

Development at 1174 Grand Avenue: Design Context and Requirements vs. Current Proposal

Respecting Historic Heritage Through Compatible Design

This block lies in the East Grand Avenue Overlay District (Appendix A), which specifies the use of TN2 design guidelines (Appendix B). The intent of TN2 districts is, per section 66.313 of the code, as follows:

The T2 traditional neighborhood district is designed for use in existing or potential pedestrian and transit nodes. Its intent is to foster and support compact, pedestrian-oriented commercial and residential development that, in turn, can support and increase transit usage. It encourages, but does not require, a variety of uses and housing types, with careful attention to the amount and placement of parking and transitions to adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The block of Grand Avenue between Dunlap and Ayd Mill Road exemplifies this mixed use:

- On the north side of Grand Avenue, residential houses (some used for mixed commercial/residential purposes) dominate. These houses are generally 2 ½ to 3 stories, and all are less than 30 feet high. The funeral home on the corner the furthest east is one story high with an adjacent dedicated parking lot. (See Photo A)
- On the south side of Grand Avenue there is a mix of apartment buildings and residential houses; a couple of the latter are used for commercial purposes, and one has a dedicated parking lot adjacent to it as well as across the street. (See Photo B)

Most of the broader neighborhood is historic, and is part of the Summit Hill Association District 16 Planning Council area. This is codified in the current Summit Hill/District 16 Neighborhood Plan:

Grand Avenue Mixed Use Corridor

Vision

The Summit Hill neighborhood maintains and reinforces Grand Avenue as an eclectic mix of housing, shops, restaurants, and services for residents and visitors. Grand Avenue shall continue to be a mix of new buildings that respect the historic character of the avenue and neighborhood and old buildings that relate closely to the sidewalk and encourage pedestrian activity at the street level. Beautification efforts on Grand Avenue continue with attention to trees, planters, bench gardens, historical lighting, and attractive design of buildings that blend with the scale and historical character of the avenue. Businesses provide parking that is affordable, inconspicuous, attractive, and underground when appropriate. A balance of residential and business uses on Grand Avenue is maintained, including a mix of small-scale retail stores and services, both locally and nationally owned.

G3 Design Guidelines

Institute commercial/retail design guidelines that reinforce human-scale building characteristics, promote quality in architectural materials, reinforce a pedestrian-focused streetscape, promote underground parking for mixed use developments, and visually-screened surface parking for smaller, single-use developments, and promote signage that is consistent with building architecture and business function, and complements the eclectic nature of the avenue.

G3a Recommend adoption of the design standards of the TN2 Zoning District, ideally in an overlay district.

G3b Compose and implement additional design guidelines, to address side and rear facades for Grand Avenue, with a consortium of residents, business owners, developers, and city staff. Pursue implementation in an overlay district for East Grand Avenue.

G4 Commercial and Housing Mix

Retain B2-C (commercial uses in residential structures) and residential zoning on Grand Avenue.

G4a Discourage rezoning of residential uses on Grand Avenue to more intensive uses.

G10 Scale and Height Limits

Pursue limitations of the height and scale of new buildings on East Grand Avenue in an overlay district as follows:

G10a Limit new buildings to a footprint of 25,000 square feet or less.

G10b Limit new building total size, above ground, to 75,000 square feet or less, including parking.

G10c Limit building height to thirty feet (30') for commercial projects and to thirty-six feet (36') for mixed commercial and residential projects.

G10d Work with the City to adopt the desired limitations in an overlay district for East Grand Avenue.

Of additional note related to the historic nature of this block and that of the surrounding area:

- This block is part of the State Hill Historic District.
- The block of Summit immediately north of this block of Grand Avenue is part of the Summit Avenue West Historic Preservation District, which borders on the alley of the buildings on the north side of Grand Avenue.
- The Historic Hill Heritage Preservation District's western border is just two blocks away from this block of Grand Avenue.
- A Legacy Grant has been issued to conduct a historic survey of the non-designated areas of the Summit Hill Association neighborhood, including this one, to evaluate for contributing structures and possible historic designation and preservation.

