CITY OF ST. PAUL

FORD LOT 2 BLOCK 3

CommonBond Communities

ZONING APPEAL

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Contents

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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: Open Space

The minimum open space requirement in the F5 zoning district for a multi-family medium building is 25% per the Ford Site Master Plan. CommonBond's original request was a variance of 9% with a 16% open space proposed. Both the Highland District Council and City Staff Recommended approval of the variance request but it was denied by the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). Below is the information that we believe was not clearly conveyed to the members of the BZA and ultimately led to the denial of the variance request.

The manner in which the desired urban design goals within the Ford Site can be achieved are constrained by specific lot conditions and consequential impacts of the proposed uses on the specific parcel. In the case of Lot 2 Block 3, the lot dimensions, street frontages, site grading, and underlying bedrock conditions directly impact the proposed project's ability to achieve the open space requirements. The open space is limited largely because of the need to provide the required parking at the surface rather than structured within the building. Our project team would argue that providing structured parking in lieu of the current surface parking design will lead to a solution that actually compromises, rather than enhances, the site and building design. Noted below are the basis upon which the surface parking, and therefore the variance request for not meeting the open space requirement, is uniquely appropriate and necessary for this specific parcel.

Access Limitations – The current access point is proposed off of the Outlot A alley along the eastern edge of the site. This access feeds directly into the surface parking lot that slopes with the grades of the site. It should be noted that the property slopes approximately 10' from the east side of the site to the west side.

- If the access point were maintained off of the Outlot A alley and structured parking was pursued in lieu of surface parking, the entire building would need to raise roughly 3' in elevation to achieve the needed headroom for the parking entrance. Alternatively a ramp would need to traverse the length of the building interior to the site to get to an elevation on the west end where there is enough headroom to access the structured parking. This would further enlarge the footprint of the building to accommodate turn radii and is significantly inefficient.
- If the access were placed off of Cretin Ave along the western edge of the parcel, which is the lower end of the site, the access point itself would actually need a variance or exception from city engineering staff as the access location would be too close to the intersection of Cretin Ave and Bohland Ave. The access point would be located roughly 32' north of Bohland Ave, and previous discussions with City Staff indicated that a minimum of 100' spacing of access points is typically required for this type of project use. It would also be limited to a right-in right-out movement only, as the current Cretin Ave design includes a center median.
- If the access were placed off of Bohland Ave, the access point would cut across the district multi-modal connectivity (boulevard, sidewalk, and bike path) that is planned along Bohland Ave and reduce the number of street parking stalls on the north side of the road. Because of the desire for the building to maintain a strong street frontage with minimal setback, the visibility of bikes and pedestrians would be hampered for exiting

vehicles resulting in a safety hazard. By accessing the parking as currently planned through the Outlot A Alley, which will exist regardless, interruptions to the multi-modal path will be minimized.

Active Street Frontage – The current design activates the frontages of both Cretin Ave and Bohland Ave with a Community Room, Front Entry, and Lobby Space along Cretin, and Lobby Space, a Covered Porch and adjacent Common Room Amenities along Bohland.

- If a vehicular structured parking access point were added along Cretin Ave or Bohland Ave, this would take away from the aesthetics of both building frontages facing the public way. This access point would need to be at the most downhill portion of the site nearest the intersection of Cretin and Bohland – an active intersection. The current design tucks all vehicular access points and vehicular parking behind the building and shields them from view from the public way.
- If an enclosed parking area is incorporated under the livable portions of the building, roughly 2/3 of the exterior building façade would become the exterior wall of the parking area as opposed to active spaces. The current porch space along Bohland Ave.- creating indoor/outdoor common spaces - would thus be minimized or eliminated, reducing activation of the street frontage.

Building Design – The current building design strikes a delicate balance between the amount of affordable housing units, the size of the affordable housing units, and the spacious amenity spaces provided interior to the building at the ground level. The surface parking lot also provides the necessary number of parking stalls for the number of residents within the building and is within the Master Plan thresholds for parking. If the building were to be redesigned to accommodate structured parking, the design team foresees the following impacts to be made to the design:

- The building footprint would grow approximately 1,750 SF (nearly 20%)
    - 9,000 SF would be added to accommodate the parking stalls and drive aisle currently exterior to the building.
    - 2,500 SF of ground floor resident amenity space would be lost. Those areas would need to either relocate to the upper levels or be removed from the project entirely.
    - 2,500 SF of ground floor mech. / storage space would be lost.
- The upper 4 floors would also have to add an additional 1,750 SF to each floor for a total of 7,000 SF (nearly 12% increase per floor)

Maintaining common spaces on the ground floors, as designed, provides added security and functionality for staff to monitor the main entries and these shared spaces. This also maintains a more active street front and encourages residents to engage with the broader urban amenities of the Ford Redevelopment site.

Construction Cost – The costs of constructing structured parking compared to surface parking are considerably higher and while economic hardships should not be used for granting variance requests as noted by the city variance process, the project team feels they should be considered when the added costs have direct impacts to the amount of affordable subsidies that this project

requires and that would be taken away from other affordable housing projects around the state. Below is an estimate of the added costs for switching from surface parking to structured parking.

- Parking: 9,000 SF x 90/SF = $810,000
- Residential area increase
    - 7,000 SF of added finished area on upper levels x $150/SF = $1,050,000
    - 2,500 SF of deleted ground floor unfinished area x $100/SF = -$250,000
    - 2,500 SF of deleted ground floor finished area x $150/SF = -$375,000
- Making building 3' taller within the ground floor area – $154,000
- Deduct area for surface parking stall pavement – -$50,000
- Net cost increase: **$1,339,000** = approximately plus **$22,317 per dwelling** or **11% of the total project cost.**