

MINUTES OF THE ZONING COMMITTEE
Tuesday, November 9, 2010 - 3:30 p.m.
City Council Chambers, 3rd Floor
City Hall and Court House
15 West Kellogg Boulevard

PRESENT: Donnelly-Cohen, Kramer, Merrigan, and Wencil
EXCUSED: Alton, Commers, and Nelson
ABSENT: Wickiser

STAFF: Penelope Simison, Samantha Langer, Patricia James, and Peter Warner

The meeting was chaired by Commissioner Kramer.

Minnwest Bank Metro - 10-914-354 - Rezoning from B3 General Business to RM2 Medium-Density Multiple-Family Residential, 1870 Old Hudson Road, between White Bear Avenue and Hazel

Penelope Simison presented the staff report with a recommendation of approval for the Rezoning. Penelope Simison also stated District 1 recommended denial, and there were 0 letters in support, and 1 letter in opposition.

Upon inquiry from the Commissioners, Ms. Simison confirmed this project will undergo site plan review. She also stated that there is a service road behind the building that is a Fire Department easement.

Gerald Frisch, 2350 W 7th Street, St. Paul, representative of the applicant, stated the property is being operated by the bank. He explained there will be additional parking across the street for up to fifty cars. He stated that his client is Platinum Healthcare, which is a national organization for senior assisted housing. The elderly waiver program proposed for this project is operated by the State of Minnesota's Department of Human Services. It would be administered by Ramsey County with participation from Blue Plus and UCare. He believes there is a distinction between what has been proposed for the adjoining property and what is proposed for the remodel of the hotel into senior housing. He stated he has been in contact with city staff, including the project manager for the property to the east, and stated that they all believe this would be an integrated campus for senior housing because they are directed towards different participants. Maxfield Research Inc. prepared a report, dated August 19, 2010 (submitted for the record), to assess the market potential for subsidized and market rate assisted living and memory care, and found there is sufficient demand in Saint Paul for this proposed project and the project on the adjoining property. He stated his client is prepared to start the project and confirmed that financing is in place, and they are not receiving and financing from the City. The facility would be available early next year.

Link Wilson, Kaas Wilson Architects, explained that the restaurant will be demolished and in its place will be a pocket park, which will include a pedestrian path, benches, and landscaping. He stated there is a significant need for memory care in the metropolitan area. He explained that the memory care facility will be on the main floor and will include a memory garden. Mr. Wilson stated each apartment would have a restroom and a small kitchenette. He stated the apartments would be rental units, and there would be 152 beds. He said that the facility is in good condition, and was recently renovated so they won't need to add a new sprinkler system. He stated he will submit a new site plan.

Upon questions from the Commissioners, Penny Simison explained that the property to the east has not gone forward because the bank has not disbursed funds because of questions about the poor market. She stated that the parking would still be sufficient without the lot across the street.

No one spoke in support.

Brian Winges, Suite Living, 1245 Gun Club Road, White Bear Lake, MN spoke in opposition. He explained he is the applicant for the property to the east. They were ready to break ground on that facility when the lender, NHI, found out about the potential for this project, and pulled the funding. Mr. Winges referred to a letter (see attached) from Lee Tzong Chen, owner of 1870 Old Hudson Road, stating he opposes the zoning change. Mr. Winges stated their facility would have elderly waiver beds, memory care and assisted living. The two projects are virtually the same, except for the cost per unit for their building will be much more, making it very hard for them to compete. He stated he is all for competition, but he believes there isn't real demand for both facilities in the area. He explained the elderly waiver program refers to services paid by Medicaid dollars. Mr. Winges stated that the remodel of the hotel doesn't have much common area for recreation, and said he thought the quality of life for the residents would be poor.

Gerald Frisch responded to the objections from the adjacent property owner, stating that he believes there is a demand for these two facilities and referred again to the report by Maxfield Research. He also stated that the bank is participating in the project, and will be the primary lender for the enhancement of the hotel to senior housing. He stated that the building will be attractive and there will be plenty of common area for the residents. Mr. Frisch explained that the rezoning meets the requirements of the City Code.

Link Wilson, Kaas Wilson Architects, explained the common areas of the proposed facility. There will be a 26 square foot area with a skylight, and there is also over 9,000 square feet of common area for activities. The residents are encouraged to get outside of their rooms. He explained that most resident rooms would be about 450 to 500 square feet. The facility would have a commercial kitchen that would serve all meals.

The public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Kathi Donnelly-Cohen moved approval of the Rezoning. Commissioner Barbara Wencil seconded the motion.

The motion passed by a vote of 4-0-0.

Adopted Yeas - 4 Nays - 0 Abstained - 0

Drafted by:

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Samantha Langer
Recording Secretary

Penelope Simison
Zoning Section

Richard Kramer
Chair