



City of Ann Arbor

301 E. Huron St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
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Meeting Minutes Planning Commission, City

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

7:00 PM

City Hall, 301 E. Huron Street, 2nd Flr.

10-a 14-0638

515 Oxford Special Exception Use and Planned Project Site Plan for City Council Approval - A proposal to construct a rear addition to an existing three-family structure on this 0.24 acre parcel and convert it to a sorority annex. The total building size will be 6,490 square feet. Planned project modifications are requested for reduced side and rear setbacks to allow the original footprint of the Brigham house and studio to be retained to preserve the house's existing façade. A total of four parking spaces will be provided. Special exception use approval from the Planning Commission is required for a sorority use in the R2B district. The proposed maximum occupancy is 20, including a resident manager. Ward 2. Staff Recommendation: Approval

Thacher presented the staff report.

PUBLIC HEARING

Al Paas, 2392 Grant Street, Ann Arbor, member of A2Modern, asked if the portion of the house on the north side is included.

Staff responded yes.

Paas said he didn't have a problem with the changes that have been made, noting that the main issue is that the buildings that belong to that era are functioning as single family residences, with this one being an exception. He said he suspects that putting the house in a historic district may meet with opposition but he would like the Commission to consider whether this legacy could be protected. He would like for A2Modern to get together with the Historic District Commission and the Planning Commission and find a mechanism for these building to be protected in the future.

Robb Burroughs, 302 B. S. State Street, representing the petitioner, provided background on the time since they had been before the Commission for the rezoning request. He thanked staff for helping them move in the right direction on this project; he pointed out their realization of the architectural gem they were dealing with, and explained that the project is now retaining primary elements relatively intact. He showed images of the proposed development with the original photo, noting that they didn't want to clone elements of the existing house, so they went to a flat roof, with terracing effects at the back corner. He explained the floor plans with larger gathering space internally and a bumped up ceiling height which affects the overall height. He said the topographic change minimizes the effect of a taller roof.

Noting no further speakers, the Chair declared the public hearing closed.

Moved by Clein, seconded by Giannola, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission, after hearing all interested persons and reviewing all relevant information, finds the petition to substantially meet the standards in Chapter

55 (Zoning Ordinance), Section 5:104 (Special Exceptions), and, therefore, approves the 515 Oxford Special Exception Use for a sorority use, subject to building occupancy of no more than 20 persons, including the resident manager.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Clein asked if the sorority will rent the property from the owner.

Thacher said yes.

Clein asked if the sorority moves out, could the house become just student housing.

Thacher said this house could be a fraternity, sorority or a student cooperative.

Clein asked about accessibility and if the building was required to be brought up to be ADA compliant due to the renovations.

Burroughs said given the added work and space, there will be required elements, pointing out the accessible spaces on first floor.

Clein said he wanted to make sure there are no surprises at time of construction. He further asked about the roof material, if the upper flat roofs would be single-ply membranes.

Burroughs said yes.

Clein asked about the lower roofs that jut out.

Burroughs said the intermediate structures are an implied element that is intended to emulate and mimic other elements of the house and are simple roof structures that are in cantilevered form and protrude approximately 18 inches.

Woods asked about the garage and parking.

Thacher showed the proposed parking on the current plan, which calls for all surface parking.

Woods asked if the garage is the carport.

Thacher explained that the earlier garage had been converted to living space.

Burroughs said the Bentley Library plans showed that the original house has a 2 car garage that was very early on in its life [maybe 5-6 years after construction] converted to a studio and has always, to the best of their knowledge, always been occupied as a living space.

Woods asked where the resident manager would be living.

Burroughs said there will be a stand-alone suite with a separate entrance on the eastern side of the building allowing the manager to come and go as needed but also give them direct access into the rest of the house proper.

Woods asked about the other types of uses that could possibly occupy this building and if they also require a resident manager and, if not, what might become of this space.

Thacher said both sororities and fraternities require a resident manager.

Rampson explained that a cooperative would not require a manager, since everyone that lives on site has shared management.

Thacher clarified that the suite could easily be incorporated into the remainder of the house should the occupants change.

Woods asked how many could occupy the building.

