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More Answers to Your Questions on the Big New Proposal ^[1]

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By:

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Today we bring you more answers to readers' questions about the Royal Properties and Vlahakis Development's Park Place proposal, which offers to be a third major redevelopment in a one-block radius downtown, and the largest in terms of height, footprint, cost, and number of new residents.

Tomorrow (Saturday morning), we're going to bring you a special combined report about what happened with this project at the Planning Commission and Downtown Development Authority meetings this week. (If you want to know as soon as that article comes out, sign up for our free email newsletter today ^[2].)

But first, we want you to know why we're changing how we talk about this project:

ELi is finding that readers — and even our own staff! — can't keep track of what project we're talking about when we're talking about Park District ^[3] (from DRW/Convexity; already approved; excavation started at the blighted corner) and Park Place ^[4] (in proposal stage from Royal Properties and Vlahakis Development; not at all approved).

So we've decided to start calling these two projects primarily by the names of their developers.

We've already at times called Park District the DRW Convexity project. But you'll see us doing that more often.

We're going to be calling the Park Place proposal the Royal Vlahakis proposal. Royal Properties is the majority investor in the project, so we're putting that name first (using the same convention as with DRW Convexity.)



Here's a map to remind you what's where. The #1 area is the one where there is already a lot of construction done. The #2 area is just now starting construction. The #3 area is what's *under proposal* from Royal Vlahakis. That third one is what we're talking about now.

How tall would this thing be, really?

We learned yesterday that the City of East Lansing's standards say that when you're speaking of the height and number of stories of a building, you don't count recreational facilities provided for residents on a top floor if it's set back from the edge.

So the City Planning staff says that the Royal Vlahakis proposed building for the northwest corner of Abbot Road and Albert Avenue would be 14 stories tall and 159 feet high.

It would, in fact, have 15 stories and be 169 feet high, counting the private club house and fitness room on the top floor.

That means it would be about 30 feet taller than anything else being built downtown 30 feet taller than the new building now under construction on Grand River Avenue across from the MSU Union.

We are still trying to sort out how tall the building on the Evergreen Avenue side would be, as the numbers have changed.

Incidentally, our Planning standards also say that internal parking garage levels don't count as stories. So Planning staff says that the DRW Convexity building to be constructed at the blighted corner is 11 stories and 140 feet high. It will, in fact, have 13 stories and be 140 feet high.

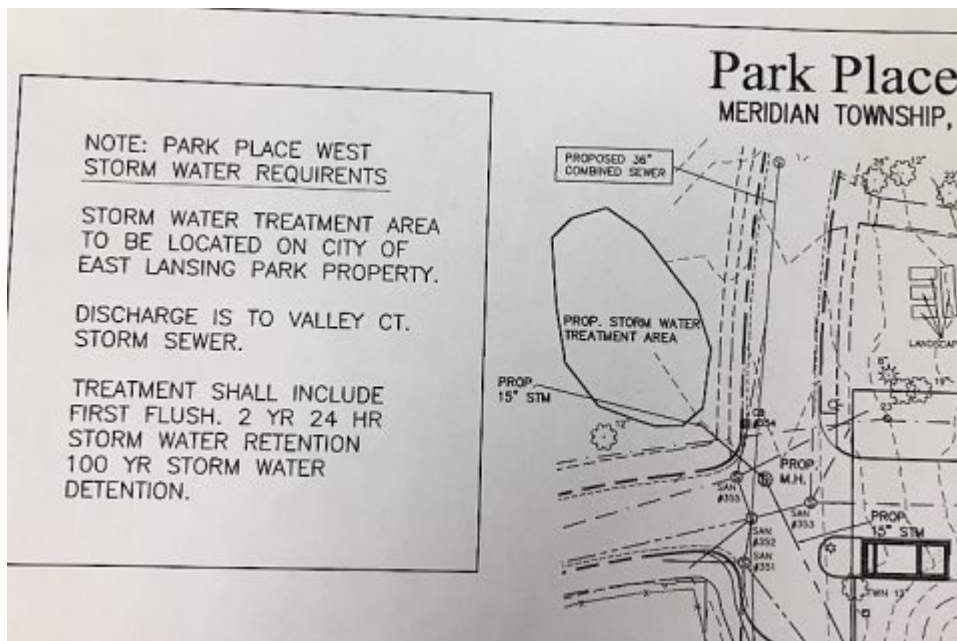
In our reporting, you'll see ELi naming the number of levels as the number of stories, and naming the total height as the building's height.

