

CITY OF ST. PAUL

FORD LOT 1 BLOCK 3
Ryan Companies US, Inc.

SITE VARIANCE NARRATIVE

May 26, 2020

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Project Summary

The Ford Lot 1 Block 3 Project is one of the first private site development projects to be constructed under Ryan's Development Plan for the Ford Site Redevelopment. Ryan, as designer and builder, has partnered with Weidner Apartment Homes, as operator, to bring forward a six-story mixed-use building on Lot 1 Block 3 as identified in the FORD plat. The proposed 2.65 acre site is located at the southeast corner of Ford Pkwy and Cretin Ave in St. Paul, MN. The proposed Lot 1 Block 3 project consists of approximately 51,000 sf retail (grocery) space, 227 market rate apartment units, 3 privately financed income-restricted apartment units designated for renters earning a maximum of 60% of AMI, apartment amenity spaces, and 436 structured parking spaces split between the two uses. The uses are consistent with the current zoning, F5 Business Mixed, as part of the Masterplan developed by the City.

The remaining 0.53 acres of Block 3 to the south of the Lot 1 parcel, identified as Lot 2 Block 3 in the FORD plat, will be developed by CommonBond Communities as an affordable housing project designated for seniors. In addition, a partially one-way alley will be constructed on the east side of the site, located in a private outlot owned by the city. This private alley, which is referred to as Outlot A, will provide the critical function of a service drive for the Lot 1 Block 3 access to residents and the project retail, the only access point for the Lot 2 Block 3 project parking area, and will be constructed at the expense of the Lot 1 Block 3 project pursuant to the requirements of the Redevelopment Agreement.

Variance Request 1: Percentage of Glazing

Ryan is pursuing a variance from the City of St Paul Ford Masterplan Design Standards (Masterplan) section S12, referencing Urban Center Frontage requirements which states: “*The building face shall include a minimum of 65% transparent glazing in the bottom 12 feet of the building for portions of the ground floor not dedicated to residential units.*” Ryan proposes complying with the Traditional neighborhood district design standards from Zoning Code Sec. 66.343 B.13.a-d instead, which matches the existing zoning of the commercial district further east along Ford Pkwy. The project renderings and building elevations included with this submittal reflect the proposed design; one elevation view (from Ford Pkwy) included for quick reference below.



Supporting Information

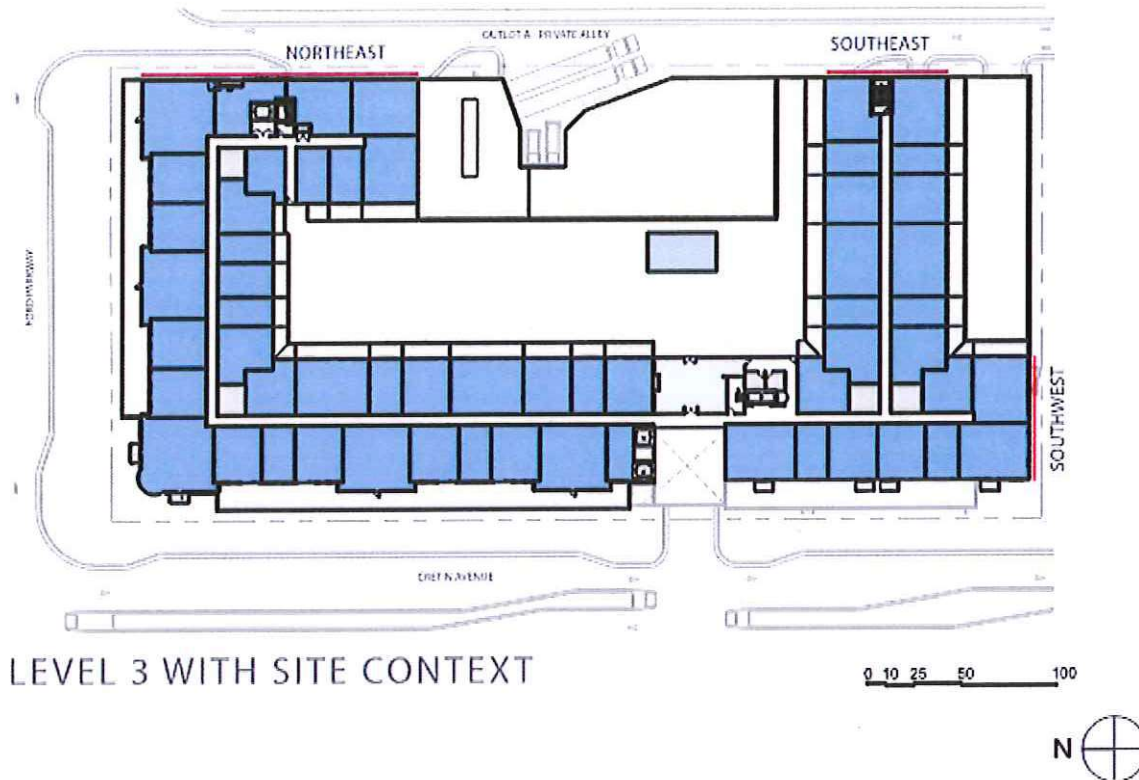
1. *Circumstances unique to the property (not created by the landowner) that create practical difficulties in complying with the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. The Masterplan calls for 65% of the façade within 12' of grade to be vision glass. The project fully embraces the desire for active street facades and visible activity within the building and have included large expanses of glazing along Ford Parkway and Cretin Avenue. This block includes two unique factors that complicate this requirement. First, modern retail operators require a flat floor across the entire footprint in order to function. The retail footprint extends across the entire footprint of the building from Ford Pkwy to the Hillcrest Avenue-aligned parking entry in the north/south direction and from Cretin Avenue to the east property line in the east/west direction. Second, the highest and lowest grade elevations – at the NE corner and SW corner respectively – have over 15' of

