

ZONING COMMITTEE STAFF REPORT

~ (Updated 5/10/12) ~

FILE # 12-037383

1. **APPLICANT:** Cullen LLC

HEARING DATE: 4/26/12

2. **TYPE OF APPLICATION:** Site Plan Review

3. **LOCATION:** 2124 and 2130 Grand Ave

4. **PIN & LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** 052823410093 Summit Wood Lots 31 And Lot 32

5. **PLANNING DISTRICT:** 14

PRESENT ZONING: RM2

6. **ZONING CODE REFERENCE:** 61.402.c

7. **STAFF REPORT DATE:** 4/17/12

BY: Tom Beach

8. **DATE RECEIVED:** 3/26/12

DEADLINE FOR ACTION: 5/25/12

A. **PURPOSE:** Site plan review for a new apartment building

B. **PARCEL SIZE:** 18,000 square feet (plus 1,200 square feet credit for half the adjacent alley)

C. **EXISTING LAND USE:** A duplex and a single-family house (These would be removed for the project.)

D. **SURROUNDING LAND USE:**

North: Apartments, single-family and institutional (RM2) (Within the St. Thomas campus boundary)

East: Apartment and single-family (RM2)

South: Single-family (R3)

West: Single-family and apartments (RM2)

E. **ZONING CODE CITATION:** Findings for site plan review are listed in Section 62.108.c. (See Section H of the staff report.)

F. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** The site plan shows a new apartment building. (See attached plans and drawings.)

- There would be 20 4-bedroom units.
- The building would have 5 stories over one level of underground parking. It would be 50' tall.
- The above grade portion of the building would be setback approximately 25' from the property line on all sides.
- The main entrance to the building would face Grand Avenue.
- There would be a total of 40 off-street parking spaces (37 underground space + 3 surface spaces off the alley). The entrance to the underground parking would be on Finn.
- The underground parking level would cover most of the site and would extend beyond the footprint of the above grade portion of the building. The roof of the underground parking area would have a green roof.

- G. DISTRICT COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION AND OTHER CORRESPONDENCE:** The Macalester Groveland Community Council has not taken a formal position at the time this staff report was written. However, they met on March 28 and sent a letter asking the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing on the site plan due to "concern regarding parking congestion, the large scale/density of the proposed building, landscaping, and on-site management."

At the time this staff report was mailed out, the City had received one letter from a neighbor with concerns about the project.

- H. FINDINGS:** Section 62.108(c) of the Zoning Code says that in "order to approve the site plan, the planning commission shall consider and find that the site plan is consistent with" the findings listed below.

1. *Applicable ordinances of the City of Saint Paul.*

The site plan meets this finding. The site plan meets all applicable ordinances including zoning standards for density, building height, setbacks, lot coverage and parking. These are reviewed in more detail in Attachment A.

2. *The city's adopted comprehensive plan and development or project plans for sub-areas of the city.*

The site plan meets this finding. The comprehensive plan calls for increasing residential density and providing a variety of housing options.

The Land Use Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Maps in the Plan show this site in an area along Grand Avenue designated as a Residential Corridor and says "Policies in this strategy direct new, higher density development to Downtown, the Central Corridor, Neighborhood Centers, Residential and Mixed-Use Corridors." Page 8
- "The core goal of Strategy LU-1 ... is higher density development. Higher density means that new residential, commercial and industrial development will be at densities greater than currently found in the community (e.g. ... small apartment buildings, larger scale multi-family apartments and condominiums where there is now small scale housing....)" Page 7
- "Existing zoning standards, as well as new zoning standards and districts, will be used ... to allow higher density in ... Residential ... Corridors." Page 8
- The Plan talks about goals for densities
 - "The range of densities permitted by the existing RM districts is 22 units to 54 units per acre. Several multi-family residential developments constructed in the past decade far exceed those densities. Densities of individual projects ranged from 40 units per acre to 90 units per acre. Similar densities in Residential Corridors ... will go far to achieving the objective of compact, mixed use development that supports transit." Page 8
 - "Provide for development of housing in Established Neighborhoods, Residential Corridors and adjacent commercial areas consistent with the prevailing character and overall densities of these areas. The density goals are residential development of 4-30 acres per acre in Residential Corridors...."
 - In comparison, this project has a density of 48 units per acre (based on a lot size of 18,000) or a density of 29 units per acre (if half the alley and the bonus for underground parking is included in the lot area).

The Housing Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan:

"Greater housing density will be the hallmark of the next 20-30 years. This density should be geographically focused on transit and commercial corridors...."

Macalester Groveland Plan

The plan says "Maintain the single family character of the district" but also says "Diversify housing to meet the needs of all income levels and lifestyles...."

3. *Preservation of unique geologic, geographic or historically significant characteristics of the city and environmentally sensitive areas.*

The site plan meets this finding. The plan does not impair any unique geologic or geographic characteristics. The site is a half block from the West Summit Avenue Historic District but it is not located in the District. Some other sites in the area have a "perched water table" and the engineering for the basement level will have to respond to this if the site is determined to have a perched water table.