Thacher said if they wanted any number greater than 20 persons they would be required to come back before the Commission for a Special Exception Use.

Briere asked if this house could still be a duplex, a single-family use, clubhouse, or boarding house in this R2B zoning district.

Thacher said yes.

Westphal noted that the Commission had received a lot of correspondence on this proposed project and those hoping to preserve the house in its current state or in hopes of establishing it as a single-family structure. He asked Thacher to weigh in on the tension between restoration and an upgrade to a different use on structures so close to the University.

Thacher said the house is located on Oxford, with large student rentals to the north and south and on the west there is a sorority. She showed on the aerial map that across the street and along South University there is a mix of single-family and rental housing units. She felt it was appropriate to expand sorority or fraternity on this lot, which would have less of an impact on the neighbors at this location than in other locations. She said, unfortunately this site is not a protected resource and the owners could have chosen to bulldoze the building and start from scratch; however, in this case, they have chosen to go with a riskier Planned Project route in order to preserve the structure that is already on the site. She said she appreciates that they have taken that leap and preserved much of the façade and the north wing, adding that she cannot apply the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation since it is not in a historic district.

Thacher stated that when you drive by the street you will see George Brigham's House there with room for a lot of sorority members in the back, and that will be fine in this location.

Westphal asked about the condition of the rear yard.

Thacher said the photo was taken when the owner was cleaning out materials left over during winter and would not be there upon completion of the project.

Westphal asked about the 'Dan's Houses' sign.

The owner stated that there would not be a sign on the building.

Westphal asked if the University of Michigan had provided comments on any encroachment towards their neighboring parcel.

Thacher said none were received.

Briere asked whether the front wall of the addition will be moved out [forward] into the

front setback.

Burroughs said, no, only the reconstruction of the trellis over the historic carport and the roof overhangs will be extending further than the existing structure and no part will be extending into the front setback.

Briere asked about windows in the new portion.

Burroughs said they would be primarily casement style.

Briere noted that she liked that each roof height represents new room; however, the wing concept seems to have disappeared which made for a dynamic building. She said she had regret over losing that element but appreciated all the hard work and effort put into restoring the remainder of the structure.

Woods noted that she received correspondence runs the gamut. She said there are those who are concerned about how the building will look, then there are those concerned about how the building will be used. She said it was interesting to read that Brigham had students who would come and use the house, so this use is bringing students back into the house. She noted that given the building's good distance from the street, one would be hard pressed to see that the integrity of the building is being damaged. She said she is pleased that this is an attempt to take an existing structure and to update it, investing in the building to make it work. She was in support of the project. She asked Commissioner Giannola if she had something to add, given her time on the Historic District Commission.

Giannola said that the deciding factor is whether the structure is actually in the historic district. She agreed with staff [Thacher], adding that one cannot protect everything all the time, so given this parcel is outside of the historic district, there is more flexibility to what can be done.

Clein said that since the neighboring uses around this property are primarily student housing, it seems like an appropriate special exception use request. And since the owners are making attempts to keep the historic portions of the house, which are fronting the street, reasonably intact he felt it was worth granting the Special Exception Use.

Giannola asked if the extra apartment that was added was intended as a student rental.

Thacher said she does not know why George Brigham built the extra apartment.

On a roll call, the vote on the special exception use was as follows, with Chair declaring the motion carried.

Yeas: 6 - Wendy Woods, Kirk Westphal, Diane Giannola, Kenneth Clein, Sabra Briere, and Paras Parekh

Nays: 0

Absent: 3 - Bonnie Bona, Eleanore Adenekan, and Jeremy Peters

Moved by Woods, seconded by Briere, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Mayor and City Council approve the 515 Oxford Planned Project Site Plan, subject to approval of the requested R2B (Two-family Dwelling District and Student Dwelling District) rezoning.

On a roll call, the vote was as follows, with the Chair declaring the motion

carried.

Yeas: 6 - Wendy Woods, Kirk Westphal, Diane Giannola, Kenneth Clein, Sabra Briere, and Paras Parekh

Nays: 0

Absent: 3 - Bonnie Bona, Eleanore Adenekan, and Jeremy Peters