grade separation. To make the flat floor work with drastically different grades, the floor ends up being significantly higher than the sidewalk toward the south, and nearly completely buried in the ground at the NE corner. A substantial amount of glazing is incorporated at the ground floor in our proposed design with great visibility into the space, however the calculation method of this as 15' above grade at any given point creates a significant challenge that doesn't work with the requirements to have a successful retail environment.

2. *The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner, consistent with the intent and purpose of the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. The property use is consistent with the Ford Masterplan and the variance is consistent with the intent of the code provision for high visibility and active pedestrian interest along Urban Center Frontages.
3. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located.*
 - a. The variance will not affect any of the proposed uses that are outlined in the zoning district provisions.
4. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan and will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*
 - a. The variance is consistent with the intension of high visibility of active uses and creation of a strong pedestrian experience, which is the underlying intension behind the requirement. The proposed glazing complies with St Paul's Traditional neighborhood district design standards Zoning Sec. 66.343 B.13. provisions a.-d. language similarly included in the Ford Masterplan Provision G16. Windows and doors or openings comprise at least 50% of the length and at least 30% of the area of the ground floor along arterial and collector street facades (Over 50% of the length and greater than 30% in area: 34% along Ford Parkway, 42% along Cretin Avenue). Proposed punched openings create a strong rhythm and break down the block into human-scaled visual interest openings, a strong emphasis of light and shadow. As mentioned previously, windows will be clear, have active uses behind them, and allow pedestrian views into and out of the interior grocery space. Punched opening size and patterns emphasize architectural organization and help define the solid definition base of the building.

Variance Request 2: Height/Setbacks – Interior Lot lines

Ryan is pursuing a variance for three short stretches of exterior envelope along interior lot lines to the east and the south where we do not meet the additional 10' setback per Table 66.931(d) to allow the building to be built to the higher 75' maximum height (65' is the height limit without stepbacks). The three sections are shown in the image below and labelled “Northeast”, “Southeast” and “Southwest” for clarity in the sections below on supporting information.



Supporting Information

1. *Circumstances unique to the property (not created by the landowner) that create practical difficulties in complying with the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. The variance is intended to help the project fit into its context more appropriately and maintain the best possible life-safety design for the users of the building. The stepback requirement for additional height was provided to enhance the pedestrian experience adjacent to a taller building structure, primarily when a pedestrian is travelling directly adjacent to the building. The two sides that this request is focused on are interior lot lines, not adjacent to public rights of way, and will not have a large amount of pedestrian traffic along those edges of the building.

