



January 17, 2023

Planning Commission
City of Ann Arbor
301 E. Huron Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Attention: Matt Kowalski, City Planner

RE: Update to our letter supporting Verve Ann Arbor, a redevelopment of a six-story multiple-family housing development with a new twelve-story building at 721 S. Forest Avenue. This report describes how changes to the PUD respond to the Planning Commission’s input and several additional meetings with City staff.

Dear Planning Commission members and Planning Staff,

This letter is an update to our previous letter dated November 17, 2022 based on additional reviews provided by City staff, and several meetings or communications with City staff. Since the last Planning Commission meeting, the Subtext design team has made a number of changes to Sustainability commitments, building design, site plan, and operations. These changes are intended to reduce the visual impact and increase the Community Benefits to make this PUD a precedent setting standard for use of the PUD approach. This report should be reviewed in tandem with other updated information that goes into more detail.

A. Future Land Use Plan and Master Plan

One key issue raised by the City Planning report references the “character of the area.” The Verve site is in a transitional area. To the north is the U of M Campus which contains taller buildings (12-17 stories). To the south is the historic residential neighborhood south of Hill Street.

In between is our block with a variety of uses and building heights. The existing Forest Place Apartments is five stories. The Forest Parking garage, which we believe is outside of the DDA, has seven levels. The area is surrounded by high density 2 ½ to 3 story Fraternity Houses, Sorority Houses, Student Cooperative Housing, and Group Housings, for which minimum net Lot Area is 350 sq. ft. per occupant (125 occupants per acre). A number of those sites contain large parking lots around the buildings. None of these uses is consistent with the Master Plan. Most of the buildings in the block do not meet with the City’s expectations for Sustainability and other City policies.

Redevelopment of our site allows the City to replace an outdated multiple family residential building with a new building that contributes to the City’s policies for Affordable Housing, Sustainability, and Carbon reduction.

1. Future Land Use Map does not reflect the current use of the site nor the current zoning

The subject site currently contains an outdated five-story multiple family building surrounded by parking and impervious surfaces. The building to the north also contains a five-story multiple family structure but in a more historic setting, nice open space, and landmark trees. Both buildings are shown as the “Single, Two Family and Group Home Residential” future land use category in the Master Plan. The future land use map is in conflict with the current R4C Multiple Family Zoning for the site and surrounding area. The complexities of the existing uses, zoning districts and 2009 Master Plan land use map are illustrated on the exhibits.

In addition to the use of the site, the existing building is about 50 feet tall compared to the maximum height of 30 feet in the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The current density of the site is also around 42 units per acre, which is over double the 20 units per acre that is permitted under the Zoning Ordinance. And the existing site does not meet many of the modern requirements for open space, stormwater or other features. Photos of the site and interior are shown on Exhibit 3.

2. The Future Land Use map and Master Plan are outdated and do not reflect the development trends in the area.

MKSK reviewed the 2009 Master Plan, the Central Area Future Land Use Plan, and the Master Plan goals. The Master Plan is 14 years old. Michigan’s Planning Enabling Act states that the Master Plan should be reviewed every five years and updated as needed. Or that new development, without a new plan, needs to address trends and needs in the area. We believe The Verve meets the City’s need for more housing at an appropriate location where multi-family housing already exists.

Since the old Master Plan was adopted, the City has adopted a number of polices for Sustainability, Reduction of Carbon footprint, and Affordable Housing. Those policies form the foundation for a new Master Plan. Transportation Plans were also endorsed by the City that promote land use that reduces the reliance on fossil fuel vehicles. The Verve provides needed multiple-family housing at a location where is already exists. Our location places housing near transit routes, shopping, restaurants, entertainment, and the University. We have also added amenities to increase travel by bicycles and electric vehicles.

Thus, The Verve PUD, while inconsistent with the outdated Master Plan’s Future Land Use Map, is consistent with newer City’s policies. In some cases, our revised site plan and building features can set a precedent for new redevelopment.

3. The Proposal is Consistent with the City of Ann Arbor Master Plan Goals

In addition to the Future Land Use Map, the Master Plan includes a series of key goals, policies and recommendations that are integral to applying future planning principals and guidance.