The previous building on this site was originally the first dairy farmhouse in this area, dating to 1871. It was, before its demolition, a two-story duplex with detached 3-stall garage, with BC zoning which allows a maximum 3 stories/30 feet height.

Throughout the neighborhood and on this particular block, materials used on the houses and residential buildings are compatible with the period of the architecture (early 20th century) and with each other. Houses are clapboard with asphalt shingle roofing and decorative ornamentation, and the residential multifamily buildings are four-square, 2 ½ stories in brick or stucco, with classical ornamental detailing around windows and pediments.

The historic nature and charm of this neighborhood has resulted in high levels of tourism from both local and national visitors, which in turn supports neighborhood businesses as well as high attendance for the biannual Summit Hill House Tour, a major fundraiser for the Summit Hill Association.

Thus, the explicit intent of the comprehensive plans, associated zoning, and creation of historic preservation districts in broader Summit Hill and surrounding neighborhoods is for new and infill development to maintain and contribute to the area's historic integrity. This extends to Grand Avenue and its unique mixture of older buildings, through promoting respectful design and maintaining existing zoning parameters, rather than more massive structures with incompatible design that are non-contributory to the fabric of the existing neighborhood.

Respecting Zoning Requirements and the Intent of TN2 Districts

The current proposal for 1174 Grand Avenue is not only incompatible with the historic context of the block and the surrounding neighborhoods, but it also is incompatible with the design parameters of the East Grand Avenue Overlay District, the TN2 code for multifamily residential buildings, and the RM2 multiple family zoning which the developers requested. Despite having their request granted, they immediately asked for variances from the zoning they asked for, as the table below demonstrates.

In addition, over the 1 ½ years since their original proposal, the developers have done little to adjust their proposal despite multiple rounds of feedback from the immediate neighbors, the Summit Hill District Planning Council, St. Paul City Council and Planning Commission. While the front setback was adjusted to be more compatible with the surrounding buildings, the other parameters of the current proposal—side and rear setbacks, lot coverage—are not only still significantly greater than those allowed by the code, but have led to a building which is still more massive compared to the surrounding multifamily buildings, and is also almost 25% higher than them with rooftop mechanicals. There has been no change to their proposed side setbacks, and only 3 feet to the rear setback. This has resulted in only a 4 percentage point improvement to the lot coverage, which at 47.4% is more than a third larger than that allowed by code.

In asking for these variances the developer has, on several occasions, attempted to present their design as being comparable in size to the existing multifamily residential buildings. However, those buildings were built at a time when usage of cars was much less prevalent, with much more use of mass transit, so parking was not an issue. Times have changed and the zoning code has, as well, in order to address different circumstances and a more car-centric society.

So, those buildings, if proposed today, could not be built in their current configuration. There is also much more emphasis on livability and access to sunlight and airflow, which inform the lot coverage and attendant setback requirements in the code.

Design Parameters:	EGA Overlay District	TN2 Multifamily Code	RM2 Multiple Family Code	Initial proposal (denied by Planning Commission)¹	Second proposal (denied by City Council)²	Current proposal³
Front setback	TN2 design standards	10-25 feet	25 feet	23.4 feet required; 20 feet proposed	25 feet required, 23.4 feet proposed	23.4 feet required, 22 feet proposed (2 feet greater vs. adjacent buildings @ 20 feet)
Side setback	TN2 design standards	Not specified	9 feet (minimum)	9 feet minimum required, 7.5 feet proposed	9 feet minimum required, 7.5 feet proposed	9 feet minimum required, 7.5 feet proposed (vs. 10' West and 9' East)
Rear setback	TN2 design standards	Not specified	25 feet (minimum)	25 feet minimum required, 19 feet proposed	25 feet minimum required, 19 feet proposed	25 feet minimum required, 22 feet proposed
Height	40 feet and 3 stories maximum	35 feet maximum (45 feet with conditional use permit)	5 stories/50 feet maximum	?	?	37' 4" feet (vs. 28'6" West, 30'6" East)
Lot coverage				35% required maximum, 52.4% proposed	35% required, 51.4% proposed	35% required, 47.4%/4528 sq. ft. proposed (vs. 4028 West and 4469 East)

1—Diatta report, Legislative File ABZA 15-5

2—City Council Meeting Minutes, 11/18/15, BZA appeal granted

3—SHA letter to BZA, 3/12/16; height and lot coverage square footage from neighbor letter 3/13/16 obtained from City staff and applicant.