2. *The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner, consistent with the intent and purpose of the provision of the code from which a variance is requested*
 - a. Overall the project as currently designed complies with the intent of the comprehensive plan. The building steps back adjacent to where pedestrians would primarily be traveling alongside the building, maintaining a human scale along pedestrian thoroughfares. Stepbacks are present along Ford Parkway and Cretin Avenue. Variances requested occur at interior lot lines: portions of the building along Outlot A, which is a privately owned service alley, and an interior lot line to the south. The rationale for the stepback variances on the south and the east is multiple and varied; as such, for clarity the rationale is broken out for the different locations of the variance but are intended to be considered as one variance, together.
 - b. Northeast
 - i. The request for a variance specific to the Northeast corner is related to the building's presence on Ford Parkway. The intention in the Northeast corner is to hold the corner and create an architectural presence on Ford Parkway.
 - ii. The pedestrian walkway in the Outlot A private alley is primarily across the street from the building and is likely to be less utilized than sidewalks on other streets, namely Cretin Avenue. The location of the pedestrian alley across the street from the building negates the human scale pedestrian advantage to setting back the building on the eastern frontage.
 - c. Southwest
 - i. The request for a variance specific to the Southwest corner is similar to the Northeast – this corner holds a strong presence of the building on the SW corner of the lot. It adds to the character of the building and to the overall aesthetic of the Cretin Avenue experience with pedestrian visual interest. We think it adds more value to the pedestrian experience than it takes away. The only potential impact to the pedestrian experience is those walking the short distance between the Lot 1 and Lot 2 properties. There will likely be minimal traffic between the properties, only limited residents would be walking outside the buildings between them. From the Cretin Avenue pedestrian experience, the building has more symmetry and visual interest when the building holds the southwest corner from the ground to the top of the housing portion above.
 - d. Southeast – negatively impact life-safety egress.
 - i. The same argument about pedestrian experience for the Northeast portion of the project can be made here. Namely, that the pedestrian walkway is across the Outlot A private alley from the building, and likely to be less used than Cretin Avenue. The intent of the code section to create a more human scale sidewalk is not applicable to this sidewalk.
 - ii. The request for a variance specific to the Southeast portion of the building is for programmatic reasons and clear life-safety/egress conditions. The current location of the emergency egress stairwell puts the exit closest to the property line, which is advantageous for two reasons. First, it doesn't impact the compact structured parking design. Moving the egress inward

would make the parking less efficient, and would require additional square footage of building, which is worse for the Sustainability goals and Building Lot Coverage and Open Space. Second, and more importantly, as currently designed, the life-safety fire-rated enclosure is a direct vertical projection from the ground, making it highly constructible and most clear to people attempting to egress the building in the event of a fire or other life-safety event. Offsetting the vertical fire-rated enclosure adds requirements of signage and is not as intuitive for people egressing a building to understand where to exit.

3. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located*
 - a. The variance does not call for any use that is not allowed in the zoning district.

4. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan and will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*
 - a. The variance is consistent with the intent of the comprehensive plan and takes the overall context and future context into account in its design. The intension is the variance requested adds to the character of the building to create a better aesthetic appearance and pedestrian experience for the surrounding area. The setback along the east and south facades will negatively affect the aesthetic of the building and its presence on the Urban Center Frontages of Ford Parkway and Cretin Avenue. The current design holds a clean façade line as it moves from our building to another site. It holds a strong corner presence on the NE and SW corners.

Variance Request 3: Height/Setbacks – Corner Element

Ryan is pursuing a variance for the tower element at the northwest corner of the building, where the design currently does not meet the height requirements per Table 66.931(d). This specific code section allows the building to be built higher than the 75' maximum height for a corner element facing the Civic Square as identified in the Masterplan. The tower element proposed faces the Urban Plaza as identified in the Masterplan, which is another open civic space within the redevelopment site, but it is not specifically facing the Civic Square civic space.

The tower feature at the corner of Cretin Avenue and Ford Parkway is intended to be an iconic gateway feature for the first phase of the Ford Site Redevelopment. The fact that it faces a planned urban plaza across Cretin Avenue further aides the tower in serving as an orientation device for people within the Ford Site Redevelopment, throughout the Highland neighborhood, and for visitors from even further away. The design of the tower form draws on the precedent of the Dacotah Building in the Cathedral Hill neighborhood (known more commonly as the W.A. Frost Building) but at a larger scale. Please note that the top of the tower is not intended to be occupiable space.