Subsequently, the Master Plan needs to be read and applied in its entirety, not just simply referring to the Future Land Use Map. The proposal is consistent with many of the recommendations of the Master Plan and other plans and ordinances adopted more recently by the Planning Commission and City Council, such as those highlighted below:

- Goal A: To promote sound and attractive residential neighborhoods which meet the housing needs of the current and future population.
- Objective 7: To protect and expand the supply of housing to meet the needs of a variety of individual lifestyles and incomes while seeking a stable balance between owner occupied and renter occupied units. (p. 62)
- Goal B: To encourage sensitive, attractive, and innovative development and renovation in downtown Ann Arbor and in adjacent neighborhoods. (p. 66)
- Objective 3: To identify appropriate locations for compatible and well-designed multiple-family residential development, or mixed-use development, particularly near campus and downtown. (p. 66)

4. Current Future Land Use Map does not reflect recent City Polices for Sustainability and Affordable Housing.

While the Master Plan is outdated, since then the City has adopted a number of framework plans and policies such as the Sustainability Framework, and ordinances on affordable housing and climate change. The new Transportation Plan also outlines goals that support land uses which reduce dependency on automotive travel.

The Verve PUD is consistent with the City's policies to add density in appropriate locations in the City. This location can provide additional needed housing in an area with other higher rise apartments within walking distance to the University of Michigan, entertainment venues and shopping. Our location makes walking, bicycling, and use of transit a convenient option to driving an automobile, which can help reduce the carbon footprint of adding more density. Solar panels, upgraded insulation, and all-electric appliances will help reduce the carbon footprint per unit as well. Replacing the existing building with one that has more of those amenities will contribute to the City's goals for sustainability and travel by non-auto modes.

B. Our proposal meets the PUD Criteria. PUD designation is the best option for this site.

Several zoning options were considered for this site. Extending the D1 or D2 zoning to our site would require including other properties that may or may not be interested in changing their zoning. An expansion of multiple properties at once would require a deeper review of the overall housing needs and impacts in this area. This is one reason what the PUD zoning was crafted and adopted by the City of Ann Arbor, as Mr. Lenart stated at the August 9, 2002 Planning Commission meeting.

The PUD provides the flexibility the developer needs to adapt the building to the unique characteristics of the site and surroundings. It also allows the developer and City to negotiate amenities to advance the site further than may be expected with a traditional zoning approach.

Some of the benefits of this PUD include the following:

- We are adding much needed multiple-family housing in an area that already has taller buildings and is comprised almost entirely of uses that are institutional in nature, such as fraternities and sororities. We are not directly adjacent to single-family neighborhoods.
- The unimaginative rectangular design of the current building with obsolete units will be replaced with an interesting design (as shown on the new renderings).
- Outdated site design will be replaced with modern stormwater facilities. Most of the surface parking will be replaced with structured parking.
- Contributions will be added toward Affordable Housing Initiatives.
- Given our location, most trips are expected to be walking trips with others using bicycles or nearby transit connections. Therefore, the ratio of automobile parking spaces to units is much lower than what exists today. Ample bike parking, both in the structure and available at the ground level, will be provided (see the Multi-modal transportation impact assessment for details). If this many new units were added to a more remote location, there would be an order of magnitude more auto trips.
- New: \$50,000 Donation to AAHDC to Support Homeless Households in the Central Area.
- New: We will include, if approved, a first-floor coffee shop that will be open to the public.
- Our revised PUD submittal adds to the sustainable design features that will be provided.

C. Elements of Innovative and Sustainable Design.

The developer and design team have been working on additions related to sustainability based on comments received from the Planning Commission and City staff. A summary is below. Refer to other documents for more details.

- Incorporating Passive Housing strategies of continuous insulation (twice the code required amount) and thermal bridge free construction to improve the thermal performance of the building and reduce energy usage for heating and cooling.
- Designing to LEED Silver Standards.
- Providing 100kW of building integrated solar power, with additional solar panels added to the rooftops.
- Providing twice the required EV charging infrastructure.
- Designing an all-electric building.
- **New:** Compost Waste Bin Designations
- **New:** 100% Green Power Renewable Energy Certificates
- **New:** Passive House Inspired Building Envelope with 2X Code Required Continuous Insulation
- **New:** Additional insulation. Construction Waste Reduction

Conclusion.

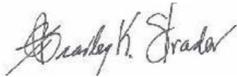
As noted above, we believe the City's Master Plan is outdated and does not reflect the trends and policies of today. Our revised PUD proposal is consistent with the City's current policies that will form the basis of a new Master Plan.

Since the last submittal, The Verve design team spent many weeks investigating options and conversing with City staff. We thank you for the time investment. As a result, we redesigned the building and added more sustainable features. The developer has also committed to provide other amenities that would accompany PUD approval. All of those changes expand the list of "Public Benefits" expected for a PUD.

We hope that this letter, our exhibits, and your own findings lead you to the same conclusion. The Verve team looks forward to presenting our changes and design to the Planning Commission and to the Public.

Please let me know if you have any questions on this report.