TN2 Qualitative Design Standards—Divergence from Intent and Goals

27

Section 66.343 b(1) of the legislative code details more qualitative goals for TN2 districts (Appendix B), over and above the specific design metrics. This development, as proposed, diverges in many of those respects from those goals and intents, as detailed below:

(2) *Transitions to lower-density neighborhoods. Transitions in density or intensity shall be managed through careful attention to building height, scale, massing and solar exposure.* This development would replace a very low-density use with one that is very high-density—with much more height and larger scale and massing compared to other buildings on that block, and would result in negative impacts on solar exposure to the adjacent builds to the side and rear.

5) *Use established building facade lines. New buildings shall relate to the established building facade line on the block where they are located.* This development would sit further back on the lot and would have a substantially larger façade due to the smaller side setbacks and greater height compared to the houses and multifamily residential buildings on the block.

(11) *Definition of residential entries. Porches, steps, pent roofs, roof overhangs, hooded front doors or similar architectural elements shall be used to define all primary residential entrances.* The appearance of the entry from Grand Avenue of the proposed development is out of character with that of the surrounding multifamily residential buildings in terms of width, as are the patio-like pavement configuration in one iteration, and a more massive sidewalk and stairway configuration in another.

(13) *Door and window openings - minimum and character.* a. *For new commercial and civic buildings, windows and doors or openings shall comprise at least fifty (50) percent of the length and at least thirty (30) percent of the area of the ground floor along arterial and collector street facades.* b. *Windows shall be designed with punched and recessed openings, in order to create a strong rhythm of light and shadow.* c. *Glass on windows and doors shall be clear or slightly tinted, and allow views into and out of the interior.* d. *Window shape, size and patterns shall emphasize the intended organization of the facade and the definition of the building.* Again, the exterior of this design is out of character with the rest of the block and neighborhood. The windows are massive and more industrial in appearance, and the floor-to-ceiling height is typical of the building's contemporary design, but completely atypical of the traditional window styles found on the block and surrounding historic neighborhoods. The sliding patio doors leading onto decks are also an architectural element completely out of place in a neighborhood such as this.

(14) *Materials and detailing.* a. *Residential buildings of more than six (6) units and nonresidential or mixed use buildings shall be constructed of high-quality materials such as brick, stone, textured cast stone, tinted masonry units, concrete, glass or metal. The following materials are generally not acceptable:*

- Unadorned plain or painted concrete block;
- Tilt-up concrete panels;
- Synthetic stucco products;
- Reflective glass; and
- Vinyl, fiberglass, asphalt or fiberboard siding.

b. *All building facades visible from a public street or walkway shall employ materials and design features similar to those of the front facade.* While the development as proposed uses brick, the overall usage and design is contemporary and out of character with the surrounding buildings and neighborhood. The side and back building facades are comparable to the front façade and thus, out of character with the surrounding area, as well.

(16) *Interconnected street and alley network. The existing street and alley network shall be preserved and extended as part of any new development. If the street network has been interrupted, it shall be restored whenever possible. Cul-de-sac streets are discouraged; crescent-shaped or courtyard street arrangements may be used when street connections are impractical.* While the proposed development does not interrupt the current street or alley, per se, the density of the building and the associated parking will add considerably to the traffic on the existing alley, which is additionally disadvantaged because it ends in a dead end, creating safety concerns due to the volume of additional cars and service vehicles. The configuration combining outside parking with an underground garage entrance, which would be largely hidden if the outdoor spaces are taken, create additional safety concerns for vehicles travelling on the alley as well as those exiting the garage.

