



For Immediate Release: 04.17.06

From: David Powers
Communications Director
708.358.5781

Contact: David Pope
Village President
708.358.5796

Continued Negotiations Lead to Enhanced Whiteco Project

A willingness by members of the Village Board and Whiteco representatives to continue negotiating, even though a legally binding redevelopment agreement had already been signed, may prove to be the key to moving forward the mixed use project slated for the corner of Harlem Avenue and Ontario Street.

The redevelopment agreement adopted last spring by the previous Village Board established parameters for height, lot coverage and building orientation and provided full rights for Whiteco to proceed with the development as approved. Nonetheless, the current Village Board and Whiteco have continued to discuss ways to enhance the project in order to help make the development a better fit for the community.

These discussions have led Whiteco to agree to enhance the project in a number of very significant ways. Whiteco has committed to contribute \$400,000 to help support affordable housing programs in the Village, on top of a \$30,000 contribution that they have already committed for public art.

Whiteco has also agreed to construct and operate the building in a far more environmentally sustainable way, incorporating important advances in energy efficiency, water conservation, and pedestrian orientation. They have committed to spend in excess of \$200,000 to pursue and achieve LEED Certification (an environmental sustainability rating conferred by the U.S. Green Building Council recognizing structures that achieve designated levels of sustainability in design, construction, and function). Whiteco's commitment in this area will be highly innovative for a building of its type in the upper Midwest, and in turn will mark this as a signature development in keeping with the community's legacy of architectural innovation that we both model and celebrate here in Oak Park.

Without specifying any requirements, the Village Board also conveyed to Whiteco its desire that the building serve as an example of high quality design and that it utilize high quality materials. Whiteco has agreed to be mindful of this as it works through the design process (within the context of its existing approvals obtained through last year's Planned Unit Development process and public hearings).

-more-

Whiteco
2-2-2

Whiteco has also agreed to initiate marketing programs to promote ride sharing and mass transit as a way to reduce the impact of neighborhood vehicular traffic resulting from the project, adding a pedestrian access point from Harlem Avenue to the proposed *Trader Joe's* specialty market and making the roof of the lower residential building a functional, landscaped amenity for the new development's residents that also would improve the view from Holley Court Terrace..

"Whiteco's willingness to allay community concerns even though they had a signed contract in hand demonstrates their desire to win over opponents and to be welcomed as a valued member of the community," said Village President David Pope. "Rather than pushing ahead to exert a legal right to build, they chose to collaborate and cooperate with the Village to identify ways to balance the project's economic viability with the broader interests of the neighborhood and the community."

Whiteco also has agreed to work with an organization such as *I-GO* that offers car sharing, market the new rental units to groups most likely to utilize Oak Park's many mass transit options and work with local merchants within walking distance to promote their goods and services to the new tenants. An unrelated *I-GO* program begins this month with two cars in the Avenue Parking Garage on North Boulevard.

The development proposal approved last spring provides for 200 residential rental units, six townhomes and about 14,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor that would house *Trader Joe's*. The project would add about 500 parking spaces to downtown, primarily through an expansion of the existing Holley Court garage.

"While this project has been at times a divisive issue for both members of our community and for members of our Board," Pope said, "the issues raised through the extensive public debate were important and required careful consideration. While these enhancements may not address every concern, I believe that they will go a long way toward making the project one that ultimately will be a better fit for Oak Park. The fact that Whiteco has been as responsive as they have I think speaks to their desire to be a long-term, committed member of our community."

For more information on the project approval process contact the Village Board at 358.5784 or email board@oak-park.us. Agendas for Village Board meetings are posted at www.oak-park.us – mouse over the news tab and click on the link.

###