

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

**MKSK**

Planning Commission & Planning Staff  
C/O Matt Kowalski  
City of Ann Arbor Planning Services  
301 E. Huron Street  
Ann Arbor, MI 48107

**RE: Revisions to Proposed Valhalla Development**

Dear Commissioners and Planning Staff:

We appreciated the time and depth of comments during our public hearing on June 2, 2020. We appreciated the input and agreement that the proposed development is more consistent with the City's Master Plan and other policies, in contrast to the existing single-family homes located in Pittsfield Township. As we hope you could see, the developer's team has done a comprehensive assessment of city expectations, policies related to development and sustainable design options for this site.

In response to the Planning Commission's discussion, we have made several refinements to the proposal. These include:

1. A further commitment toward the City's affordable housing goal, with now all 15 units committed to meeting the 60% AMI as discussed.
2. The developer now commits to full electrification and no use of natural gas, except as an emergency back-up, as was promoted by several Planning Commissioners. Our energy advisors have recalculated the energy savings with our solar power system and all-electric operation. The energy offset remains at approximately 13% with an all-electric facility, and is expected to decrease the carbon emissions by another 9.9% compared to the previous plan.
3. In response to questions about the height and how it is measured, we have re-calculated the dimensions. The proposed building height is actually a bit lower than we had noted. Specific language is now included in the Conditions to Rezoning to R4E which specifies a maximum height of 74 feet compared to no maximum height in the R4E zoning district and clarifies that the 74

foot maximum height is not the predominant building height through-out the project. The methodology of calculating the heights is set forth in the Conditions to Rezoning.

4. At the Citizens Participation Meeting, a comment was made to lower the height of the southern section of Building B from the originally proposed 5 stories above the parking. We have lowered that portion of the building to four stories. We had already addressed that issue in the previous revised plan set and the building is now four stories above the parking. (See Sheet A1.17).
5. One of the Conditions of Rezoning offered will limit density to a maximum 50 units per acre. A note was added to the conditions to clarify that the 50 units per acres was in place of the maximum of 75 units per acre otherwise allowed in the zoning district. We believe these caps help address some of the comments related to height and density appropriate for the context of the area, while still providing sufficient density to meet various city goals and the financial needs for a viable development with all the various amenities.
6. Questions were raised regarding certain street access and traffic concerns. As reflected in the report of our traffic engineer in Section 5.2 of the Traffic Impact Study, several operation issues exist today due to the alignment of the median at the Huron Professional Center Drive. Our traffic engineer's report submitted to the City recommends several changes to improve the operations and safety, and reduce the crash potential associated with the median opening in close proximity to the proposed site driveway, including:
  - Update the median opening to provide a channelized left-turn for the existing Huron Valley Professional Center driveway.
  - Add a "Right Turn Only" sign under the existing "STOP" sign on the existing Huron Valley Professional Center driveway approach.
  - Add a "No U-Turn" sign in the median.

Our traffic engineer and the City's traffic engineer have agreed that, in concept, revisions to the design can improve the current design problem. Details of the final design will need to be agreed upon, which must go through the city's normal approval process for changes to a public street.

Another line of comments from the Planning Commission was a discussion of the benefits of the development to the City of Ann Arbor. We have prepared the following list of some of the many benefits and Project amenities being offered that advance important City policies.

