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Monday, June 25, 2018, 7:15 am

By:

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Above: Dublin Square restaurant ? a possible site of redevelopment in the near future?

What's going on with redevelopment projects and proposals for East Lansing's downtown?

What might be coming that you haven't heard about yet? ELi's team keeps its ears to the ground to bring you these updates:

Punk Taco and Cosmos are coming to East Lansing:

The location in Brookfield Plaza (on Grand River Avenue just west of Hagadorn Road) that had until recently housed Bagger Dave's is going to turn into an East Lansing location for restaurants Punk Taco and Cosmos ^[2]. (The Lansing Punk Taco and Cosmos locations will remain open.) Building permits have been pulled for the Brookfield Plaza location and the management is

looking into obtaining a liquor license for the site.



According to what City Planning staff said at an East Lansing Downtown Development Authority (DDA) committee meeting last week, the restaurant will be set up to feel like it is two different establishments in one location, with a single kitchen. The Punk Taco side will be "fast casual," and the Cosmos side will feel similar to the existing Lansing location.

Biggby may leave its original location to move across the street and get a drive-through:

At the same DDA committee meeting last week, ELI learned that Biggby Coffee wants to have a new location with a drive-through at the "300 Grand" building (the colorful four-story building shown below), on Grand River Avenue.



If these plans come through, Biggby would vacate the adjacent site it now occupies, a building that originally housed an Arby's and in 1998 became Biggby's first-ever location. (Back then, the coffee shop was called Beaner's, a name later changed because "beaner" is sometimes used as an ethnic slur.) What would happen with the original Biggby site hasn't been announced.

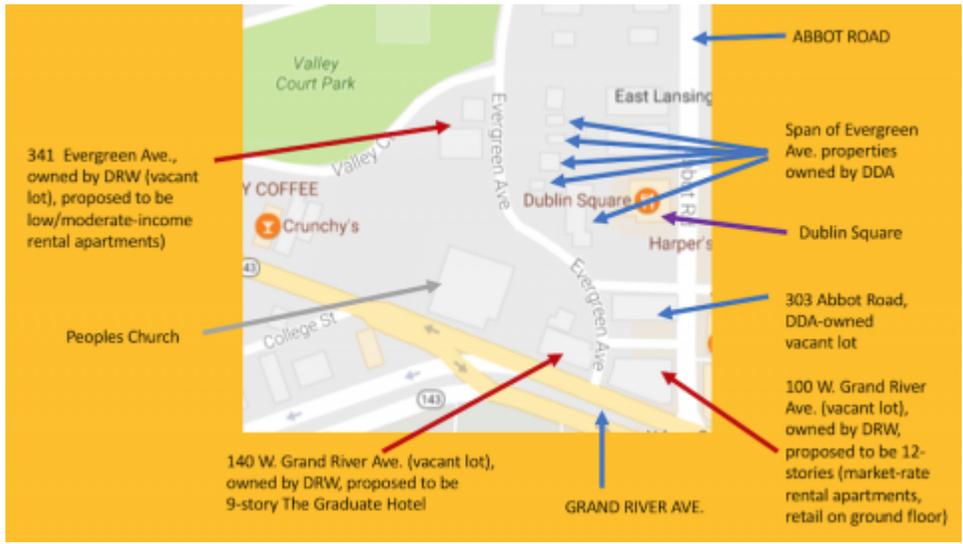
At the DDA committee meeting, East Lansing Planning and Zoning Administrator David Haywood explained that "stacking space" – the space for when cars back up waiting for the drive-through – is an issue at this site. Gateway of East Lansing, LLC, owner of the "300 Grand" building, has requested a variance from the Zoning Code that requires ten stacking spaces per drive-through window for establishments in the B-2 zoning districts, like this one.

This variance would be needed to allow Biggby's proposal, which is to provide only 5 stacking spaces, to go forward. The Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a public hearing on this variance request on Wednesday, July 11, at 7:00 p.m. at City Hall.

The 300 Grand building opened in late summer 2016 and, while the high-end apartments have rented to a mixed market [3] according to the developer, the building has never had a retail tenant for the two ground floor retail spaces.

Dublin Square might be redeveloped:

Some background is required on this developing story. On June 15, ELi broke the news [4] of what's now being proposed for the vacant properties along Grand River Avenue, just west of Abbot Road, in the area that had been called "The Park District." We reported then the significant news that the new DRW/Convexity proposal for their properties in the area does *not* involve the series of properties along the east side of Evergreen Avenue owned by the DDA.



