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Mayor

Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP
Committee Chairman
Director of Planning



Jim Woyciechowski
Fire Department

David Rodio
Building Official

Nick Capezza
Engineering Division

Stephen Mulcahy
Traffic Safety Division

DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

Cranston City Hall
869 Park Avenue, Cranston, Rhode Island 02910

MINUTES 9:00 AM, WEDNESDAY, May 18, 2022 CRANSTON CITY HALL – 3RD FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBER

1. Call to Order

Principal Planner Doug McLean, as designee of committee member and Chairman Jason Pezzullo, called the Development Plan Review Committee meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. in the City Council chamber.

The following members were in attendance for the meeting: Nick Capezza, Stephen Mulcahy, and Franklin Paulino.

The following Planning Department members were in attendance: Doug McLean, Principal Planner; Joshua Berry, Senior Planner; and Alex Berardo, Planning Technician.

2. Approval of Minutes

- 5/4/22 Meeting

(vote taken)

Upon motion made by Mr. Capezza and seconded by Mr. Mulcahy, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the 5/4/22 meeting.

3. "661 Park Project"

Pre-Application (No vote taken)

Location: 661 Park Avenue, AP 3, Lots 289, 291, 1695 & 1696

Zoning District: C-3 (General business)

Owner/Applicant: Legion Development, Inc.

Proposal: The applicant is proposing to redevelop the site by razing all existing buildings and constructing a new building that will host 69 residential units and commercial uses on the street-level facing Park Avenue. The redevelopment will include associated modifications to site circulation, parking, and landscaping. In addition to being reviewed as a Development Plan Review application, this proposal will also be reviewed as a Major Land Development Application and will require amendments to the Zoning Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan.

Ed Pimentel, planning expert for the applicant team, briefly summarized the 661 Park Avenue project and the progress made to date. With him was Atty. John DiBona, representing the applicant; Marshall D'Ambrosio, of Legion Development, Inc.; Eric Prive, registered P.E.; and Herman Peralta, registered P.E. with Beta Group.

Mr. Prive provided some more summary detail regarding the proposal said a landscape plan would be submitted at the preliminary plan phase to include stormwater management, but noted plans already show a reduction in paved area and increased in vegetated buffers along the site's residential abutters.

Chairman Jason Pezzullo and Committee Member Stan Pikul then joined the meeting.

Mr. Peralta reported that a full traffic impact study was conducted and there were no major safety issues identified with the plan. The development would only generate around 50 trips during the peak period, which is not a substantial increase over current conditions, and the Park/Wellington intersection would be at service level A, sufficient to handle present traffic as well as the projected future traffic. The southbound approach to Doric Avenue would be slowest, but with a 1- to 2-car queue, roughly what it is at present. He offered only three suggestions: 1) to prohibit parking on either side of the driveway leading onto Park Avenue to preserve sight lines; 2) to add reflector plates for streetlights; and 3) to find out if RIDOT would allow another pedestrian phase.

Mr. McLean asked if peak hour traffic projections for the site are in-line with present use. Mr. Peralta said yes, with the caveat that a possible restaurant tenant could raise the traffic levels. He also explained that the site will change from a primarily commercial to a primarily residential use, and residential uses are not "destinations" in the way that commercial uses are. Mr. Pimentel agreed and said that the applicant team used urban area vs. city core traffic standards and noted they have designed the property to facilitate more pedestrian use.

Mr. Berry asked the applicant team to speak to its parking spaces per unit calculation. Mr. Pimentel noted that in his career, he has seen consensus gradually coalesce around the idea that two spaces per unit ends up being excessive for this type of development – the actual number tends to be closer to 0.75-1.25 spaces per unit because some tenants have either one car or no cars at all. He noted that this site affords enough room to provide 1.3-1.5 spaces per unit, but the applicant prefers to offer more green space than to pave more area than is necessary. Mr. Pikul asked if the deviation from the standard 2 spaces per unit is baked into their proposed zone change, to which Mr. Pimentel said yes.

Mr. Mulcahy expressed concern over the potential impacts of a restaurant tenant on the parking situation, but Mr. Pimentel said the key is that there is a synergy of uses. He said he had worked on mill redevelopment projects that were much more intensive, but the commercial uses mostly used parking spaces during the day, while residential uses occupy the spaces at night. Mr. Berry asked how the balance is maintained when commercial activity spills into the evening; Mr. Pimentel said there will be more spaces than necessary provided on-site, and Mr. Peralta said on-street parking availability would relieve the remaining pressure.

Mr. Mulcahy also said that the City requires parking stall dimensions be a minimum of 9' x 18', as opposed to 10' x 20', and asked the applicant team to revisit the proposed location for the dumpster. Mr. Prive said they could revisit both items. He then asked if the gate at N. Clarendon St. would be locked, to which Mr. Prive said yes – opened for emergency access only.

Mr. Berry said the floor plan didn't show direct access to the ground-floor residential units; Mr. Prive said a hallway is shown on an updated version of the plans. Mr. Berry asked if the loading space should be moved from its currently proposed location along Park Avenue and wondered if the sidewalk would be blocked while it was in use. Mr. Pikul agreed and said he thought it could be an issue. Mr. Pimentel said on-street loading probably isn't ideal and wondered if perhaps a row of parking in the rear could serve an alternate use as a temporary loading zone.

