

HLU minutes, December 1, 2021

Present: Meg Arnosti (Secretary), Mike Moore (Chair), Catherine Plessner, Dave Pasuik, Tom Dietsche, Gene Johnson, Cindy Radtke, Julie Kaupa, Art Punyko, Kensey Lipstreuer, Kate Baxter-Kauf, Colin Fesser, Ross Gregerson, Regina Purins, Tim Schmidt, Drew Nelson, Zak Yudhishtu, Gary Huffman, Evan Hall, Dawn Huffman, Jack Fei

Staff: Alexa Golemo

Guests: Stephanie Shimp (co-owner Groveland Tap), Eliyahu Zmira, Jane McClure, Jamila Bouldali, Chet Funk

Cathy moves to approve minutes, Dave seconds. Minutes approved 14-0 with 2 abstentions.

1834 St. Clair, Groveland Tap

Stephanie is here to inform. Not asking for variances or changes to zoning. 100-plus year-old building needs to be updated. Roof, electrical, Covid caused a delay. They have been there since 1988. It's an honor to be able to reinvest in the neighborhood. Expanding patio area. Picnic tables in the parking lot were well received, but they need to use space for parking again. They have decided to give notice to tenants about the repairs. Starting after the first of the year in order to open for the spring/summer season.

Colin: There is currently a step up to get to the front door, which makes it difficult for wheelchairs and crutches. Friends suggested inside spaces are not wide enough to meet ADA standards. Are accessibility issues being addressed?

Stephanie: Yes, there will be a new entrance that will eliminate the step and bring building into compliance. Entrance will be wider and have a ramp.

Cathy: Thank you so much for all that you do. It has been hard, and I am excited for the reinvestment.

Stephanie: This time last year we were closed. We held a vaccine clinic at the Blue Plate Offices and provided booster shots for employees.

Art: Is Groveland Tap expanding its footprint, and will tenants be affected permanently?

Stephanie: The ramp will encroach upon tenant spaces. The tenants will be displaced and Groveland Tap will take over those spaces. We gave them more than 3 months' notice in order to transition. There is open space in the former Mathnasium space and other spaces nearby. Still working on details and pricing. Contact information will be available to Alexa.

Cindy: Thank you for bringing the community together. Looking forward to updates.

James Avenue Apartments Variance Application. Chet Funk (developer) and Eliyahu Zmira (DJR Architecture.) Chet: Plans to start construction beginning of 2022. Yellow Tree Construction has become a partner. Showed a side by side view of the previous iteration and the new design to meet the FAR (Floor Area Ratio) of 2.75. Had to fill in the southeast space to meet the FAR. The fifth floor will be stepped back to mitigate the impact. Requesting to hang balconies on Lexington Avenue, outside of the previously entitled setbacks.

Eli: There is more square footage to allow for more units because the footprint has grown. Includes more affordable units (10 percent of the total.) Zoning Committee and Planning Commission approved the setbacks shown on their plan view drawing. Unlike other cities, St. Paul does not include balconies in the setbacks. Developer and architect believe balconies help with the pedestrian experience. An 18-foot setback on the west side has been approved, but the balconies will make it a 13 ft. 9" setback instead. The building changed from 91 units to 114 units. It is still 5 stories but will be adding 2 feet (1 in lobby and 1 on 5th floor.)

Art: Any new neighborhood inputs? What is AMI?

Zak: \$100,000 is AMI

Alexa: no new neighborhood input yet.

Eli: It is a more efficiently designed building, including studios for less than \$1000. A two-bedroom is in the \$17-1800 range.

Julie: What is the number of total units? (114) Is it correct that we are discussing CUP and 4 variances?

Alexa: This is a new application, not a revision of the previous application.

Jack: Do you foresee changes in parking rules from the City?

Chet: Code-wise, we were not required to do any parking. We have 82 underground parking stalls.

Heather: Will there be a limit of cars per unit, will you charge rent for the parking spaces, and where will overflow parking go? How will that impact traffic and neighborhood? What were concerns of neighbors? How will this impact Lexington, which is already congested? We are making this more dangerous for cyclists.

Chet: Parking is limited to a first come first served basis. There are assigned stalls. Guests will need to park on the street. We have a traffic study, which shows that the roads can handle a project of this nature. A frontage road to 35E will help with traffic.

Eli: We were asked to do a TDMP (Travel Demand Management Plan) and hired a specialist. Two TDMP points were required, and we have 11, which is much more than required.

Jamila, *** Brimhall. Technically some apartments are affordable, but AMI for St. Paul is a lot lower than the average of the region, and many residents will not be able to afford these units. To pay \$1180 a month you need a \$42,000 salary, which is higher than many jobs. Eli: there will be units that rent for less than \$1180.

Colin: Are the numbers for car and bike parking all inside? Answer: all are inside. Exterior bike parking is additional.

Art: Concerned about pedestrians on James and Lexington.

Chet: cannot speculate, but majority of traffic would travel on Lexington and pedestrians would use a crosswalk.

Julie: comparing setbacks, what is required and what you are requesting?

Eli:

Lexington: the original setback for Lexington was 25 feet. In March we were approved for 18 feet. Now we are asking for extending the balconies, and extra 4 feet 3 inches.

James: The setback is based on average height of the building. The original was 18 feet 11, inches, but 10 feet was approved. Not asking for any change from that.

East: Since there are no neighbors on the east, we set the building on the lot line, which was approved in March. We are not asking for a change.

South: The major change occurred on the south side because we infilled. That lowered the average height and increased the average setback. The only request is for balconies, 4' 5" extra.

Cindy: Broader question for the HLU: Do we want to take a position on AMI? Why do balconies need a variance? Also notes that an apartment building and parking garages are not as bad as we might imagine. Supports the changes.

Gene: Does the 3% rent increase cap require redoing your proformas?

Chet: we never planned on 3% and is not stopping us from moving forward.

Kate: Move to recommend approval.

Seconded by Art.

Zak: likes the apartment, but affordability is a valid concern.

Colin: Would like to see more affordability. Intends to vote yes.

Heather: Would like to see a rendering without speculative greenery for a more accurate picture of the future.

Motion to recommend approval of the variances for the west front setback, south side setback, north side setback and east rear setback and a conditional use permit for height of 69' 1-4" for the proposed James Avenue Apartments at 1074-1096 James Avenue.

Passes 12-2 with 5 abstentions.

Kate Baxter-Kauf, chair of inclusivity task force. Equitable Development Scorecards. Next semester there will be a class at Macalester to help us learn what an Equitable Development Scorecard could look like. Would love as much involvement as possible.

Cindy: This is very exciting.

Art: Agrees that it is another larger view.

Gene: The HLU really needs this. We don't have a way to hold developer's feet to the fire. Have not seen a rent roll and other details. Developers currently tend to whitewash the situation.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:12 p.m.