

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS, City of Saint Paul
9/29/2020

File #: 20-069819, 540 Portland Avenue

Comments about Requested Variances:

1. Primary Entrance to rear: Placing the primary entrance at the rear is part of the applicant's attempt to pretend that this project belongs on Summit Avenue. It will have no front yard, sidewalk, or driveway on Summit as is the existing pattern throughout this and most residential neighborhoods. Finding a main entrance for guests or deliveries to these three units will be further complicated by a Portland facing elevation with no people doors, only garages.
2. 10 off-street parking spaces required: The ten residential units to the West of this property (townhouses and condos) do not have off street parking and, with no alley, no ability to add it. Street parking on this section of Portland Avenue has been a severe problem for many years. We cannot condone a project that will add, not help solve this problem. The project appears to be too large given its parking demands. In addition, there is no space designated for snow storage. That or a guaranteed plan for snow removal should be included.
3. 35% lot coverage: In a location typically occupied by garages and carriage houses, this building will simply be too large and visually overwhelm its neighbors.
4. RT2 lot size per unit: Again, the request of the variance is an indication of how oversized this proposal is.
5. Minimum lot width: The number of units and their design creates this need for a variance. Other design solutions and a smaller scale development should be recommended.

6. Minimum rear yard setback: Repeat comments for variances 1 & 5. A different site plan and forgoing the “Summit Avenue address” (desire to be “on” Summit) would let this building meet the twenty five foot requirement.

Additional Comments:

1. In the past, designers and developers have been encouraged to treat variances as a last resort. They might request one after trying in every way make their project(s) succeed within Zoning and Building Code requirements,. “Hardship” was the case to be made to Zoning Officials in both Cities. There is no hardship here, just a wish to go way beyond what Code has specified.
2. In granting such a sweeping list of exceptions (variances), and allowing a highly unusual development to occur, a dangerous precedent may be set for other developers who are not particularly interested in becoming new/good neighbors.
3. Access to this triplex from Portland is by a narrow driveway that is by shared easement. The other party in the easement was never contacted by the developer (until we raised the alarm last week) to discuss the impact all this new traffic might have on them. Their home is a few feet away from the drive. Also, the driveway will be the only access to the triplex units. All foot traffic from deliveries, visitors, etc. will also necessarily enter the site up this narrow route.
4. Placing this large “house” so close to Summit Avenue may limit the options of the owner on Summit to the East. Has that owner been informed of these plans? We understand they reside out of the Country.

Respectfully submitted by Missy Staples Thompson and Gar Hargens, twenty five year residents at 548 Portland Avenue.