Mr. Capezza concurred with Mr. Mulcahy's suggestion to revise the parking dimensions down according to the City's minimum dimensions. He also wondered if the N. Clarendon access point should simply be closed and blocked altogether. He said he couldn't speak for Fire in Mr. Woyciechowski's absence, but he didn't think it was necessary to maintain it. He also said he'd be interested to review the sidewalk and drainage details at the appropriate time.

Mr. Paulino asked for details on the affordable housing element; Mr. Berry said the ordinance would specify 15% of the units be restricted as affordable for 99 years.

Mr. Pikul said he would be interested to review how certain building code aspects (like accessibility) are handled in future plans, and he will also be looking forward to the signage plan.

Director Pezzullo said he had no comments to add beyond what the Committee had already discussed. As there were no public comments, and no vote was to be taken, the Committee proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

4. “Achievement First Illuminar School” *

Pre-Application (No vote taken)

Location: 85 Garfield Avenue, AP 7, Lot 91

Zoning District: C-4 (Highway business)

Owner/Applicant: Achievement First

Proposal: The applicant is proposing to expand the existing school facility on this property. The expansion will include associated modifications to site circulation, parking, and landscaping.

The applicant team for the Achievement First Illuminar School expansion project, comprised of Cassidy McKee, Director of Special Projects for Achievement First; David McKinley, PLA, and Larry Trim, AIA, both of Kaestle Boos Associates; and Leila Colbert, presented their concept. Ms. McKee said that since the applicant last met with the City, it has bought the property, which was a land condominium unit they had been leasing. The applicant seeks to build a gymnasium addition with space for bus parking. The building expansion will not prompt an expansion in the number of students but is rather a reworking of the site.

Mr. McKinley added the team is working with engineering firms to determine whether the site has any contamination that might impact the site layout, as it once hosted Narragansett Brewing. For now, they know they will be modifying the front student pick-up area as well as the parking and they will modify the traffic island slightly. He also noted the bus lane would be designed to wrap around the building and would pass over the proposed basketball court.

Mr. McLean said that school uses has two extreme traffic peaks and little other demand, so the Committee needed to hear how the site’s use and programming would impact parent circulation. Ms. McKee said there has been a higher-than-normal rate of parent drop-offs this year, most likely due to COVID, and that should subside in the future. Mr. McLean acknowledged that the school is fairly new and its track record for traffic has only existed during the COVID era, but he said the fact that much of their parking area is on leased land (and could theoretically disappear in the future) is a point the Committee should consider. Ms. McKee said the school has a right of first refusal (ROFR) on those additional parcels but cannot purchase them immediately. Mr. Mulcahy said he would be interested to review their traffic study.

Mr. McKinley asked how the City would calculate frontage for the site and whether their plans for vegetation would suffice (17% of the site is landscaped). Regarding the vegetation, Mr. McLean said that the DPRC could issue a waiver for the paved parking area, but the applicant would need to provide an explanation as to why their specific use needs accommodation.

As for the frontage issue, Chairman Pezzullo said the land condo process as it is being used here amounts to a “quasi-subdivision,” almost verging on an illegal subdivision. He explained that it circumvents the City’s formal subdivision process and felt the applicant would probably need to apply for an official subdivision and a variance. Ms. McKee asked how the applicant would proceed, as it is not the declarant of the land condominium, but it is now an owner, and to what extent they can proceed with their plans while that question is unresolved. Chairman Pezzullo said he could speak with the applicant team offline, but it would take some unpacking.

For the Committee’s benefit, Mr. Trim said the shared use of asphalt for the basketball court and the bus land is acceptable in RIDE standards and exists elsewhere. Mr. Capezza asked how the school could restrict access to the court is there would be no fencing; Mr. Trim said it would have to be done through monitoring. Mr. Capezza advised the applicant consider moving the court closer toward the gym so it could be enclosed with a fence – he said there was a greater risk of damage to the court and hoops if the public could access them freely.

Mr. Paulino asked if the school planned to conduct any maintenance or landscaping on the portion of the bike path adjacent to their site. Ms. McKee said the team hadn't thought of it but could discuss it; Mr. McLean said it might be mentioned in their maintenance plan. Mr. Capezza asked if the elimination of the berm would require replacement with a retaining wall, but the applicant team said it's simply a man-made mound of earth on flat ground. They added that removal is more for student safety, as some children have hidden on the other side of the berm before, and the bike path is publicly accessible and fairly busy.

Mr. Pikul asked that the plans show more clearly where the proposed building will be located. He cautioned the applicant team to review City code particularly for their signage and lighting plans. Mr. McLean added that the signage regulations in particular could be more restrictive than they expect.

Mr. Paulino asked if the addition would lead to the hiring of more employees. The applicants said at full growth, which should be achieved next year with the inaugural 8th grade class, the full K-8 school will accommodate about 865 students and 75 staff.

Returning to the potential contamination issue, Mr. McLean asked if any RIDEM permits were coming for the soil remediation. He said that if changes are to be made to the plans, the City will need state permits in place before the preliminary plan submission can be made. He also noted that the applicant hadn't provided for a bypass lane in the rear of the building near the bus parking area. He wondered if there would be enough clearance for fire trucks to get around that side of the building without a bypass lane and said he would try to get in touch with Fire after the meeting.

As there were no public comments, and the item was a pre-application meeting, no votes were taken on the matter.

Upon motion made by Mr. Capezza and seconded by Mr. Pikul, the Development Plan Review Committee unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:40 a.m.