(20) *Parking lot lighting. Pedestrian-scale lighting shall be provided within parking areas. Light standards shall be no more than twenty-five (25) feet in height in parking lots and sixteen (16) feet in height along interior sidewalks and*

walkways, and have a downcast glow. The rear parking spaces, and the entrance to the underground parking garage, will likely require lighting, although this has not been detailed by the developers. However, given the proximity to the alley (and thus, the houses along Lincoln Avenue in the back) and the height of the building, there is concern that the lighting will be intrusive to those houses.

Other Design Impacts

There are other impacts which, while not directly addressed in the legislative code, have a large impact on the livability and quality of life of the neighborhood and its residents:

- As noted above, the increased intensity of use of the alley which would result from the proposed development raises safety concerns. However, additional issues are also unaddressed, such as alley maintenance both during and after construction due to greater wear and tear from more passenger vehicles and service vehicles. Also, along with the impact of lighting in the parking and garage entrance areas, noise from more vehicle traffic is also a concern, as is alley blockage due to service and delivery vehicles.
- The massiveness of the proposed building, especially as compared to the previous use, is likely to create environmental impacts from solar blockage and shadows, which would negatively impact both adjacent buildings and several houses on Lincoln Avenue. In addition, the narrow spaces between the adjacent buildings would restrict air movement. Mechanicals from the proposed building will add to ambient noise and negatively impact all the surrounding buildings and houses.
- The balconies with decks on both the front/sides and back/sides of the proposed development will detract from the privacy of surrounding residents, exacerbated by the height of the building relative to those to the sides and the back.

It is imperative that variances such as these, and designs such as these, not be approved in order to preserve the historic integrity and fabric of neighborhoods such as this. The precedent that it would set would cause immeasurable and irredeemable harm.

29

Appendix A—East Grand Avenue Overlay District Legislative Code

ARTICLE VI. - 67.600. EG EAST GRAND AVENUE OVERLAY DISTRICT

Sec. 67.601. - Establishment; intent.

The EG East Grand Avenue Overlay District is established as shown on the official zoning map accompanying this code to provide design standards and building height, size, and footprint limits, and to reduce the shortage of parking in the east Grand Avenue area.

(C.F. No. 06-561, § 1, 7-12-06)

Sec. 67.602. - Standards and regulations.

(a) Design standards. The TN2 design standards in section 66.343 apply.

(b) Building regulations.

(1) The maximum building footprint shall be twenty-five thousand (25,000) square feet.

(2) Total building size, above ground, shall be limited to seventy-five thousand (75,000) square feet, including parking.

(3) Building height shall be limited to three (3) stories and to thirty (30) feet for commercial buildings, three (3) stories and thirty-six feet (36) for mixed commercial-residential mixed use buildings, and three (3) stories and forty (40) feet for residential or institutional buildings. No additional height based on setbacks is allowed.

(c) Parking. The provision in section 63.204(a) that exempts a change in use to a new use that requires five (5) or fewer spaces more than the existing use from providing the additional spaces shall not apply.

(C.F. No. 06-561, § 1, 7-12-06)

30

Appendix B—TN2 Legislative Code

Sec. 66.313. - Intent, T2 traditional neighborhood district.

The T2 traditional neighborhood district is designed for use in existing or potential pedestrian and transit nodes. Its intent is to foster and support compact, pedestrian-oriented commercial and residential development that, in turn, can support and increase transit usage. It encourages, but does not require, a variety of uses and housing types, with careful attention to the amount and placement of parking and transitions to adjacent residential neighborhoods.

(Ord. No. 11-27, § 1, 4-20-11)

Sec. 66.343. - Traditional neighborhood district design standards.

