

DISCUSSION

2025-0266

Potential Multiple Family Residential Development Discussion - Adams, Old Adams and Forrester

(McLeod Memo dated 6/11/25, Applicant's Letter dated 6/11/25, Plans and Public Comment received had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record hereof.)

Present for the discussion was developer Ziad Kassab, architect Ghassan Abdelnour of GAV Associates, and Chad Holdwick of Greentech Engineering.

Chairperson Hooper introduced this discussion item and noted that it is for a proposed development on Adams at Old Adams and Forester.

Ms. Kassab introduced his team, and stated that this is his first development ever in the City. He explained that his background is in health care for about 25 years in different capacities. He stated that he has lived in the City for 32 years since he was about 10 years old and this is his home. He mentioned Penelope's Place is named after his daughter, and he noted that he acquired the land from a long-time friend of his, Vito Pampalona, who is also a long-term resident of the city. He mentioned that part of the parcel was a part of Adams Road, and when they expanded the road, part of that went to the City for the expansion on the project. He commented that they are in front of the Commission to get feedback on how to make this a beautiful development in what they feel is the best city anywhere.

Mr. Abdelnour thanked the Planning Department for being very helpful in the whole process, and explained that they have been working with the Department for the past few months. He stated that the property has a great location and works well for an apartment complex. He noted that sometimes subdivisions do not like to have apartments around them, and this location has no neighbors that might have any issues with it. He explained that they are trying to design two buildings, one three-story of 32 units and one four-story of approximately 48 units. He noted that the four story was going to be located where the property was dipping down and the three story was going to be pushed to the street side. He noted that they were designing the building with a sloping roof and are trying to use a lot of different materials, such as two types of brick, limestone, and heavy siding to give it texture. Most of the units have balconies that push out and they plan for a bit of cut in the building to add interest and not have it be flat.

He stated that he has been working with Mr. McLeod in different cities for around 27 years and they have a good history together. He pointed out that he has worked with Mr. McLeod for other projects including three gas stations that he has designed. He stressed that they like to come up with nice elements to make the neighbors and the Commission happy, and he stated that they are trying to create some nice elements and nice effects here for people passing on the main roads.

He stressed that they wanted to get the Commission's advice during the

meeting to see if they are on the right track. He added that there are a lot of trees, and they needed to work to ensure they do not have to cut any more trees than necessary. He stated that they also wanted to create walkable areas and make them attractive.

Chairperson Hooper asked if Mr. McLeod had any comments to add.

Mr. McLeod responded that as noted by the development team, this property was originally part of the Adams Road realignment. He pointed out that this property is under a Consent Judgment, which means a court order, and explained that as a part of the Consent Judgment it indicates that the property should likely be developed pursuant to a PUD process, otherwise it would be developed as for office purposes. He noted that Mr. Kassab would like to develop this as multiple family, which is something that would fit into the PUD process. He mentioned that the City's Multiple Family district only allows for two-story buildings, with 35 feet maximum height for multiple family buildings.

He noted that even in the FB District, there had been lengthy discussions regarding building heights and where higher buildings should be located within the city. If this property is developed as office within the Office district, it is allowed to go three stories or 42 feet in height. He stated that as the application came forward and has gone through its first blush of a full administrative review, the building height became an issue and became a discussion item. He explained that he and Ms. Roediger talked to the applicants and suggested that as this is a critical item, perhaps it warranted going before the Planning Commission to determine whether or not the Commission has any desire to go forward with more than three stories, or if three stories is going to be a conflict point going forward.

He stressed that as a PUD, the decision would ultimately lie with City Council. He pointed out that it is a discussion item and there are no official decisions to be requested tonight; and stated that the applicant is looking for some feedback about what the Commission is seeing about the proposal. He commented that the main reason for bringing this tonight is that if it is developed pursuant to the PUD process, the question becomes as to whether a third story is allowable, which is probably a little easier than whether or not a four-story building is allowable.

Chairperson Hooper noted a comment relative to two bedrooms versus one bedroom.

Mr. McLeod responded that this is another item that would have to be addressed through the PUD process. He explained that the Ordinance specifies that for a truly multiple-family development, there is a certain threshold of one bedroom versus two bedrooms within a development. He noted that the requirement is basically that no more than 30 percent should be one bedroom units; and he believes that the applicant has 40 percent as one bedroom. He commented that this ratio should not be an issue in terms of parking if the site is planned appropriately; however, should be something discussed here as well.