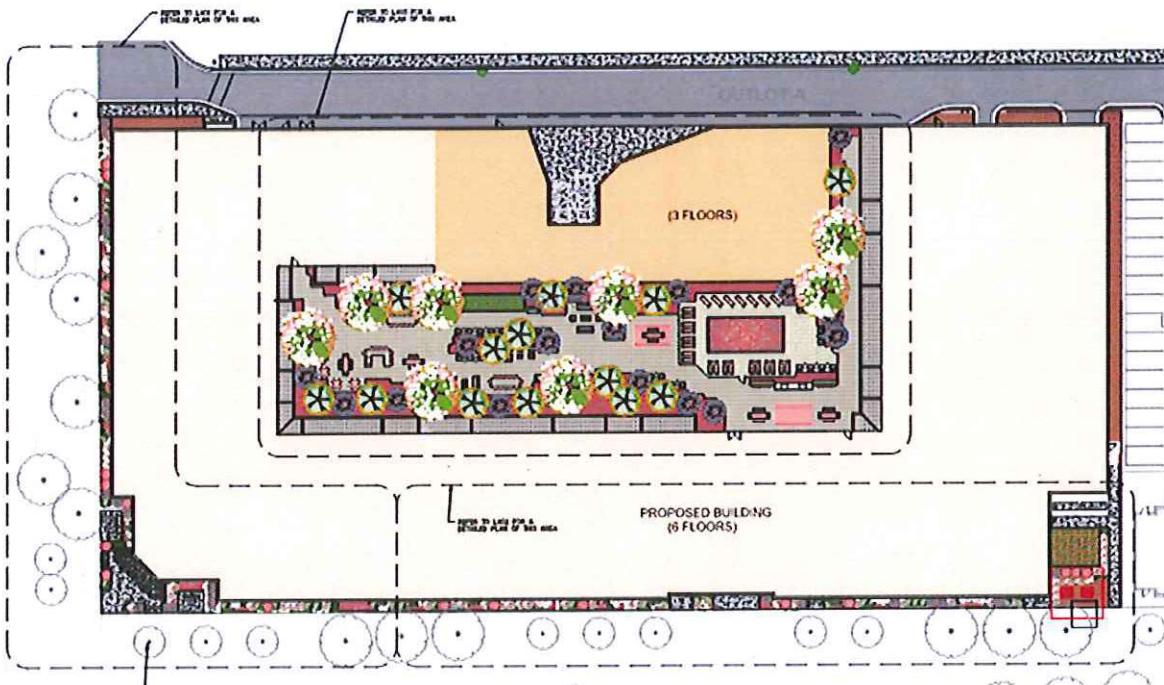
Supporting Information

1. *Circumstances unique to the property (not created by the landowner) that create practical difficulties in complying with the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. The tower corner element at Ford and Cretin is the purpose of this variance which would be similar in nature to the exception for the Civic Square in Table 66.391(d) but for the fact that it faces a different but very similar open plaza space. Much to the purpose of this exception to the code for elements facing the Civic Square, Ryan believes in the importance of framing the open plaza spaces throughout the site to further enhance the pedestrian experience in and around the plaza spaces. The tower is a nod to a historical St Paul building which will create a high-design feature and way-finding entry to the Ford Site. The project's proposed tower is across from the Ford Site Urban Plaza, which adds to the visibility of the tower, and the pedestrian impression of openness.
2. *The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner, consistent with the intent and purpose of the provision of the code from which a variance is requested*
 - a. The proposed variance is reasonable in its request to extend the exception of Table 66.391 to a similar condition where a tower faces an open plaza space.
3. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located*
 - a. Variance will not permit use that is not allowed in the zoning district as tower elements facing plaza spaces are allowed.
4. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan and will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*
 - a. The tower adds character and an iconic, defining feature to Ford Parkway enhancing the surrounding area and inviting additional interest to the Ford Site.

Variance Request 4: Lot Coverage – Open Space

Ryan is pursuing a variance for the minimum amount of open space of 25% as required by the City's Masterplan. The project provides approximately 7,300 SF (6.3%) of open space around the building exterior at ground level and approximately 22,000 SF (19.1%) of rooftop amenity space above the ground floor grocery and parking deck, which together equates to 25.4% of open space on the site. When the rooftop square-footage is adjusted per the Masterplan, which limits the rooftop amenity space to count towards only half (or 12.5%) of the total open space calculation, the percentage drops to 18.8% which is short of the required 25%.

The values above also do not consider the additional open space provided by some of the resident balconies on the north and west sides of the building elevated above the ground floor. While these elevated balconies are only available to a limited number of residents, they still contribute to the open space on the site as they will have people actively using the space on a frequent basis.



Supporting Information

1. *Circumstances unique to the property (not created by the landowner) that create practical difficulties in complying with the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. The Masterplan sets forth a range of Land Uses to guide the Ford Site Redevelopment including a minimum amount of Retail & Service space. From Ryan's previous mixed-use and retail development experience, retail zones thrive

when centralized around a specific active district, rather than stretched out in sporadic locations, and when a diversity of uses are provided. The Lot 1 Block 3 project proposes a large-scale grocery use in order to provide a first solid anchor for the new business-mixed zone and to work towards the achieving the minimum amount of Retail & Service space required by the Masterplan. This grocery use brings with it a requirement to have a large flat floor plate as well as a larger demand of parking to service its users. This limits the amount of open space that can be provided at ground level without incurring exceptional costs of constructing the necessary parking deeper into existing bedrock and or in a different shape that forces inefficiencies within other portions of the building.

