



City Plan Commission
Angel Taveras, Mayor

December 19, 2012

Anna M. Stetson, City Clerk
Office of the City Clerk
Providence City Hall
25 Dorrance Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Notice of Preliminary Plan Approval and Notice of Appeal for Major Land Development Project 12-011 MA at 257 Thayer Street (AP 13 Lot 42, 48, 104, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 241)

Applicant: Gilbane Development Company

Dear Ms. Stetson:

The City Plan Commission (CPC) approved the Preliminary Plan for the subject Major Land Development Project on December 19, 2012. In accordance with Rhode Island General Laws Section 45-23-67, the CPC is required to post its decision on major and minor subdivisions and land development projects in the Office of the City Clerk to begin the 20-day appeal period. Therefore, this letter serves as notice that a decision has been rendered on the subject matter. **This letter must be posted in your office for a period of 20 days, beginning with the day you receive this letter.** Any appeals to this decision must be immediately transmitted to this Department. If no appeals are filed, this letter may be removed from your bulletin board 20 days after it has been posted.

Project Overview

The applicant is proposing to demolish all nine buildings on site and construct an apartment building with 95 units. The building's main entrance will primarily be oriented toward the corner of Thayer Street and Euclid Ave., with frontage on Brook St. and Meeting St. The building will contain a small amount of retail on the ground floor, a landscaped courtyard, and 80 underground parking spaces. The subject property is located on lots 42, 48, 104, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 241 on AP 13, which are zoned R-M High. Altogether, the lots measure approximately 33,592 SF.

Findings of Fact

The CPC approved the Master Plan for the development on April 24, 2012. In approving the Preliminary Plan, the CPC made the following findings of fact.

1. *Consistency with Providence Tomorrow: The Interim Comprehensive Plan* – The Comprehensive Plan's future land use map designates the project area as High Density Residential, which is intended for high density residential development with a degree of mixed use. The CPC found the proposed development to be in conformance with this designation. The CPC found that the development reflected the strategies of a number of Comprehensive Plan objectives. The development would conform to strategy B of Objective SE-4 of the plan, which encourages the use of standards like LEED to promote responsible development. Objective BE-3 also promotes compact urban development to achieve a higher concentration and greater mix of housing and transit options in the City. The CPC found that reduced parking and provision of facilities like bicycle parking and access to ZipCar memberships would help to improve transit and circulation around the area. The CPC also found that the project would satisfy objectives H-1, H-2 and H-3 of the plan, which aim to improve existing housing and create new housing opportunities for diverse populations.

2. *Compliance with Zoning Ordinance*

The CPC made the following findings:

Use

The CPC found the multi unit mixed use building to be in conformance with the development permitted in the R-M high density zone.

Dimension

Density: The R-M high zone requires development to occur on a lot measuring at least 5,000 SF and provide a lot area of at least 300 SF per dwelling/rooming unit. The CPC found that the proposal for 95 units on 33,592 SF would provide a density of approximately 354 sq. ft. per dwelling unit, which falls within the density permitted in this zone.

Height: The height limit for structures in the R-M zone is 45 feet. Measured from grade, the gables of the roof reach a height of just over 53 feet. The CPC granted the dimensional adjustment for the excess height sought by the applicant, finding that provision of common open space and architectural details not normally required were appropriate amenities provided in exchange for the adjustment.

Parking: The parking requirement for development in the R-M zone is similar to that of Downtown zones, where the parking requirement is reduced by 50 percent. Therefore, approximately 72 spaces are required for 90 dwelling units. Two additional spaces are required for between 1,000 to 2000 SF of commercial area. The applicant proposed 80 underground parking spaces, which the CPC found to be sufficient under current zoning.

Landscaping: The CPC found that landscaping will primarily be provided within the interior courtyard and on sidewalks surrounding the development. Although it appeared that the canopy coverage would exceed what currently exists on site, the applicant did not indicate the species used or include a canopy coverage calculation. The CPC required that a complete landscaping plan be submitted at the final plan stage.