(a) Applicability. The traditional neighborhood district design standards under paragraph (b) below apply to development within T1—T4 traditional neighborhood districts, as indicated in table 66.343, applicability of traditional neighborhood district design standards. Site plans and other development proposals within traditional neighborhood districts shall be consistent with the applicable design standards unless the applicant can demonstrate that there are circumstances unique to the property that make compliance impractical or unreasonable. In cases where more specific design standards or guidelines have been developed as part of city council-approved master plans, small area plans, or other city-approved plans for specific sites, those shall take precedence. All standards in section 63.110, general design standards, are also applicable to development within T1—T4 traditional neighborhood districts.

(b) Traditional neighborhood district design standards.

(1) Land use diversity. In general, it is desirable for each block to include some diversity in housing type, building type, and mix of land uses. In T3M districts any two (2) abutting block faces shall include more than one (1) land use or building type. (Note: Not applicable to T2 districts)

(2) Transitions to lower-density neighborhoods. Transitions in density or intensity shall be managed through careful attention to building height, scale, massing and solar exposure.

(3) Block length. Block faces in mixed use areas shall typically not exceed four hundred (400) feet. Block faces in residential areas shall typically follow the pattern of neighboring blocks, but shall not exceed six hundred sixty (660) feet, the length of the standard Saint Paul block. This standard may be modified to ensure compliance with the city's adopted comprehensive plan and development or project plans for sub-areas of the city.

(4) Compatible rehabilitation and reuse. Remodeling, additions or other alterations to existing traditional buildings shall be done in a manner that is compatible with the original scale, massing, detailing and materials of the original building. Original materials shall be retained and preserved to the extent possible.

(5) Use established building facade lines. New buildings shall relate to the established building facade line on the block where they are located. On most nonresidential or mixed use blocks, this is the inside edge of the sidewalk. For corner buildings, each facade that fronts a public street shall maintain the established building facade line. Portions of the facade may be set back a greater distance to emphasize entries or create outdoor seating and gathering areas.

(6) Buildings anchor the corner. New buildings on corner lots shall be oriented to the corner and both public streets. On corner lots at light rail transit station platforms, no portion of a structure shall be permitted in the triangular area of the lot included within fifteen (15) feet of the corner along each lot line.

31

(7) Front yard landscaping. Front yard areas located between the principal building and the street shall be landscaped, except on University Avenue where the first four (4) feet may be paved similar to the public sidewalk. Other hard surfaced front yard areas should include amenities such as benches, tables, and planters.

(8) Building facade continuity. New buildings along commercial and mixed-use streets shall provide a continuous facade along the street. Where breaks occur, the street edge shall be continued through the use of fencing, low walls and/or landscaping.

(9) Building facade articulation. The bottom twenty-five (25) feet of buildings shall include elements that relate to the human scale. These should include doors and windows, texture, projections, awnings and canopies, ornament, etc.

(10) Building height - treatment of 1-story buildings. New buildings of two (2) or more stories are encouraged. One-story buildings shall be designed to convey an impression of greater height in relation to the street. This can be achieved through the use of pitched roofs with dormers or gables facing the street, a higher parapet, and/or the use of an intermediate cornice line to separate the ground floor and the upper level.

(11) Definition of residential entries. Porches, steps, pent roofs, roof overhangs, hooded front doors or similar architectural elements shall be used to define all primary residential entrances.

(12) Entrance location. There shall be a primary pedestrian building entrance on all arterial or collector streets. At a corner location where both streets are arterial or collector streets, this standard may be satisfied with a single entrance at the corner. In multi-tenant buildings, any ground floor use with street frontage shall have an entrance facing the street.

(13) Door and window openings - minimum and character.

a. For new commercial and civic buildings, windows and doors or openings shall comprise at least fifty (50) percent of the length and at least thirty (30) percent of the area of the ground floor along arterial and collector street facades.

b. Windows shall be designed with punched and recessed openings, in order to create a strong rhythm of light and shadow.

c. Glass on windows and doors shall be clear or slightly tinted, and allow views into and out of the interior.

d. Window shape, size and patterns shall emphasize the intended organization of the facade and the definition of the building.

