



City Plan Commission
Angel Taveras, Mayor

April 27, 2012

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

**Re: Notice of Master 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:

In accordance with Rhode Island General Laws Section 45-23-67, the City Plan Commission (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 proposes to demolish all buildings on site and construct an apartment building with 102 units. The building will primarily be oriented toward Thayer Street with frontage on Euclid Ave., Brook St. and Meeting St. The building will contain a small amount of retail on the ground floor, a landscaped courtyard, and underground parking. The subject property is located on lots 42, 48, 104, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 241 on AP 13. Lots 104, 48, 235 are zoned C-2 and lots 234, 241, 42, 236, 237, 238 are zoned R-3. Altogether, the lots measure approximately 33,592 SF.

Findings of Fact

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

1. *Consistency with Providence Tomorrow: The Interim Comprehensive Plan* - The future land use map of the comprehensive plan indicates two land use designations for this property: Neighborhood Commercial/Mixed Use to the west, and Medium-Density Residential to the east. Per the plan, the Neighborhood Commercial/Mixed Use designation is intended for traditional pedestrian oriented development that serves local neighborhood needs for convenience retail, services, professional offices and housing. Residential uses are encouraged. Development in the Medium-Density Residential areas are characterized by one- to three-family dwellings on separate lots that vary from 3,200 to 5,000 sq. ft. Some small-scale neighborhood uses like neighborhood corner stores may be considered appropriate.

While the proposed development is consistent with the Neighborhood Commercial/Mixed Use designation, it is inconsistent with the Medium-Density Residential designation. The applicant has petitioned the City Council to change the designation for the area bounded by Cushing, Hope, Angell, and Thayer Streets to Neighborhood Commercial/Mixed Use. Were the Council to make this change, the project would be consistent with the Plan.

The CPC found that the project conformed to a number of objectives expressed in the Comprehensive Plan. These include:

- Locating high-density housing in areas proximate to public transportation
- Providing lower parking ratios and bike storage to promote walking and biking
- Providing below-grade parking
- Locating student housing proximate to campuses to discourage driving and conflicts with neighbors
- Eliminating curb cuts to prevent vehicle-pedestrian conflicts and open up more on-street parking
- Installing new landscaping
- Reconstructing sidewalks
- Providing mixed use
- Reducing stormwater runoff over current conditions
- Promoting energy efficiency through LEED certification
- Increasing property tax revenue

The Commission also noted potential negative impacts from the development such as:

- More vehicular traffic than currently exists
- Demolition of nine existing buildings

- The large massing of the building that could set a precedent for other development in the area

Although the proposal is consistent with many aspects of the comprehensive plan, it is inconsistent with the land use designation for a part of the block. The proposed comprehensive plan change would accommodate the project.

2. Compliance with Zoning Ordinance

The Commission made the following findings:

Use

The subject property is zoned C-2 to the west and R-3 to the east. The proposed multifamily dwelling is permitted in the C-2 zone. However, the R-3 zone permits only one, two and three family homes. There is at least one commercial establishment in the R-3 zone on Meeting St., granted by variance.

Dimension

Density: The C-2 and R-3 zones requires 1,200 sq. ft. and 2,000 sq. ft. of land area per dwelling unit, respectively. Under the current zoning scheme, no more than 20 dwelling units could be built on site. The proposal is for 102 units, a density of 329 sq. ft. per dwelling unit.

Height: The C-3 and R-3 zone permit three stories of height, not to exceed 45 feet in C-2, and 40 feet in R-3. The building is proposed to be four stories and will not exceed 45 feet in height.

Parking: In the C-2 and R-3 zones, residences require 1.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit; approximately 154 spaces are required for 102 units. The applicant proposes 80 underground parking spaces for 102 units. The parking would be insufficient under current zoning.

Landscaping: Landscaping will primarily be provided within the interior courtyard and on sidewalks surrounding the development, with a focus on canopy coverage provided along Brook and Thayer Street. It would exceed what currently exists on site.

Proposed New Zone

The applicant has proposed an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to create a new C-3 zone and apply it to all of the subject lots. This zone would permit the proposed use, density, building dimensions, and reduced parking ratio as of right. The CPC is required to make a recommendation to the City Council for zoning changes. The CPC will take public comment on the proposed zoning change during the public hearing on May 15.

Building and Site Design

Section 609 of the Development Review Regulations details physical design requirements for land development projects. The CPC analyzed the project for conformance to these regulations.

- 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.
- Two curb cuts, on Euclid Ave. and Brook St. provide access to the property.
- The ground floor façade incorporates significant amounts of transparency and is composed of brick, glass, steel and other materials that are characteristic of development in the surrounding neighborhood.
- It is unclear where proposed retail will be located. It should be located fronting on Thayer St.
- The building presents areas of visible blank walls adjacent to neighboring buildings. This is a concern that should be addressed through building design.
- The proposed development is considerably larger, but not necessarily taller than other developments east of Thayer St. 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 building's design should minimize the impact of this massing. The building should also be an example of outstanding architecture, and in no way seem generic.

3. Environmental Impact

- To mitigate stormwater runoff, the CPC required the applicant to provide a detailed stormwater plan at the preliminary plan stage.
- As the development will be a dense housing development, the CPC required that a traffic study should be prepared to determine its impact.
- The CPC required the applicant to conduct a survey of the existing structures on site to assess the impact to the built environment.

4. Buildable Lot

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

5. Street Access

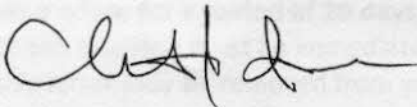
The CPC found that adequate vehicular and pedestrian access is provided from Thayer Street, Euclid Avenue and Meeting Street.

RECOMMENDATION

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

1. The applicant shall present a utility and stormwater management plan at the preliminary plan stage.
2. The applicant shall conduct a study detailing the impacts of traffic generated by the project.
3. The applicant shall prepare an assessment of the impact to the built environment through a survey of the existing structures on site.
4. The design of the building shall be refined to respond architecturally to its surroundings and to address concerns of the impact of its large massing on the area.
5. The CPC will conduct a public hearing on the comprehensive plan change and make recommendations to the City Council on the proposed comprehensive plan and zoning changes. Should the plan and zoning changes fail to be approved as proposed, the plan shall be modified accordingly.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Ise
Administrative Officer

Cc: Kelly Morris, 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