2. *The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner, consistent with the intent and purpose of the provision of the code from which a variance is requested*
 - a. The project complies with the concept of the business-mixed district by providing a commercial anchor to the site to kickstart the new retail zone, providing a welcoming entrance into the Ford Site by holding the building corners on the Northeast and Southwest, and stepping back the taller residential portions of the building to preserve the pedestrian scale within the public realm. We have provided a spacious amenity deck above the parking ramp and have limited the taller portions of the building to mostly the site exterior in order to provide open space on the site, even if it is not on the ground level.
3. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located*
 - a. The variance will not permit any use not allowed in the zoning district.
4. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan and will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*
 - a. The project fits into its Ford Parkway peers with increased density and retail. It enjoys added sidewalk and street activation compared to its eastern neighbors by pursuing structured parking rather than a pedestrian facing parking-lot. The project has openings within the façade behind which are several active uses, such as grocery retail, fitness, leasing office, and residential lobby. There is character and life at the street level on the main pedestrian avenues.

Variance Request 5: Lot Coverage – Building

Ryan is pursuing a variance for the maximum building lot coverage of 70% as required by the City's Masterplan. The project is 90.3% covered, which is roughly 20% above the zoning code allowance, for many of the same reasons mentioned in the summary of Variance Request 4 above. Ryan feels the openness of the adjacent areas such as the urban plaza and wide boulevards mean the pedestrian experience will continue to be engaging despite an increased building lot coverage. The project and pedestrians enjoy significant improvements to the pedestrian realm with large bay windows promoting the active uses behind them, enhanced landscaping, and paving materials.

Supporting Information

1. *Circumstances unique to the property (not created by the landowner) that create practical difficulties in complying with the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. Grocery program business models require that a certain rentable area be supported by a minimum parking stall count, which adds to the programming space required. Existing bedrock conditions make it financially infeasible to construct deeper, linear underground parking as well.
2. *The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner, consistent with the intent and purpose of the provision of the code from which a variance is requested*
 - a. The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner consistent with surrounding areas and with the Masterplan vision.
3. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located*
 - a. The variance will not permit any use not allowed in the zoning district.
4. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan and will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*
 - a. The proposed building looks to frame the public realm by providing building frontage along the primary street corridors and to pull the parking away from the primary corridors and interior to the building for less visibility. The unique programming requirements and parking demands of the grocery use require a flatter, larger footprint to the building but will provide a stable retail tenant for the Ford Site Redevelopment as a whole.

Variance Request 6: Parking – Car-Share Requirements

In lieu of the Ford Masterplan required car-share stalls for this project, the project proposes designated areas for shared scooter parking exterior to the site. Scooter technology has recently emerged as a highly used shared transit option that could expect to serve a larger quantity of people than ride-share programs. This is a great location to provide scooter parking because it is within the commercial/mixed-use zone expected to experience high amounts of pedestrian traffic and directly adjacent to the dedicated bike paths on Ford Pkwy for an easy scooter stop.

Supporting Information

1. *Circumstances unique to the property (not created by the landowner) that create practical difficulties in complying with the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. From past correspondence with Hour Car, one of the only ride-share programs still active in the area, the team has learned that their model performs better for larger car-share “hubs” rather than smaller amounts of car-share parking in separated areas. Therefore, Ryan would be looking to provide a larger area of car-share stalls elsewhere within the development to act as that “hub” to reach its optimum performance. We are continuing to work with Hour Car in order to fully understand their business model and where the centralized location best fits within the redevelopment area.
2. *The property is proposed to be used in a reasonable manner, consistent with the intent and purpose of the provision of the code from which a variance is requested.*
 - a. Property use is consistent with the intent and purpose of the provisions of the code. Variance requested provides an alternative means of shared transportation and proposes a car-share hub be provided in another location in the Ford Site which better supports the Hour-Car business model and by extension Hour-Car client demand.
3. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located.*
 - a. To our knowledge there is no restricted use on scooter parking or shared scooters.
4. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan and will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*
 - a. The variance requested is consistent with the intent to reduce the demand on individually owned vehicles and maintains the essential character of the Ford Site as a forward thinking 21st century development.