

BUSINESS Northeast

Transformation near Central and Lowry

Neighborhood group, City Council Member support plan for new residential, commercial development

by Gail Olson

A business owner's vision is reshaping Northeast's commercial corridor with three potential new developments: a new apartment/commercial building, a restaurant, and a bakery.

Majdi Wadi, owner of Holy Land Middle Eastern Restaurant and Deli, 2513 Central Ave. NE, said he has purchased properties near his business, including the former Sully's Pub, 2521 Central Ave. NE, and eight duplexes, five on the north side of the 900 block of Lowry Avenue NE behind Subway and Holy Land, and three on Polk, around the corner. He also bought a building on the east side of the 1600 block of Central.

The first project includes remodeling Holy Land's building. Wadi said he plans to relocate his deli/restaurant to the Sully's building and connect it to the Holy Land building. He will move the company's hummus factory into part of Sully's (an exterior re-do includes a gold dome on top of Sully's building), and expand Holy Land's grocery store—adding more American products—into the current deli space.

He plans to open a commercial bakery (with no retail component) in the 1600 block of Central. "It will be coming very soon. We bought the lot between our building and Burger King and have finished with the city approvals. We have our permit. Now we're waiting for money; we hope to close before Jan. 15."

The apartment building

Wadi said he bought the duplexes on Lowry after the neighbors made a lot of complaints to the police about the buildings and the tenants. "We are working hard to improve the neighborhood. We bought the first house, remodeled it, and brought our mom to live in it. Then we started buying the others, remodeling them all inside. The problem is, they are very old and in bad shape outside. So many things are not up to code."

Wadi is working with St. Paul developer MetroPlains, LLC, hoping to redevelop the Lowry Avenue duplexes into a 34-unit, four story apartment building and commercial complex. Rob McCreedy of MetroPlains said that they plan to buy the land and build the complex. Wadi Properties, he added, proposes to buy back the commercial space on the first floor.

If the plan goes forward, two detached market-rate townhomes will be for sale. The 30 apartments will be for rent; because they will be classified as affordable housing, there are caps on what prospective renters can earn to qualify to live there. Four of the units will be reserved for homeless people. Ann Daly, MetroPlains marketing director, said they are partnering with Families Moving Forward to find tenants for those units.

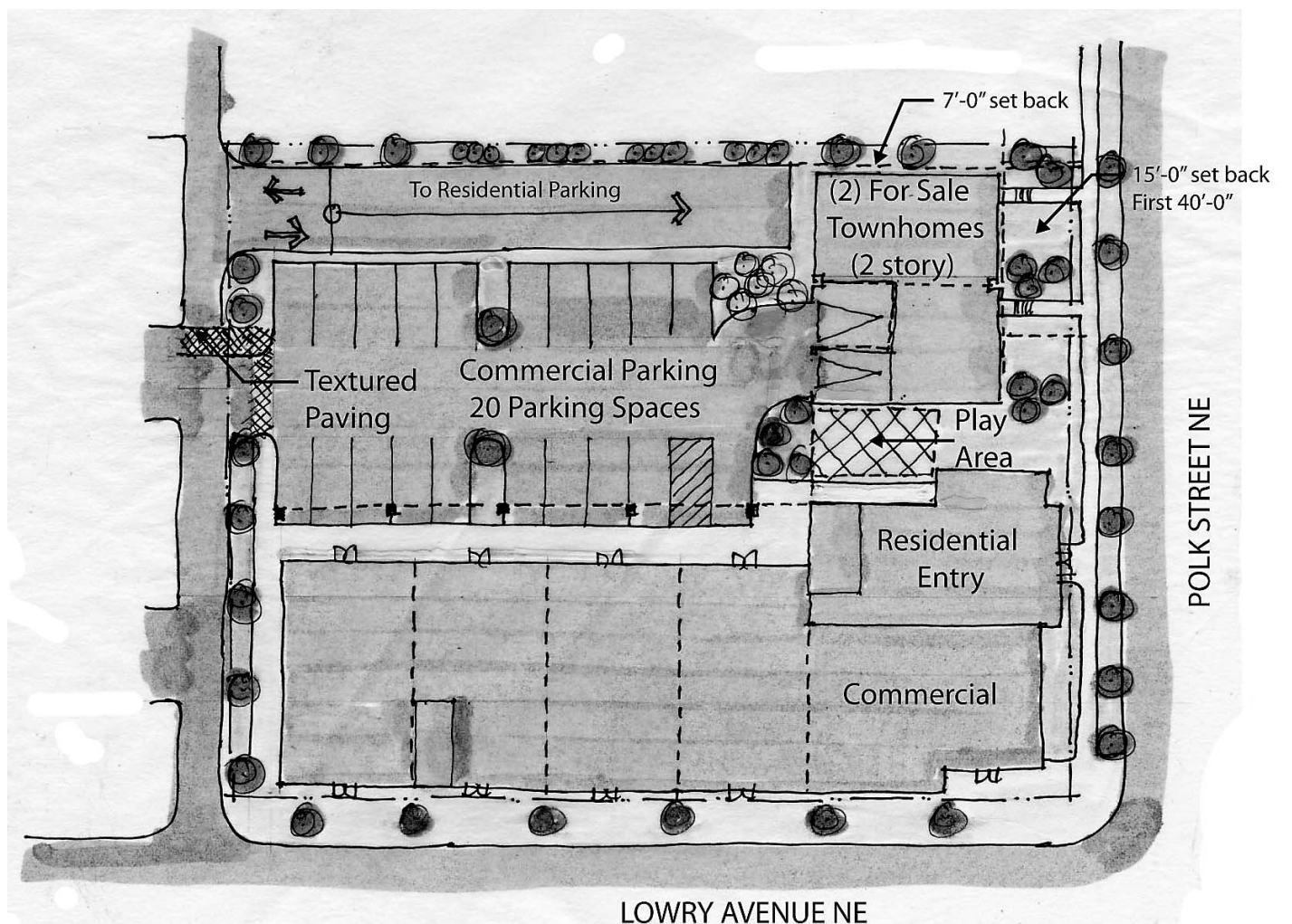
"These units will be for families that have undergone hardships, maybe someone injured at work, for instance, or they have families who have lost their house through foreclosure. Families Moving Forward is overseeing that part of the program and tenants will be screened.

