

city of saint paul  
planning commission resolution  
file number  
date

WHEREAS, Anne Geisser, File # 20-086-348, has applied for an appeal of a zoning administrator decision to approve a site plan for a new multi-family residential building under the provisions of §61.701 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code on property located at 1769 Grand Avenue, Parcel Identification Number (PIN) 04.28.23.42.0024, legally described as Elmer & Morrison’s, Rearrangeme Lot 6 Block 3;

WHEREAS, the Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission, on November 19, 2020, held a public hearing at which all persons present were given an opportunity to be heard pursuant to said application in accordance with the requirements of §61.303 of the Saint Paul Legislative Code; and

WHEREAS, the Saint Paul Planning Commission, based on the evidence presented to its Zoning Committee at the public hearing as substantially reflected in the minutes, made the following findings of fact:

Zoning Code §61.701 provides that the Planning Commission shall have the power to hear and decide appeals of zoning administrator decisions where it is alleged by the appellant that there is an error in any fact, procedure or finding made by the Zoning Administrator. In their appeal, the appellant alleges that the approved site plan does not address the parking needs, does not include sufficient detail regarding the trash enclosure, does not adequately protect neighboring properties, and will disrupt the character of the West Summit Avenue Historic District. Zoning Code § 61.402(c) states that in “order to approve the site plan, the planning commission shall consider and find that the site plan is consistent with” the eleven findings listed below. As a delegated function of the Planning Commission, the Zoning Administrator in consultation with the Site Plan Review Committee found that the proposed site plan is consistent with the findings. The concerns raised in the appeal and staff’s evaluation of the site plan are addressed in the findings.

1. *The city’s adopted comprehensive plan and development or project plans for sub-areas of the city.*

The approved site plan meets this finding. According to the applicant, the multi-family development is intended for people of all ages and provides an option for affordable living for those who are willing to share a flat, and/or desire to live adjacent to neighborhood amenities and service providers. As described, this project aligns with Policy H.2 of the Macalester-Groveland’s Community Plan to, “Preserve Macalester-Groveland’s peaceful community, while promoting a range of housing types and affordability to meet the needs of all people throughout their life and changing lifestyle needs.”

moved by \_\_\_\_\_  
seconded by \_\_\_\_\_  
in favor \_\_\_\_\_  
against \_\_\_\_\_

Additionally, the project is supported by Policies LU-1.42 and LU-1.21 of the Land Use chapter of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan to promote the development of housing in mixed-use neighborhoods that supports walking and the use of public transportation and to balance the following objectives for Mixed-Use Corridors through the density and scale of development: accommodating growth, supporting transit use and walking, providing a range of housing types, and providing housing at densities that support transit.

Finally, Policy H-1.3 of the Housing chapter of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan supports revitalizing the city by developing land-efficient housing. This parcel is the only low-density housing on the block; the entirety of the residential uses on the block have developed multi-unit housing, providing more land-efficient housing.

## 2. *Applicable ordinances of the City of Saint Paul.*

The approved site plan complies with Zoning Code requirements including design standards; provides for the necessary trash enclosure and general protection of neighboring properties relative to views, light, air, and privacy; and was granted variances for parking, density and dimensional standards. Relevant ordinances include:

- §63.110 – Building design standards.
- §63.114 – Visual screens.
- §63.207 – Parking requirements by use.
- §63.313 – Visual screening.
- §66.216 – Intent, RM2 medium-density multiple-family residential district.
- §66.230 – Residential District Density and dimensional standards.
- §66.232 – Maximum lot coverage.

*Setbacks:* The approved setbacks buffer abutting properties from the development. Under RM2 for this property, the minimum front setback is 12'. The minimum rear setback requirement is 25'; the site plan includes a 111' rear setback plus the alley. 6' side yard setbacks are allowed based on a variance approved by the City Council. Required off-street surface parking setback is 4' from any lot line.

*Density, Lot Coverage, and Height:* Under the RM2 Zoning requirements at the time of application, the proposed multi-family residential building received a variance for the minimum lot area per residential unit of 1,500 square feet in a RM2 district, to construct 12 units with lot area of 866 square feet per unit. The approved site plan is below the maximum 35% lot coverage in a residential district (building area of 2,870 sf / 10,394 sf lot area = 27.6% lot coverage). The site plan meets the maximum building height of 5 stories and 50' in a RM2 district. Building height is measured from the established grade to the top of the roof deck.

