

CITY OF ST. PAUL

FORD LOT 2 BLOCK 3
CommonBond Communities

SITE VARIANCE NARRATIVE
May 26, 2020

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Project Summary

The Ford Lot 2 Block 3 Project is the first affordable housing development to be submitted for site plan review within the Ford Site Redevelopment. CommonBond Communities (CommonBond) is bringing forward a 5 story, 60 unit affordable rental development designated for seniors earning a maximum of 30% AMI. The proposed 0.53 acre site is located at the northeast corner of Cretin Ave and Bohland Ave in St. Paul, MN. The proposed Lot 2 Block 3 project consists of approximately 59,000 square feet of affordable rental apartments, common space amenities, and 29 parking stalls of which 11 are covered. The site is currently zoned F5 Business Mixed as part of the Masterplan developed by the City.

Variance Request 1: Open Space

The project team is pursuing a variance for the minimum amount of open space of 25% as required by the City's Masterplan. The project provides approximately 3,700 SF (16%) of open space as defined by the Masterplan. The project does have open surface parking, but per the Masterplan definitions the surface parking does not count towards the open space calculation. If the parking lot were to count towards open space the site would include an additional 7,100 SF (31%) of open space for a total calculation of 47%.

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 project team has provided a combination of open surface parking and covered parking with structure above in order to maximize the number of affordable units, the necessary parking and maneuvering space for its residents, and the appropriate balance of costs for the project. The surface parking provides easier vehicular access for the senior residents who may have more limited mobility or vision, rather than having them turn around tight underground garage conditions and can also help with trips made by personal care attendants or other third party vendors such as Meals On Wheels (to name one). The presence of shallow bedrock on site increases costs if underground structured parking were pursued which would necessitate greater public funding needs for the project. With the strong emphasis on affordable housing that the City of St. Paul and the Masterplan have set forth, the project team believes the compromise for not hitting the required open space numbers per the specific definition in the Masterplan is appropriate.
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 building lines the primary roadway corridors to help frame the public realm and the parking is handled interior to the site and screened by the building from the public way. The surface parking, rather than structured

parking, creates the appearance of additional open space, even if it cannot be counted towards the open space calculation as specified in the Masterplan.

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. As mentioned above, the proposed project strikes a good balance of maximizing the building frontage along the public roadways, minimizing the amount of parking seen from the public way, and providing affordable housing with efficient use of public resources, all of which the Masterplan for the redevelopment sets forth.

Variance Request 2: Setbacks – North Parking

The north edge of the surface parking lot is set back 2' from the northern property line, which is less than the required 4' setback as set forth in City Code Section 63.312. This condition is proposed in order to provide the appropriate parking lot dimensions and building programming for the building residents. While the city code requirements of 56' curb to curb distance could be met (18' parking stall depth, 20' drive aisle, 18' parking stall depth), the project team feels that additional space for the senior residents to utilize for the parking maneuvers is more appropriate. The proposed design includes approximately 59' curb to curb distance (18' parking stall depth, 23' drive aisle, and 18' parking stall depth). The setback encroachment has been discussed with the developer of the Lot 1 Block 3 parcel to the north (Ryan) and they are in full support of this setback reduction. The two project teams have worked closely together to ensure that the setback encroachment is not a hinderance to the adjacent project.

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 minimum parking aisle dimension in the current city code is fairly narrow for typical surface parking lots, especially one used by residents with potential mobility constraints, and the project team feels that additional width in the drive aisle will be a benefit to the proposed residents. The additional width will also help with frequent travel of personal care attendants and third party vendors.
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*

The setback encroachment does not change the proposed use on the parcel and is not a hinderance to the adjacent property.

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 variance does not change that the project is complying with the maximum number of surface stalls allowed or that the parking areas should be located towards the rear of buildings and away from the public ways. The variance is simply allowing for additional maneuvering within the surface lot itself.

Variance Request 3: Electric-Vehicle Parking

The project team is requesting a variance from the Masterplan requirements for electric-vehicle (EV) parking. The Masterplan requires that all new and expanded parking areas provide the electrical capacity necessary to accommodate the future hardwire installation of Level-2 electric vehicle charging stations at a minimum of 1 parking space or 2% of the total parking spaces. The project proposed 29 parking spaces, so one EV space would be required. The project team feels that an EV stall would be underutilized and would prefer to preserve that space for visitors, personal care attendants, or other residents to use.

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 proposed residents within the affordable housing building are unlikely to utilize the EV parking space, so the project team proposes to not provide in order to minimize the unnecessary costs placed on the project.
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 rest of the parking requirements and is contributing immensely to the affordable housing goals set forth by the Masterplan.
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 variance will not alter the character of the surrounding area.