"The other units will be available to people whose household income falls between the

WADI DEVELOPMENT
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The proposed development would take out this row of duplexes along Lowry and three duplexes on Polk around the corner. The building, sketched from the same angle in the architect's rendering above, would be a 30-unit, four story apartment building with a commercial first floor. The commercial space is already spoken for, according to Majdi Wadi, who owns Holy Land, the business that will expand in other properties contiguous with their present location, along Central Avenue. Shown in the overhead view below, hidden by the buildings, 20 commercial parking spaces on grade would be added and there would be two for-sale townhomes blending the project with its neighbors on Polk. (Photos by Gail Olson, sketches courtesy of DJR Architecture, Inc.)



Funding almost complete

WADI DEVELOPMENT —from page 8

\$33,000 to \$50,000 median Twin Cities income range,” Daly said. “The rents will range from \$441 to \$1,200, depending on the unit. [One, two and three bedroom units will be available.] The rents are very close to average market rate, and the apartments will have amenities, including a microwave, dishwasher, garbage disposal, air conditioning, balconies and underground parking.”

There will be a community room, manager’s office and play lot on the first floor, she said, in addition to the commercial portion. MetroPlains is partnering, in the \$7.6 million project, with the City of Minneapolis (which will provide \$1,935,330 in federal tax credits), and Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (providing \$500,000 from its Home Fund), Daly added. “We are still waiting for a little funding before the project goes forward.”

The company hopes to start clearing the site in November, 2008, she said.

talked to the neighborhood group last summer, “before drawing anything.” It looks as though removing the houses and building the apartment building “could be a major improvement for the area,” she said. “We’re in support of it.”

She said ANA is working on a plan to improve the parking behind businesses on Central. “Hennepin County has agreed to do a parking study and plan.

We’re trying to look ahead; with new commercial businesses going in, we’re going to need more parking space.”

Wadi said the commercial space in the proposed new building is already spoken for. One office will offer help to recent immigrants. “We are finding that many people come to us for help. Holy Land has become a landmark in the Twin Cities and the state. We get calls from people from Iraq, Somalia, Middle East, Bosnia. We will help any new immigrants.”

He said he is from Jerusalem; his family has been here 20 years. “We

countries, including the Middle East, Malaysia and Singapore. “Northeast Minneapolis is going to be known in the Far East. We expect to export bread and hummus to Tokyo, soon. It is wonderful for us. We are from countries where you don’t even have the right to dream. Here, your dreams can come true.”



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— Majdi Wadi,
Owner, Holy Land Middle Eastern
Restaurant and Deli

Wadi said that John Vaughn, executive director of Northeast Community Development Corporation, had been of great help in finding the developer. Vaughn said he had researched and recommended MetroPlains, a group also recommended by city staff.

First Ward Minneapolis City Council Member Paul Ostrow said, “Majdi is a huge part of Central Avenue’s future. His success has been amazing. The apartment building has a lot of potential. One of its strengths is the commercial portion, because Majdi himself would own it. So often these mixed-use developments end up with too much vacancy in the commercial space. We don’t have that concern here.” He added that he would like to see more market-rate rental units in the development. “I know it is a very tough housing market right now, but it’s a good thing to have both affordable units and market rate units.”


Cindy Schulte, president of the Audubon Neighborhood Association, said that Wadi and McCready

have arranged some meetings with recent immigrants and police officers from the 2nd Precinct. They tell people not to be afraid to call 911 when there’s a problem. Many of them come from regions that force them to lie to survive. We have to teach them that this is different.”

Wadi said that his business is becoming well known, and sales are good. Recently, he has had success exporting Holy Land bread to other

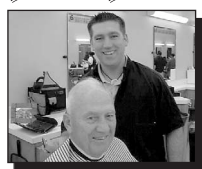
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