(14) Materials and detailing.

a. Residential buildings of more than six (6) units and nonresidential or mixed use buildings shall be constructed of high-quality materials such as brick, stone, textured cast stone, tinted masonry units, concrete, glass or metal. The following materials are generally not acceptable:

-Unadorned plain or painted concrete block;

-Tilt-up concrete panels;

-Synthetic stucco products;

-Reflective glass; and

-Vinyl, fiberglass, asphalt or fiberboard siding.

32

b. All building facades visible from a public street or walkway shall employ materials and design features similar to those of the front facade.

(15) Screening of equipment and service areas. If an outdoor storage, service or loading area is visible from adjacent residential uses or a public street or walkway, it shall be screened by a decorative fence, wall or screen of plant material at least six (6) feet in height. Fences and walls shall be architecturally compatible with the primary structure.

(16) Interconnected street and alley network. The existing street and alley network shall be preserved and extended as part of any new development. If the street network has been interrupted, it shall be restored whenever possible. Cul-de-sac streets are discouraged; crescent-shaped or courtyard street arrangements may be used when street connections are impractical.

(17) On-street parking. Streets shall generally have parking on both sides to buffer pedestrians, calm traffic and supplement off-street parking unless the space is needed to accommodate traffic volume, emergency vehicles, transit or deliveries. Parking bump-ins are permitted in special cases (such as adjacent to large development sites) in conjunction with a redevelopment project that has at least three-hundred (300) feet of street frontage.

(18) Parking location and design.

a. Off-street parking shall be provided within a principal structure, underground, or to the rear of buildings to the greatest extent possible. Limited side yard parking may be appropriate. Entrance drives and garage doors for underground or structured parking may face the street, except adjacent to light rail transit platforms, but shall be designed for pedestrian convenience and safety.

b. Surface parking shall not be located within thirty (30) feet of a corner. Buildings shall be located to emphasize and "anchor" the corner whenever possible.

c. Vehicular entrances to structured parking shall be minimized so that they do not dominate the street frontage of the building. Possible techniques include recessing the entry; extending portions of the structure over the entry; using screening and landscaping to soften the appearance of the entry; using the smallest curb cut and driveway possible; and subordinating the vehicular entrance to the pedestrian entrance in terms of size, prominence in the streetscape location, and design emphasis.

d. New above-grade parking structures fronting on arterial and collector streets shall be lined with active commercial/retail uses at street level with direct access to the sidewalk.

e. Upper levels of new parking structures shall be designed with exterior wall treatments, detailing, fenestration and materials that screen the view of vehicles and relate to existing adjacent buildings.

(19) Residential garage location. Attached residential garages shall be recessed at least ten (10) feet behind the front facade of the building. Detached residential garages shall be located in the side or rear yard, recessed at least twenty-five (25) feet behind the front facade of the building. When an alley is present, garages shall be located in the rear yard and accessed through the alley. Individual residential unit garage entrances shall be off alleys or interior courtyards.

(20) Parking lot lighting. Pedestrian-scale lighting shall be provided within parking areas. Light standards shall be no more than twenty-five (25) feet in height in parking lots and sixteen (16) feet in height along interior sidewalks and walkways, and have a downcast glow.

(21) Entrance location for transit access. New and existing retail, office and multifamily housing shall coordinate with the transit agency in locating bus stops and related improvements. Building entrances shall be located to provide easy access to bus stops and shelters.

33

(22) Street trees. Street trees in the street right-of-way, as prescribed by the city forester and section 69.600 of the subdivision regulations, and other landscape improvements shall be provided along all streets at regular intervals to help define the street edge, buffer pedestrians from vehicles, and provide shade. Trees shall be located in a planting strip at least five (5) feet wide between the curb and sidewalk, or in a planter or planting structure of a design acceptable to the city.

(23) Sidewalks. Streets shall be designed with sidewalks on both sides except where they abut a park or other open space. Sidewalk width shall be at least five (5) feet, and six (6) feet or more in areas of high pedestrian activity. The T4 district is defined as an area of high pedestrian activity.

(Ord. No. 11-27, § 1, 4-20-11)

34