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Victor Gardens
Architectural Review Feedback

Prepared by: Mark Youngdahl
Prepared for: Victor Gardens current single family homeowners

Background

I have been asked by Josh Berger, a resident of Victor Gardens single family district, to review and comment on a proposed, new construction, design submission package prepared by Centex homes (Builder).

The following information was provided for consideration.

1. Submission Package; Centex Minnesota ARC #2 - August 28, 2009 (51 pages).
2. Victor Gardens Design Guidelines - 8/16/00 (15 pages).
3. Victor Gardens Design Guidelines Checklist for ARC - 9/11/2009 (8 pages).
4. Home photo sheets with pictures of Victor Gardens homes - no date (3 sheets).
5. Letter to Ms. Wentz from Mark Viker - no date (3 pages).
6. Proposed ARC Process flowchart – no date (1 page).
7. Assortment of copied and cut out home elevations.

(Not available “Lot Planning Guide” referenced in guidelines)

The “submission package” is, in part, 10 new home designs (see; tabs 1 through 10 ARC Submittal #2).

Also included in this submission package is lot matrix information (see tab 11 ARC Submittal #2)

The lot matrix identifies 24 buildable lots within Victor Gardens.

These 24 lots are categorized into 3 different lot types. The 3 lot types are; Walkout (W), Lookout (L), or Full (F) (see tab #11, 2 pages, ARC Submittal #2).

It’s assumed that each of the 10 plans could be placed on any of the 24 lots with appropriate modifications.

The builder is seeking final design approval from the Victor Gardens Community Association board.

Mr. Berger also indicated that the builder is planning to start up to 3 model homes. It’s not clear which plans would be the initial models.

Author Qualifications

1. Owner of Senn & Youngdahl (S & Y) a “Design/Build” custom home building firm that, for the past 12 years, has specialized in the design and construction of historic, architectural styled homes.
2. S & Y has designed and built homes in architecturally controlled communities including;
 1. Liberty on The Lake, Stillwater MN.
 2. Victor Gardens, Hugo MN.
 3. Cobblestone Lake, Apple Valley MN.
 4. Birch Park, Hudson WI.
 5. Tapestry at Charlottes Grove, Lake Elmo MN.
3. Owner of St. Croix Farms L.L.C. a development company that acquired, developed and improved, Tapestry at Charlottes Grove, an architecturally controlled community.
4. Current Chair of the Tapestry Architectural Control Committee (ACC)

Purpose

The purpose, as I understand it, is to review the information provided and offer feed back regarding the appropriateness of the proposed home designs for Victor Gardens. I have also been asked to comment on the builder’s request for the granting blanket approval for all ten plans as currently submitted.

Prospective

Victor Gardens is arguably one of the finer “Neo Traditional” communities in the Twin Cities and surrounding areas. This has been accomplished through the deliberate and committed efforts of community leaders, planners, developers and builders. Over time this effort has been carried through by community members, working diligently to see that Victor remains substantially consistent with the original ideas and intent. This is not to suggest that Victor is appealing to all personal preferences, tastes or life styles, it does however imply that Victor has become what it was intended to be, clearly unique and different. While there are many other fine communities around the country, in a multitude of value ranges, there can always be a common thread found among them. That is, there are very deliberate and recognizable characteristics that distinguish and differentiate them from other communities. For Victor, one of the most prominent defining characteristic is the strong tie and commitment to historical architectural styles. While every home in Victor would not be considered an authentic historical interpretation, taken as a whole, the variety of styles and four sided design presents remarkably pleasant site lines and streetscapes.

Assumptions

The builder plans to construct one or more model homes. Sales representatives will work from the model(s) to seek prospective buyers. Buyers will have the opportunity to purchase various homes designs and the flexibility to add to the plans from a list of pre-determined upgrades. They will also select their lot in this process.

Since the outcome of the sales process is unknown, the builder is hoping to receive blanket approval for all ten plans. If granted, the builder would then be allowed to move forward with out requiring further plan approvals. This approach, to the best of the author's knowledge, is inconsistent with common practice at Victor.

Comments & Recommendations

While several of the plans provided in the submission package have certain redeeming qualities, if approved as submitted, would permit the construction of homes that are inconsistent with the quality and character of most homes in the earlier phases of Victor Gardens.

It's important to point out that the plans submitted are "preliminary" in nature and should not be thought of as "final plans". Granting of final approval with this level of plan creates a very unpredictable outcome.

I cannot recommend the approval of these plans for the following reasons;

- A. ***Insufficient Information*** - I do not recommend granting final approval on "preliminary plans" due to the lack of information.
- B. ***Quality and Character*** - The proposed designs are inconsistent with the majority of the homes that lie north and east of the ValJean Boulevard Bridge.
- C. ***Spirit and the Intent*** - The builders proposed designs are inconsistent with the original intent of the ARC guidelines.

For the readers consideration here are additional comments on each of the objections mentioned above;

- A. ***Insufficient information*** – “Preliminary plans” do not provide the reviewer with enough information for a thorough design review. From a practical stand point, early feedback for the presenter can prove valuable in determining the viability of a particular product or offering. While this type of review can provide benefits to all parties, the reviewing body needs to exercise caution when practiced.

- B. ***Quality and Character*** – Unique to Victor Gardens is the multitude of creative historical architectural design interpretations. This, along with careful attention to streetscape, creates many of the very unique distinguishing characteristics found within Victor. The plans submitted to date do not convey a similar level of quality and character and would detract from the current level of architecture prevalent in Victor today.

- C. ***Spirit and the Intent*** – The primary forces that have guided Victor to date are; the Design Guidelines and ARC review process. While interpreting designs does come with a level of subjectivity, the overall presentations reflected in the current plans significantly depart from the spirit and intent of the original guidelines. These designs are inconsistent with the majority of homes found south and west of the ValJean Boulevard Bridge.

The following list represents areas of design that should be addressed in order to bring the level of Architecture more in line with the spirit and intent of the Victor Architectural Guidelines and more consistent with the neighboring homes.

1. Four sided architecture vs. face applied “track” style presentation.
2. Primary roof pitch and patterns.
3. Home, porch, garage forward plane relationships.
4. Cornice variety.
5. Side and rear wall massing, detail and fenestrations.
6. Finish variety, application, detail and terminations.
7. Finish material palates and colors.
8. Front, side and rear yard topography.
9. Mechanical, electrical and venting; equipment, penetrations and hook ups.
10. Lot and topography considerations.
11. Retaining needs and applications.
12. Landscaping Plans.
13. Overall streetscape presentation.

Conclusion

While the “preliminary” designs submitted do not portray the same quality and character as the majority of homes in Victor, several of the plans do have certain redeeming qualities. A logical question may be; could these plans be reworked to naturally blend with what currently exists in Victor? Possibly. Here are a couple of early considerations for each party:

- A. Can the builder’s product work at a higher price point resulting from design modifications?
- B. Can the board provide a process acceptable to the builder that will allow for sales flexibility and rapid information turnaround?

If the above considerations are possible, I believe solutions are available that would provide a reasonable outcome for all parties.

Regards,

Mark Youngdahl

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