*Design standards:* The site plan meets all applicable building design standards including percentage and location of window and door openings, use of building materials and architectural treatments, and screening of roof top equipment.

*Parking:* Per the off-street parking variance approved by City Council (ABZA 20-2), the site plan includes 12 surface parking spaces accessed off the alley and bike racks for a minimum of 12 bicycle parking spaces.

*Screening:* Off-street parking facilities that adjoin a residential use or zoning district, shall provide a visual screen. In addition to existing abutting garages that will screen the surface parking lot, the site plan includes a 4.5' cedar fence along the east and north property lines to visually

separate the parking lot from the adjoining properties. Landscaping is proposed around the perimeter of the property including shade trees to further screen the parking lot along the west property line.

*Trash enclosure:* For multifamily structures with ten or more units, garbage dumpsters and trash containers shall be located to the rear of the principal building and enclosed by a visual screen.

3. *Preservation of unique geologic, geographic or historically significant characteristics of the city and environmentally sensitive areas.*

The approved site plan meets this finding and does not disrupt the character of the West Summit Avenue Historic District. The proposed use is typical of the intent of a RM2 medium density multiple-family residential Zoning District, which is intended to provide for comprehensive development of multiple-family uses and a balance of population concentration near major thoroughfares, transit, and related facilities.

The property is neither designated as having historical or environmental significance nor was it inventoried by Heritage Preservation. It is also not located within a heritage preservation district and is not subject to their design requirements.

The West Summit Avenue Historic District is to the north of the parcel across the alley. The proposed multi-family dwelling at 1769 Grand Avenue will be constructed towards the front of the lot, approximately 119' away from the historic district boundary measured to the middle of the 16' wide alley. There are surface parking lots along the length of the south side of the alley, similar to the proposed development. The proposed multi-family dwelling and the surface parking lot will not change the historical significance or character of the abutting properties within the West Summit Avenue Historic District that face Summit Avenue as this site aligns with the adjacent properties along Grand Avenue.

4. *Protection of adjacent and neighboring properties through reasonable provision for such matters as surface water drainage, sound and sight buffers, preservation of views, light and air, and those aspects of design which may have substantial effects on neighboring land uses.*

The approved site plan meets this finding and the effect of the proposed building and residential use on adjacent and neighboring properties is reasonable. Specific to the finding:

- Stormwater from the parking lot and building roof will be discharged where it will not cause a hazard or nuisance and directed towards the public alley. The parcel size does not trigger City stormwater run-off rate control requirements.
- The building's proposed front and rear yard setbacks meet or exceed the zoning standard, buffering abutting properties from the development. The minimum rear setback requirement is 25'; the site plan includes a 111' rear setback plus the alley. The 6' side yard setbacks on both sides of this property were granted by the City Council (ABZA 20-2) and are greater than those of the surrounding multi-family dwellings along Grand Avenue.
- The proposed building height is 50'. This aligns with the maximum building height allowed in the RM2 zoning district.
- The approved site plan adheres to §63.110 – Building design standards, including delineation of a primary entrance, direct pedestrian connection to the street, building materials, minimum window and door openings, and reducing visual impact of rooftop equipment.
- Decorative landscaping is planned around the perimeter of the building and property including three shade trees and pollinator plantings along the west of the parking lot.

- Off-street parking will be accessed via a driveway off the alley. The City Council reviewed the proposed amount of parking and configuration of the parking lot and voted to grant the developer a variance (ABZA 20-2) of 7 off-street parking spaces. There are two bus stops located at each end of this block and a dedicated bike path along Summit Avenue, helping reduce single-passenger vehicle trips.
- Refuse and recycling will be properly screened in a 6' tall, 7'x12' cedar enclosure, which meets screening requirements. Building operations will determine the frequency of trash and recycling pick up off the alley.