4. *Protection of adjacent and neighboring properties through reasonable provision for such matters as surface water drainage, sound and sight buffers, preservation of views, light and air, and those aspects of design which may have substantial effects on neighboring land uses.*

The site plan will meet this finding if additional information about construction staging is submitted. The site will be completely excavated for the basement and a plan is needed to show how construction materials, equipment, vehicles will be stored so they do not unreasonably interfere with the adjacent neighbors.

Stormwater from the site will be directed to the City sewer system and will not drain to adjacent properties. A row of evergreen shrubs is shown along the west property line to act as a buffer for the residential property to the west. The main entrance is located near the corner of Grand and Finn to keep it away from adjacent property.

5. *The arrangement of buildings, uses and facilities of the proposed development in order to assure abutting property and/or its occupants will not be unreasonably affected.*

The site plan meets this finding. The building will be set back at least 25' from adjacent properties. To limit outside parties or other activities by residents that could create problems, the site does not have an outdoor gathering spot: the green roof will have a fence around it to keep people off of it. One additional step that should be taken to reduce the impact of the project is to relocate some of the windows on the south side of the building to the east side so that they face Finn and not the property across the alley.

6. *Creation of energy-conserving design through landscaping and location, orientation and elevation of structures.*

The site plan meets this finding. Providing higher density housing within walking distance of the St. Thomas campus will help to reduce the number of students who need to drive to school. The green roof over the underground parking level in the basement will reduce stormwater run off and help mitigate the urban heat island effect.

7. *Safety and convenience of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic both within the site and in relation to access streets, including traffic circulation features, the locations and design of entrances and exits and parking areas within the site.*

The site plan meets this finding. The applicant provided a Traffic Impact Study for the

project and it was reviewed by the staff from the Traffic Section of Public Works. The number of car trips generated by the building and the location of the driveway are consistent with traffic safety.

The plan is also consistent with the safety and convenience of pedestrians and people riding bikes. To encourage pedestrians to cross Grand at the intersection, the pedestrian route from the public sidewalk to main entrance of the site plan was revised to add an access closer to the corner of Grand and Finn.

8. *The satisfactory availability and capacity of storm and sanitary sewers, including solutions to any drainage problems in the area of the development.*

The site plan meets this finding. The site has adequate sewer availability and the site meets the City's requirements for the stormwater. Storm water will be directed to the public storm sewer and will not drain to adjacent properties. The green-roof proposed for the underground parking level will absorb stormwater and reduce the amount of run-off from the site. There are a few technical details that need to be worked out and this should be a condition of site plan approval.

9. *Sufficient landscaping, fences, walls and parking necessary to meet the above objectives.*

The site plan meets this finding.

- *Landscaping* The ground level of the site will be a green roof for the underground parking. It will be planted with perennials and ornamental grasses. Trees and shrubs will be planted around the edge of the site.
- *Fences and walls* The site will have a low wall around parts of it, ranging in height from 0.5' to 2.5'. The site will have an ornamental fence around the green roof to keep people, including residents, from walking on it.
- *Parking* The site plan shows 40 off-street parking spaces and this meets the minimum required number of parking spaces for an apartment building of this size.

10. *Site accessibility in accordance with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including parking spaces, passenger loading zones and accessible routes.*

The site plan will meet this finding if it is revised to provide direct access to the main entrance to the building. (The ADA entrance is currently to the rear entrance of the building.) This should be a condition of site plan approval.

11. *Provision for erosion and sediment control as specified in the Ramsey Erosion Sediment and Control Handbook.*

The site plan meets this condition. The site plan includes an erosion/sediment control plan. The entire site will be excavated for the basement and the material will be hauled away so erosion and sediment getting washed away from the site is not a major concern for this project.

- I. **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Based on the findings above, the staff recommends approval of the site plan for a new 5-story apartment building with 20 4-bedroom units and a total of 40 off-street parking spaces at 2124 Grand Ave subject to the following conditions:

1. Parking permits for the building, located in a permit parking area, shall be limited to no more than one (1) permit for each unit and five (5) for general building use. The annual parking permit for each unit shall be issued only after certification by the building owner that at least

two (2) underground motor vehicle parking spaces are leased to residents of the unit or that all of the underground parking spaces are leased.

2. At least one parking space shall be provided for shared vehicle parking, and at least one passenger automobile shall be provided and managed by an official car sharing provider for use by residents of the building, unless an official car sharing provider certifies that use of the car would not justify its provision at this location.
3. At least twelve (12)²⁴² secure bicycle parking spaces shall be provided in the underground parking garage, and at least twelve (12)³⁶² secure bicycle parking spaces shall be provided in the patio area near the front door.
4. ~~The access from the public sidewalk to the entry area must be relocated closer to the corner of Grand and Finn.~~ (The site plan was revised to address this issue.)
5. ~~The ADA access to the building must be redesigned to provide direct access to the main entrance.~~ (The site plan was revised to address this issue.)
6. The bottom half of fourth and fifth floor bedroom windows facing south, and of fourth and fifth floor bedroom windows in the back half of the building facing west, shall not be transparent, but may be translucent, to limit impact on the privacy of neighboring homes and back yards.
7. The east windows on the south facade shall be moved to the east facade.
8. Drain tile shall be installed to handle stormwater drainage from the 4' landscaped strip along the west property line.
9. A final plan for sewers and stormwater management must be approved by Public Works.
10. A plan for staging equipment and materials during construction must be approved by DSI staff.



