

Overton Square developer hires local help

Looney Ricks Kiss principal to be third-party adviser

BY TOM BAILEY JR.

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The company seeking community acceptance for plans to redevelop Midtown's Overton Square has recently made an interesting hire.

Sooner Investment had drawn some flak for proposing to demolish old buildings, erect what some feel is an inappropriately suburban-style grocery store and build with some materials of a lesser esthetic quality.

But now the Oklahoma developer has hired Memphis-based Looney Ricks Kiss Architects' principal

Frank Ricks to help finish the plan.

Ricks is a leader in a growing movement to bring to Memphis the best practices of urban planning, including smart growth and pedestrian friendly, sustainable neighborhoods.

He's not only a board member of the Memphis Regional Design Center, he makes presentations there on some of the same issues swirling around the Overton Square proposal.

A North Carolina firm — not Ricks — remains the architect of record for the five buildings pro-

posed on five acres at the southwest corner of Madison and Cooper. Ricks described his role more as a "third-party adviser."

"I have been retained to look at what they have done to date and advise them," Ricks said Thursday. "We've been asked to see if we can give them some input on how to make this work. We're willing to help if we can help advance it in the appropriate direction.

"I made it clear to them if we were going to be involved we've got to be looking at it carefully because it's too close to home," the Midtown resident said.

Sooner Investment did not submit its plans to the Office of Plan-

ning and Development by Thursday's deadline to get on the January agenda of the Land Use Control Board.

Plans were delayed because architects are still working on how the buildings would look and what materials to construct them of, said attorney Ronald Harkavy, who represents developer Sooner Investment.

Now, the company hopes to submit the application for a planned development in time to get on the February agenda, Harkavy said.

The firm plans to redevelop the property bounded by Madison, Cooper, Florence and Monroe.

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