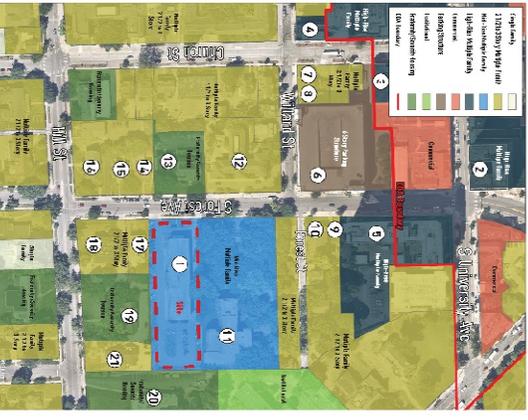
Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Strader". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brad Strader, AICP, PTP
Principal Planner
MKSK

Please also see the attached exhibits on the following pages.

Exhibit 2: Existing Uses and Height



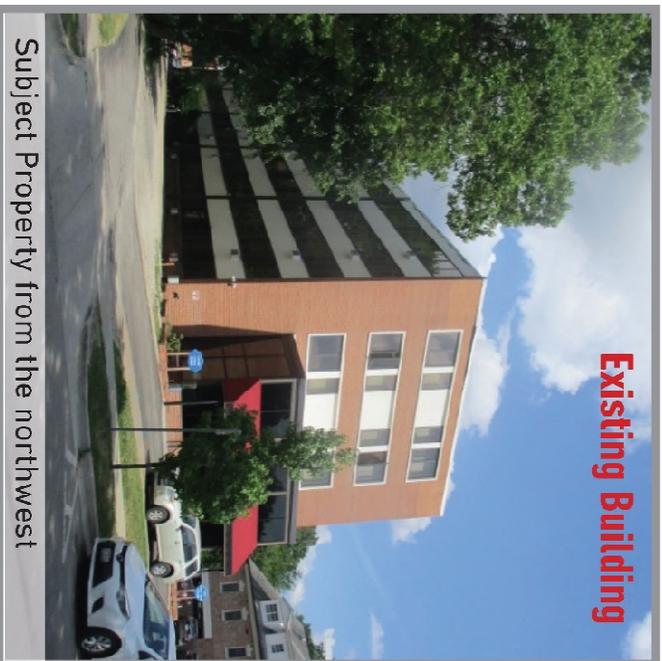
Current Land Use

Single Family (R2A), 2-Family (R2B), and Multiple Family (R4C) Residential is 30 feet maximum building height.

D1 Downtown Core and Downtown Interface District, Min. 24 feet and 2 stories to new buildings (no height requirements for buildings build before December 26, 2009). Height requirement in D1 district is 150 feet and D2 district has a height limit of 60 feet.

<p>1 Estimated Building Height: 110 feet Site Building Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>2 Estimated Building Height: 158 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Inside the D1/D2 Boundary</p>	<p>3 Estimated Building Height: 110 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Inside the D1/D2 Boundary</p>	<p>4 Estimated Building Height: 175 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Inside the D1/D2 Boundary</p>	<p>5 Estimated Building Height: 142 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Inside the D1/D2 Boundary</p>
<p>6 Estimated Building Height: 140 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>7 Estimated Building Height: 30 Feet Downtown Core Zoning District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>8 Estimated Building Height: 23 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>9 Estimated Building Height: 30 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>10 Estimated Building Height: 25 feet Downtown Core Zoning District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>
<p>11 Estimated Building Height: 55 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>12 Estimated Building Height: 30 Feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>13 Estimated Building Height: 33 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>14 Estimated Building Height: 30 Feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>15 Estimated Building Height: 31 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>
<p>16 Estimated Building Height: 50 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>17 Estimated Building Height: 30 Feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>18 Estimated Building Height: 33 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>19 Estimated Building Height: 34 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>	<p>20 Estimated Building Height: 50 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>
<p>21 Estimated Building Height: 30 feet Multiple Family Dwelling District Outside the D2 Boundary</p>				

Exhibit 3: The Verve Site



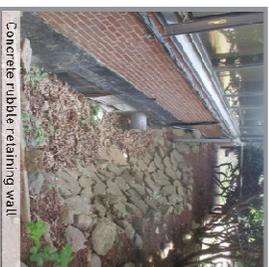
Subject Property from the northwest

Existing Building

Exterior Features



Subject property from the southeast



Concrete rubble retaining wall



Ingress/egress point at Fo. east Ave



Basement stair well along south side



Main lobby/entrance and signage



Retaining wall along rear of property

Interior Features, outdated rooms and do not provide amenities students are now looking for/lacks sustainability features



Interior corridor on first floor



One bedroom apartment kitchen



Apartment living room



Abandoned sauna in the basement



Basement storage room