## The Project Is Consistent With and Advances Key City Policy and Planning Objectives because it:

1. **Helps meet the documented need for more multiple-family housing at appropriate locations in Ann Arbor.** The site abuts open space, the golf course, and is within walking distance to the nearby retail, grocery stores, pharmacy, restaurants, medical/dental, and other services. This proximity can help meet City goals to shift automobile trips to more sustainable travel modes. The Project provides a needed and attainable housing option to meet the housing demands of young professionals and other employees that work in the City's growing business and educational communities
2. **Provides Density along a major transit route and near U of M transit options.** Previous City Planning Staff reports have outlined the benefit of locating multiple-family residential along key AAATA routes, specifically Ann Arbor-Saline Road (see staff report dated October 1, 2019). This site is also within permissible riding area for e-scooter providers. Micro-mobility options can be used for commuting or as a first/last mile connector to University of Michigan buses.
3. **Removes aging energy-inefficient, single-family residential use on septic systems in an area of incompatible land uses.** Developer had to acquire and assemble a variety of properties in order to provide for an infill re-development opportunity to construct a modern housing product more consistent with the City's current policies and practices at a location in an area of mixed land uses, but remote from any other single-family land uses..
4. **Resource Preservation.** The property consists of multiple, old, single family lots which contain trees planted in various locations in the yards of the existing residential parcels. While we could not save all of the higher quality trees in order to construct the Project, the design of the Project was revised numerous times to preserve most of the higher-quality trees that had been part of the residential parcels.
5. **Fiscal Benefits.** The total project investment in connection with this land now located in Pittsfield Township is estimated to be around \$125-\$130 million, which will generate, among other things, significant new tax revenue to the City, hundreds of construction and permanent new jobs and significant new spending on services and retail goods to support local businesses and restaurants.
6. **Affordable Housing.** The proposed development has been revised to include 15 affordable units, to all now be available at 60% of Area Median Income (AMI). Affordability details are noted in the Conditions of Rezoning.

7. **Diversity of Housing Options.** The Project provides a diversity of housing alternatives and price options in one development through three different building and housing designs—mid-rise residential towers; a courtyard style building and townhouse units. This diversity of housing alternatives offers a place where active-empty nesters, a variety of local workers, including young professionals, and families may live and interact in one integrated development.

## **The Project is Consistent with the City’s Environmental Goals for Low-Carbon Impacts, Energy Efficiency and Water Quality**

8. **Exclusive Use of Electric Energy.** The Project will be designed so that there will be no use of natural gas, with the exception of potential use of natural gas, or other fuel, for backup generators for emergency use in the event of power outages as required by code.
9. **Renewal Energy.** The Project includes the use of many rooftop solar panels
10. **Vegetated Roof.** The Project includes approximately 10,000 square feet of a green roof.
11. **Buildings to be designed and Constructed to LEED Silver Standards.** The developer has committed to design and construct the project to LEED Silver standards, in order to achieve increased energy efficiency , help minimize the project’s carbon footprint, and reduce utility costs of the residents.
12. **Underground Parking.** The use of a substantial amount of underground parking reduces the impact on stormwater and helps avoid the sea of parking aesthetic of similar housing located outside of the downtown district.
13. **Other Environmental benefits.** The development will include the removal of aging septic systems and their replacement with connections to the City’s sanitary sewer system. A new storm-water management system to meet the City’s standards will help improve overall water quality.

## **The Project is Consistent with City’s Goals to Promote the Use of Public Transit and Active Transportation Options**

Consistent with various City policies, the Project’s design and amenities will help promote use of transit, walking, bicycling, and more sustainable transportation choices as an alternative to gasoline powered automobiles.


14. **Convenient Access to The Ride.** The site is along The Ride Routes 24 and 25, providing a direct connection to Downtown as well as access to various employment zones served by the transit system. In addition, a standard City bus shelter, subject to a licensing agreement, will be provided in front of the development to help make use of an AAATA bus an attractive alternative to driving.
15. **Non-Motorized Connections.** Pathway connections, including 10' wide sidewalks, provided on- and off-site to connect with existing systems so pedestrians can walk to nearby grocery stores, shops, restaurants, and for recreational purposes.
16. **Electric Charging Stations and Car Share Parking.** The Project includes EV charging stations and dedicated parking spots for ride-share vehicles.
17. **Other Transportation Options.** Residents will also be within easy walking distance to the University of Michigan bus service and the Project is within the scooter service area. There is also bicycle access to commercial, recreational and other business activities.

## Recreational Amenities

In addition to its proximity to at least 24 public parks and recreational facilities, the Project offers several on-site recreational amenities consistent with City policies and goals, including an on-site swimming pool, playground equipment, workout facility, a lounge area and bike/walking pathways.

In summary, we believe that this state-of-the-art multiple family development under the R4E zoning district, with the Conditions being offered, and the specific commitments made in the site plans, provides many key benefits to the City and is fully consistent with the City's current policies and planning objectives. Thank you again for your time and attention to our proposal. We look forward to our next discussion and hopefully a favorable recommendation to the City Council.

Respectfully Submitted,



Principal  
MKSK, Inc.

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