5. *The arrangement of buildings, uses and facilities of the proposed development in order to assure abutting property and/or its occupants will not be unreasonably affected.*

The approved site plan meets this finding. The effect of this specific proposed building on neighboring properties is reasonable. This block of Grand Avenue includes many multiple family residential buildings as well as commercial uses. As a buffer to abutting residential properties, the site plan proposes a 12' front yard setback, 111' rear setback plus the alley, and 6' side yard setbacks based on the side setback variance approved by the City Council.

Required off-street vehicular parking and bicycle parking will be provided in the rear yard, situated between accessory garages on adjacent properties. On the eastern and north eastern property lines, a screening fence buffers the parking stalls where the accessory garage does not. The parking lot perimeter is landscaped.

Refuse and recycling will be stored to the rear of the building in a trash enclosure per Zoning Code standards. Building operations will determine the frequency of trash and recycling pick up off the alley so as to not create a nuisance.

6. *Creation of energy-conserving design through landscaping and location, orientation and elevation of structures.*

The approved site plan meets this finding. A multifamily building is inherently more energy conserving because it has fewer exterior walls and roof per dwelling unit than low density housing. The building is oriented to the south end of the lot facing Grand Avenue and exceeds the minimum amount of glazing on all sides, allowing each unit to gain solar heat. Decorative landscaping is planned around the perimeter of the building and property including three shade trees and pollinator plantings along the west of the parking lot.

The developer also plans to install a 35.1 kW roof-mounted solar system with the capacity to offset the building's electrical usage by 107%, saving an equivalent of 743 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> over 25 years.

7. *Safety and convenience of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic both within the site and in relation to access streets, including traffic circulation features, the locations and design of entrances and exits and parking areas within the site.*

The approved site plan meets this finding. Required off-street parking shall be provided based on the variance approved by City Council (ABZA 20-2). The site plan includes 12 surface parking spaces accessed off the alley and bike racks for a minimum of 12 bicycle parking spaces. The number of residential units did not warrant a traffic memo or study by Public Works Traffic Engineering. Vehicle turning templates for parking area access were approved by the Public Works Transportation Planning and Safety Division.

The proposed development is located on a collector street with on-street parking, public transit and a bus stop at the end of the block, making it conducive to walking, biking, and using public transit rather than driving.

8. *The satisfactory availability and capacity of storm and sanitary sewers, including solutions to any drainage problems in the area of the development.*

The approved site plan meets this finding and will protect adjoining properties from excess surface water drainage. The parking lot is designed to drain towards the public alley in conformance with City standards. Roof drainage is regulated by the State Plumbing Code; Department of Safety and Inspections staff approved primary and secondary roof drainage to discharge where it would not cause a hazard or nuisance. The roof drainage design includes a curb and gutter "conduit" for the water to reach the alley without flowing onto the sidewalk or parking area. Rate control for stormwater run-off from impervious surfaces is not required based on the parcel size. Water and sanitary services will be connected in Grand Avenue.

9. *Sufficient landscaping, fences, walls and parking necessary to meet the above objectives.*

The approved site plan meets this finding. The Landscape Plan, approved by the City Forester and DSI Zoning, complies with applicable landscaping requirements. Existing boulevard trees will be protected where possible and new boulevard trees planted as required. Landscaping is proposed around the perimeter of the property including shade trees to screen the parking lot along the west property line. A 4.5' screening wood fence will be provided along the east property line and alley to visually separate and screen the parking lot from abutting properties. Off-street parking complies with the approved parking variance. Bicycle parking will be provided in a safe and secure area near the rear of the building.

10. *Site accessibility in accordance with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including parking spaces, passenger loading zones and accessible routes.*

The approved site plan meets this finding. One van-accessible parking space will be provided to meet the ADA standards required for lots of 1 - 25 parking spaces. Required accessible entrances and routes shall be provided per accessibility code.

11. *Provision for erosion and sediment control as specified in the "Ramsey Erosion Sediment and Control Handbook."*

The approved site plan meets this finding. The site plan includes an erosion and sediment control plan that meets this standard.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Saint Paul Planning Commission, under the authority of the City's Legislative Code, that the application of Anne Geisser for an appeal of a zoning administrator decision to approve a site plan for a new multi-family residential building at 1769 Grand Avenue is hereby denied.