Those DDA-owned properties containing a series of older rental houses, as shown below looking from Evergreen Avenue, and one modern, brick, mixed-use building, as shown below on the side it faces Dublin Square, across an alley.





We've explained previously [5] that the DDA is facing millions of dollars in debt coming due on these Evergreen Avenue rental properties ? with the City's taxpayers ultimately responsible for that debt. Last time around with DRW/Convexity, the plan was to include most of the DDA properties in the "Park District" project and to use that project to pay off the DDA Evergreen Avenue debt using tax increment financing (TIF). This time around, there's no such solution for the DDA's debt built into the proposal.

Now we hear that the plan may be to redevelop those DDA-owned properties along with the privately-owned property currently housing Dublin Square, along with the City-owned parking lot just south of Dublin Square. Who would do the project, and what would it look like? Details are not yet available.

DRW/Convexity's plans for the big vacant corner:

The project proposal for the vacant properties at Grand River Avenue just west of Abbot Road goes to the full DDA [6] this Thursday, June 28, and to East Lansing's Planning Commission for a public hearing on July 11. (The Planning Commission's meeting on July 11 will be in Courtroom 2, at the same time as the Zoning Board of Appeals meets in Courtroom 1 about the zoning variance for the 300 Grand proposal for Biggby.)



We still don't know if the DRW/Convexity deal will involve tax increment financing (TIF) and/or more roadblocks from the previous owner/developer. The DDA Executive Committee put only the site plan and Special Use Permit concerning the project on its agenda for June 28. The financial aspects of the plan are not expected to be ready for review at that time.

Read the news we broke ^[4] on the latest plans for that area, and read our special analysis of the problems posed by the actions of the previous owner/developer, "The Pickle in the Park District."
^[7]

Construction continues for The Hub:

"The Hub" is the name for the 10-story structure being built using the two cranes you can see when you drive by the job site at the southeast corner of Grand River Avenue and Bogue Street, where the 7-11 and Georgio's Pizza used to be and will be again, after the project is finished and those businesses move in to some of the new retail space on the first floor.

The image below shows the job site in the distance, with the new Himalayan restaurant ChiChi and Papa in the foreground.



According to updates from the City, at The Hub, ?Foundation work continues to be the most important task at hand. Unexpected underground conditions have added some work to the job.? The project has made it challenging for some nearby residents and businesses as it has led to a lot of construction traffic, detours, and closures.

The Hub is being built without tax increment financing (TIF) and is designed to rent to MSU students without cars. You can read more about The Hub here [8].

Center City District project adds a crane as it ?goes vertical more quickly?:

The Center City District project ? the big one in the middle of downtown ? has now added a second crane to the job site and, according to City staff, the project is ?expected to go vertical more quickly? now. The image below shows the Grand River Avenue side as of yesterday. This private-public partnership project, being constructed with a \$58 million TIF deal, will see a 12-story building with a small-format Target store on Grand River Avenue, and a new publicly-owned parking garage with new retail space and senior rental housing on Albert Avenue.



ELi reported last week ^[9] that the project has recently experienced delays and that the DDA has agreed to help out by temporarily leasing land across Abbot Road to the contractor, Christman Company, for \$1,500 per month. The property being leased, at the southwest corner of Albert Avenue and Abbot Road, is being fenced in and will be used for storing construction materials.

East Lansing Community and Economic Development Administrator Tom Fehrenbach told a DDA committee last week that delays happened because what was under Albert Avenue was not what was expected. East Lansing Community Development Analyst Heather Pope said that some duct and sewer lines were not located where plans indicated they would be.



According to bulletins from the City, ?The re-opening of the westbound lane of Albert and pedestrian access to the new, widened sidewalks (on the north side of Albert) is expected to take place the first week of July.? Abbot Road has been experiencing some evening to morning closures while the project is underway. Soon, up to two lanes of Grand River Avenue will be closed at a time for the project.

ELi has asked City Planning staff and Christman Company for an update on when the major Center City District project components are set to be completed, but we have not received a response.

Appreciate ELi's reporting? Pitch in to keep it coming. [10]

Update, June 25, 11:20 a.m.: This article originally had the wrong surname for a City staff member at the DDA committee meetings; we reported her name as Heather Surface, but the staff member in attendance was Heather Pope. The article has been corrected.

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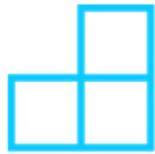
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