Chairperson Hooper asked whether the market study showed that the one

bedroom is more marketable than the two bedroom.

Mr. Abdelnour responded that they do a lot of projects, and usually the 60 percent-40 percent is a very good number that they have been using. He explained that once they go to two bedroom, the units become bigger and more expensive, and they are trying to balance what people can afford. He mentioned that for the younger tenant or newly-married, they see one bedrooms used a lot more.

Mr. Kassab stated that they are at 63 percent-37 percent right now.

Questions were raised about the proposed rental rates. Mr. Abdelnour was mentioned that rents are typically based on a price per the square footage, and the one bedrooms would be 700 to 800 square feet and approximately \$2,000 per month and the two bedrooms would be 1,000 to 1,100 square feet and rent for approximately \$3,000 per month. He added that some cities the rates are going up higher than that, citing his experience with higher rates in Birmingham.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she wanted to disclose that she has known Mr. Kassab for almost 20 years and noted that they have already had a conversation about this development. She commented that she told Mr. Kassab that this would be a super hard sell because the Ordinance is clear. She mentioned that she would be willing to shift around the percentages of one versus two bedroom and would not have a problem with that in two story residential; nor would she have a problem with it as an office building. She stated that after Mr. Kassab called her, she spoke with a lot of people on the Zoning Board, City Council, and people in the community; and the feedback was pretty much the same, which is that four stories are completely out of the question. She added that three-stories are most likely out of the question.

She added that relative to affordable housing, she stated that while it is going to be nice, this is something that they have been dealing with in the Master Plan process. She commented that she does not know if \$2,000 is affordable, nor is \$3,000 for a two-bedroom. She stated that she did not want Mr. Kassab as a friend to waste money going further on something that most likely would not be approved and that she would not vote for.

Mr. Abdelnour asked if three stories would be possible.

Ms. Neubauer responded that it would be a hard sell. She stated that she was trying to get a gauge whether three stories with a reduced density would be an option, and she noted that those that she spoke with pushed back and were surprised that she was even making that suggestion. She stated that she tries to be as fair with everyone as possible whether it be in Zoning or Planning or City Council, and she just thinks it would be very hard.

Mr. Abdelnour stated that he can understand the four-story and thought from the beginning that the three-story might be the right one especially if it was not being made quite as high. He suggested possibly taking the roof out and making it a flat building to keep the height the right way and stated that this is why they are coming here to try to work with the Commission. He commented that two

stories for apartments never works.

Ms. Neubauer responded that she understands this; however, this property was never intended to be an apartment and was intended under the Consent Judgment to be office space. She stated that in going the PUD route and doing an apartment, the intention is that it be two stories. She commented that she was not certain that it could be possible to keep it lower.

Mr. McLeod stated that the hope when they first started their conversations was that since the property is kind of bowl-shaped and is naturally about six feet lower than Adams Road it would hide some of the height. He noted that unfortunately as they started to lay out the site, some of that ability was lost and the height started to come up due to engineering requirements. He mentioned that when he last met with the developers, they thought that they might be able to lower it down a foot or two; but the site will be coming up and ultimately the proposed building height would be a true height.

Ms. Neubauer mentioned that City Council required the height of a gas station at Adams and Walton to drop down by four feet even though it was approved fully in Planning and was within the Ordinance. She noted that City Council is even more restrictive than Planning.

Mr. Abdelnour noted that he was the architect for those stations, and one gas station was allowed to stay that height and one was lowered.

Ms. Neubauer stated that Council was trying not to kill the project; and stressed that she does not want Mr. Kassab to waste money on something that would be hard to get approved if he could invest in a two-story apartment or three-story office that would be financially feasible and give him a good ROI.

Mr. Abdelnour responded that he is being kept busy changing offices to apartments and condominiums. He reiterated that with three story they could take the roof off and make it flat to give it the right look.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she believes that would be a negative aesthetically.

Mr. McLeod stated that staff knew that this would be an ultra-sensitive issue and thought that if it would be exceeding two stories, at least if the roof is flat the building would not be as high. He commented that when doing that it would change the complexion of the building and present it a different way than a peaked roof would. He suggested that a three-story office building could actually have a bigger footprint than two three-story apartment buildings.