How can I see a shadow animation of the proposed project?

City staff are asking the developers for a shadow study. According to Director of Planning Tim Dempsey, "they need to include the entire building mass to be as accurate as possible in the modeling."

Are they really going to let a developer use a park for private development?

The project proposal called for use of a portion of Valley Court Park to build an underground storm water treatment tank for the project. Every other development has had to deal with its storm water on its own property.



Dempsey told ELi late yesterday afternoon that staff will be requesting [that] the developer find alternative means/locations for the storm-water retention.

Why is this project even under review when City Council hasn't voted to allow it to include City Parking Lot 15?

The City normally doesn't entertain any site plan application if a developer doesn't have permission from owners of the land to submit a site plan including their land. In this case, Royal

Vlahakis submitted plans that included DDA property on Evergreen Avenue, with the DDA's permission, plus City Parking Lot 4, with a vote from City Council to allow it.

But in this case, Royal Vlahakis submitted a proposal that also includes City Parking Lot 15 and part of Valley Court Park (for the stormwater retention).

Wednesday, at Planning Commission, I asked how this could be under review without votes from Council to allow these two public properties to be included. Staff said they'd have to look into it and get back to me.

The next day, not having gotten an answer, I asked the same question at the Downtown Development Authority meeting. In response, Mayor Pro Tem Erik Altmann asked staff how Lot 15 had even gotten into the application. Dempsey responded that the developer had included it.

Late yesterday, Dempsey told ELi, "In terms of Lot 15, we do plan to take the lot to Council for approval." He says this vote will happen at the City Council meeting of February 12, prior to Planning Commission's next meeting.



The land the developer wants to use includes the steps that go up from Evergreen Avenue to Parking Lot 15 as shown here (above).

Why tear down Dublin Square? Or is it staying?

One of the developers, Paul Vlahakis, owns a company that owns Dublin Square. That property is part of this proposal. He wants to tear down the Dublin Square building for this project.



He has said that there will be a new "Dublin Square" restaurant in the new building, but it won't look anything like what's there now. Here's what would replace the Dublin Square property plus Parking Lot 4.



One reader asked, specifically, "Rebuilt is not preserving historical buildings. Where will Dublin Square do business in the interim? Or will it move to a new location or go out of business? Or does the developer plan on paying for worker's wages & lost business income the entire time it's closed? Where is that information in the developer's plan or in info to residents?"

Correct, the historic WPA-built building is not set to be preserved. Vlahakis is going to meet with the Historic District Commission at its next meeting to discuss this, and will likely also discuss the impact of the project on the Oakwood Historic District, in which part of this project resides.

(Disclosure: This reporter's spouse, Aron Sousa, is on the Historic District Commission and we own a house in the Oakwood Historic District.)

There are no plans to move the Dublin Square business while construction occurs. We have no

information on what would happen to the workers' jobs during that period.

Where's the traffic study?

Still not available, so far as we know. We expected to see it on the Transportation Commission's agenda for Monday's meeting (January 28), but as of right now, the agenda is posted ^[5] without any sign of this project's traffic study.

We know you have more questions.

Next week, we'll be bringing you more special reports and answers to other questions submitted. (Some of them take more substantial research to answer.)

Reminder:

We are not your government. ^[6] If you want to weigh in on this proposal with the decision-makers, the best way to do that is to write to:

- Planning Commission via staff member David Haywood ^[7]
- City Council via email ^[8]
- Downtown Development Authority via staff member Tom Fehrenbach ^[9]

Questions you want ELi to investigate? Use this portal to send them. ^[10]

Check out ELi's comprehensive reporting on this proposal. ^[4]

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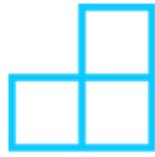
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