborhood character goals. These are mutually exclusive goals as currently presented. If some portions of the neighborhood are to be transformed (i.e.: College Avenue) and others preserved, these distinctions should be clarified.
- *The plan states that parking should be limited to one side of the street for “narrow” streets.* This should be clarified as to which or what types of streets are being referenced here. MKNA is not known for particularly narrow streets, but residents should be able to easily understand whether parking on their street will be affected.

- *Portions of the plan are in conflict, Part 3.* Retaining the character of the neighborhood and PU zoning are not consistent with one another.
- *Residential Corridor Reserve.* What is the location and application of the residential corridor reserve?
- *Indygo Traffic Study* – An Indygo traffic study is mentioned in this plan, but a thorough reference should be cited, and further, since Transit Oriented Development is such a critical component to the plan, should be included as an addendum as part of the plan for easy reference.
- *High and Mid-Rise Residential* – Definition of these terms should be included so that residents can properly assess the impacts on their portion of the community.
- *A statement is made in the plan on page 17 that units per acre of development are not relevant versus structure type.* We fully disagree with this statement. As a mostly traditional neighborhood (per plan designations) density of a development among single family dwellings is one of the most critical issues.
- *Critical Area 1*
 - *Same height restrictions as along the Monon – 3 stories as is consistent through most of M-K.*
 - *ATT building is technically two, not three stories.*
 - *Why require multi-story on the ATT site if a single story, qualifying use opts to locate there?*
 - *Restrict access to the alley per current land covenants.*
 - *Require sufficient on-site parking to accommodate residents.*
 - *Require the development to include parking in the rental fee for housing units.*
 - *Require a traffic impact study. (Perhaps the Indygo study can be used as a basis so as to keep costs down).*
 - *Assure that infrastructure needs for new development does not overburden the existing system.*
 - *Require consistent (all sides) and quality materials and aesthetic continuity with the rest of the neighborhood.*
 - *Encourage an ownership rather than transient use.*

Many residents in our portion of the neighborhood have been long-time residents in the community being used to bus systems, an urban setting, traffic and other common concerns regarding city life. However we are deeply concerned about the unified advocacy of a transformative plan between planning entities, and that these entities are acting upon the plan as though there were a resident mandate to do so. We find this troubling and request your response to this letter and its contents. We pledge to work with MKNA to find common ground for solutions to plan deficiencies so that we can, as a community, move forward with the peace of mind that we all fully recognize the potential risks and rewards to our neighborhood and our investments.

Respectfully submitted,
College Avenue Area Neighbors

Cc: Colleen Fanning – City Council Representative, District 2