Building and Site Design

Section 609 of the Development Review Regulations details physical design requirements for land development projects. The following analyzed the project for conformance to these regulations and made the following findings:

- The building façade occupies the street frontages on Thayer, Euclid, Meeting and Brook Streets. The main entrance orients itself to and is accessible from the corner of Thayer Street.
- A curb cut on Euclid Ave. provides vehicular access to the underground parking area. The interior courtyard is accessible from Brook Street. The DPD finds it encouraging that the number of curb cuts around the development will be reduced from nine to one, which would foster a better flow of pedestrian movement around the development. Reduction of curb cuts would also open up curb space for onstreet parking.
- The design of the building façade has been revised to incorporate design elements characteristic of the neighborhood. The façade is primarily composed of brick, cast stone and glass with gables punctuating the roof at each elevation.
- The ground floor façade incorporates significant amounts of transparency at the corner of Euclid and Thayer Street.
- The retail area is proposed along the Thayer Street frontage.
- There has been more detail inserted into the façade in response to concerns that parts of the building facing neighboring structures were blank. These include the introduction of transparency and projections into the façade. The Brook Street façade has a recessed entrance to the courtyard. There are a number of awnings that punctuate the façade, particularly on the corner of Thayer Street and Euclid Avenue.
- Based on a discussion with the DPD, the applicant will consider changing the symmetry of the windows along the west elevation to provide a uniform look to that façade.
- The garage will be vented mechanically and through ground level openings. The applicant has been asked to modify the ground level details of the openings to improve the pedestrian experience offered by the building.
- The proposed development is considerably larger, but not necessarily taller than other developments east of Thayer St. The building's design captures elements of the institutional and residential character of the neighborhood. The massing of the building is more characteristic of institutional buildings to the west of Thayer St. and to the east of Brook St., within the Brown and Wheeler School campuses. The design of the façade minimizes the impact of this massing by employing elements that at once distinguish it and integrate it with the neighborhood's character.
- Revision of the Brook Street building façade to allow visual access into the courtyard would increase the interaction of the development with the street.

- The applicant set back a portion of the Thayer Street façade to allow for access to the neighboring building.

3. *Environmental Impact*

Stormwater and Drainage: The applicant provided a stormwater plan, which shows pre and post development runoff rates to remain constant. The study found that the total suspended solids (TSS) would be reduced as the new development would have less surface pavement other than the garden walkways. The majority of the development surface area consists of the building roof, which will reduce the amount of TSS in the stormwater. The Department of Public Works (DPW) had no objections to the plan, but noted that the plans did not show the connection to the oil/water separator in the garage. Based on comments received at the meeting, the CPC also required that the applicant investigate subsurface groundwater issues on the site prior to final plan submission.

Traffic: The applicant provided a traffic study that observed existing current traffic patterns and compared them to scenarios involving no new development and a worst case scenario showing full buildout of the site. The study, which was reviewed by the DPW noted that the creation of 63 new parking spaces would result in an increase in vehicle trips. However, the impact during peak periods is expected to be minimal as students are not expected to drive to classes. Projecting for a worst case scenario, the study forecasted an increase of 80 and 85 trips during the morning and evening peak hours. Comparing the “no build” and fully developed scenarios, the study found that the difference in delays when travelling on the intersections adjacent to the site amounted to only 3 seconds or less. The DPW, in its review did not find the increase to be significant.

The CPC required that the applicant submit a survey of properties on site. The survey submitted by the applicant included images of each existing property and assessed their collective impact against the proposed development. The survey concluded that the proposed development would not change the character of the neighborhood given the existing uses on site.

Based on their review of this material, the CPC found that the development would not pose a negative environmental impact.

4. *Buildable Lot*

The CPC found no physical constraints that impact development of this property.

5. *Street Access*

The CPC found that adequate vehicular and pedestrian access is provided from Thayer Street, Euclid Avenue, Brook Street and Meeting Street.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on their analysis and findings contained in this report, the CPC approved the Preliminary Plan, subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant presented a three dimensional model of the development at the meeting. The CPC required that the final plan be reviewed by the CPC on January 15, 2013 to allow time for residents and other interested parties to comment on the plan and view the model.
2. The landscaping plan to be submitted at the final plan stage shall be refined to depict conformance with the Ordinance under the supervision of the City Forester.
3. Final plan approval shall be subject to the applicant submitting more details of illumination used in and around the development.
4. The CPC granted a dimensional adjustment for the building height as depicted in the plans and submitted height calculations.
5. The design of the grates on the garage vents shall be revised to be more decorative in nature.
6. The applicant shall investigate the impact of the development on subsurface drainage on the site and to surrounding properties and present a report to the CPC for final plan review.
7. The applicant shall conduct an administrative subdivision to merge all the lots on site prior to securing building permits.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Ise
Administrative Officer

Cc: John Garrahy, Moses and Afonso
Thomas Moses, Moses and Afonso
Russell Broderick, Gilbane Development Company
Councilman Samuel Zurier
William Bombard, Department of Public Works
Jeffrey Lykins, Department of Inspection and Standards
Douglas Still, Department of Public Parks