

**STAFF REPORT**  
**Lancaster Redevelopment Agency**

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Date: November 10, 2009

To: Chairman Parris and Agency Directors

From: Elizabeth Brubaker, Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Director

Subject: **Revise the Lowtree Master Vision Plan and continue with Agency efforts regarding project implementation**

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**Recommendation:**

Concur with the proposed revisions to the Lowtree Master Vision Plan and direct staff to implement the modifications made relative to planning, environmental, and redevelopment matters incorporated with the updated Lowtree Master Vision Plan.

**Fiscal Impact:**

None associated with revising the vision plan. As individual strategies of various stages of the vision plan are further defined and prioritized, the Agency shall approve separate allocations of funding and budget adjustments as needed for specific anticipated project implementation.

**Background:**

On September 27, 2005, a vision plan for the Lowtree neighborhood was prepared and approved following considerable study and analysis by Agency staff, RBF Consulting (the “Consultant”), community stakeholders and local residents to initiate the redevelopment of a currently blighted and underutilized area of City defined by the boundaries of Avenue J and Avenue J-8, and by 15<sup>th</sup> Street West and 12<sup>th</sup> Street West. The vision plan concept to redevelop said area evaluated the condition of the neighborhood and the need to develop a strategy and plan to: a) enhance the aesthetics within the neighborhood; b) to redevelop specific challenged housing; c) to improve the stability of existing neighborhoods; d) provide subdivision and site planning design guidance for future development; and e) ensure adequate infrastructure on blighted and underutilized properties. Since that time, several potential projects have been identified and actually been initiated as a result of the Redevelopment Department’s efforts and the vision plan process. However, it became clear early on that the original vision plan was affected by a much larger geographical area that would also need to be included in order to adequately address area-wide impacts and development.

As originally defined, the Lowtree Neighborhood Master Vision Plan involved an approximate 80-acre planning area, whose focus was primarily on the development of a large vacant property in the urban core of the city along Lowtree Avenue. The proposal now being considered is the

expansion of the original 80-acre area to include an additional quarter mile to the east (boundary shift from 12<sup>th</sup> Street West to 10<sup>th</sup> Street West) and an area a half mile to the south (boundary shift from Avenue J-8 to Avenue K). The expansion of the vision plan area adds approximately 80 acres of land to the east developed with single- and multi-family units, a commercial center and government agency uses (old Sheriff Station and the Post office), and approximately 160 acres to the south of the original project site developed with a large tract of older single family homes with some newer multi-unit residential complexes, professional office uses, and a couple key commercial areas along the major arterials of Avenue K and 15<sup>th</sup> Street West.

Although the original Lowtree Vision Plan Area focused mostly on vacant land, staff felt that it was important to also include adjacent properties in the planning of what was defined as the Lowtree Neighborhood in order to provide a more complete solution for redeveloping the entire area. The pattern of development and the complexity and required interface of various uses within the Vision Plan area, are factors that will most likely directly affect the adjacent proposed expansion areas as well. In staff's opinion, addressing the needs of the Lowtree Neighborhood as part of a larger geographical area would more effectively deal with potential incompatibilities of current and future uses, traffic and circulation throughout the area, the physical and economic obsolescence of some of the existing structures, and the general lack of prior planning for the area. The proposed expansion of the Lowtree Vision Plan area will also further enhance the original "two-phase" development strategy used by RBF Consulting (the "Consultant") to produce design and development solutions to enhance livability within the overall Lowtree neighborhood.

Although the original vision plan area focused on a much smaller area having significantly different development constraints and potential with the type of land use, the analysis by staff of possible approaches to address the impacts of one area typically resulted in discussing the affects and/or benefits (as part of redeveloping), the use of property in the adjacent neighborhoods. Blighting conditions affecting the original vision plan area, as well as the expansion areas also stemmed from similar negative indicators including: a) an overall lack of maintenance; b) structural deterioration of the housing stock and commercial buildings; c) increased criminal activity and drug dealing in areas next to schools, apartments and commercial properties; d) imposed prior development and land use patterns; e) and poor traffic circulation with disconnected and limited neighborhood access. For this reason, the expansion of the original Lowtree Master Vision Plan that would include the adjacent neighboring planning areas was deemed warranted in order to develop a comprehensive strategy for rehabilitating the entire neighborhood.

Whatever is being planned for one site should be considered and evaluated based on the affects it may have relative to the adjacent properties to complement developments and not create incompatible an isolated land use patterns. Planning for the larger area would also help to produce greater opportunities for redeveloping more than the original site, especially since the expansions areas are equally blighted and deteriorating due to the age of structures and extended periods of deferred property maintenance. To ignore the interface between these neighborhoods would likely result in a greater incompatibility of uses and would certainly affect new prospects for redeveloping the area as a whole.

Staff and the Consultant reviewed design alternatives for the overall expanded area comparing it with the original vision plan area, addressing programmatic objectives, overall City expectations for redeveloping the area, and community concerns for regarding specific land use and design

guidelines. The re-evaluation process assisted in redesigning and addressing the expanded planning parameters affecting the overall area, which would be incorporated in the revised Lowtree Master Vision Plan currently being proposed.

The primary objectives for the Lowtree neighborhood are: 1) to redevelop areas involving inconsistent patterns and densities of multi-family residential uses; 2) to mitigate the conflict of uses between the incompatible nature of some of the uses (e.g. hospital, professional office buildings, governmental agencies, schools, commercial centers and residences); 3) to develop programs for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of older commercial, residential properties and currently vacant and underutilized property; 4) to enhance circulation and access; 5) to ensure and facilitate the construction of new infrastructure to support neighborhood growth and future investment; and 6) and to create implementation tools and comply with environmental standards in order to realize the potential benefits from the resultant vision plan.

The revised plan meets the objectives set forth by the Planning Commission and the Agency. This vision has been reviewed by the City's Development Review Committee and is being recommended for approval. The preparation of the vision plan represents only a first step in the revitalization process. Additional actions will be necessary by the Council, Redevelopment Agency and Planning Commission, which will provide opportunities for future public input. Actions necessary to complete the effort include:

- Compliance with environmental review requirements.
- Adoption of any necessary regulatory plans
- Compliance with Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended and applicable administrative regulations.
- Acquisition of property, specific project and funding approvals by affected parties, the City and Lancaster Redevelopment Agency and other interested parties as necessary to implement and overall plan.

The implementation of revised Lowtree Neighborhood Vision Plan will require these and other related actions, as well as a commitment of resources by the City, the Agency and various interested parties. Therefore, it is important that the Agency Board concur with this latest revised planning effort and direct staff to continue with the steps necessary to continue to finalize and implement the Lowtree Neighborhood Vision Plan, as revised.

Attachment: Revised Lowtree Master Vision Plan Map