Ms. Neubauer commented that this would not address the density issue, as three stories and 32 units would be 64 units on three acres.

Mr. McLeod stated that this would be a question for Mr. Kassab as to whether that net number works for him. He stressed that on the staff end of the conversation, it was simply melding all of the ordinances together to determine what would be acceptable, as if there is not an agreement they do not have to go through five or six different reviews when Planning Commission and City

Council will ultimately have to decide on whether to allow four stories. He mentioned the Brooklands, where the additional story was stepped back to allow variation in the facade. He stated that they have discussed a lot of options, whether the building could go lower on the site itself, whether the roof could be removed, or if the building could be stepped back; however, the simple conversation is if four stories is a no, four stories is a no.

Mr. Struzik asked if this would bypass Planning Commission.

Mr. McLeod responded that as a PUD it would be at both the Commission and Council. He pointed out that the Consent Judgment is complete and states that the process for development in this case would be the PUD, which brings it to both entities.

Mr. Struzik commented that Ms. Neubauer has a very good pulse on the community and how City Council might feel about things and he would put a lot of weight on what she has to say. He noted that Adams Road is a very congested corridor and north of this area they are looking at redoing the road. He questioned whether Mr. McLeod knew which alternative had been selected.

Mr. McLeod responded that there is one alternative that they have been zeroing in on, but stressed that when it is ultimately said and done, there is no funding allocated to move forward other than the completion of the study. He added that implementation could be years and years away.

Mr. Struzik stated that he some of the community friction is that the City is adding more places to live and more density. He added that there is nearby residential across the street in Auburn Hills, and the City wants to be good neighbors and have things flow with the same consideration that they would want with Rochester Hills residents. He commented that it is not completely incompatible with what is across the street as Auburn Hills has multifamily, condos, apartments and townhomes; however it is definitely a different scale. He stated that he likes the idea of a residential opportunity on the site as it is near great features such as the Clinton River Trail, and there are places to walk within the community such as shopping and schools. He stated that he can still see the concerns with the height and density for the area.

Mr. Weaver stated that four stories would be a hard sell for him. He commented that he thinks he could be persuaded in this area because one of the conversations they have had included discussion of where these heights are appropriate; and if there is a bowl shape to the site, some of the height would be hidden. He commented that he thinks they have done a good job preserving the site; noting that it is heavily wooded but many of the trees on the site are saved. He suggested the building colors could be switched up a bit, but he appreciated the modern flair of the building.

Mr. Abdelnour commented that in his experience in designing different buildings, usually an office building gives more density than an apartment due to all of the employees and clients coming in. He added that pertaining to traffic, in apartments people mostly leave in the morning; but for office buildings, there is traffic all of the time.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that she would support Ms. Neubauer's opinions regarding a fourth story and would not support it. She questioned whether the developers are considering this affordable housing.

Mr. Abdelnour responded that it is a nice apartment and not exactly considered affordable housing. He commented that the one bedroom makes it a bit cheaper.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that it might be considered attainable housing, but looking at the prices it does not appear that anyone could afford these over other apartments in the city. She commented that the developer is offering the City a PUD and asked what community benefit would be included. She stated that she does not care for the building or colors offered, commenting that they look dark and drab. She stated that even if she was willing to consider the three stories, there is nothing proposed that stands out to encourage her to support it.

Mr. Abdelnour responded that they attended this meeting to get an opinion on what the Commission is looking for and the color offered is not necessarily what will end up being proposed. He noted that this colors have been used in other projects in the past and they are trying to see how they can make things look better for the community.

Mr. McLeod noted that the recognized benefit is going offsite and providing the extension to the Clinton River Trail. He mentioned that if this project were ultimately to go forward along with the Whitewater Car Wash, the City has also received a grant to implement pathways on the north side of Adams. He noted that they have just installed the crosswalk across Adams in that area as well and there would have a full connection along Adams north and south to get to the trail. He commented that this would be for the Commission to determine whether it would accept this as a public benefit. He explained that the developer is offering the connection, and the pathways would be between the Planning Department, and Parks and Natural Resources. He mentioned that there is a grant in place to do the north side of Adams, but for this connection on the south side, it will be about 300 feet to extend down to the trail.

Mr. Kassab added that in addition, they spoke of modernizing or improving the SMART bus stop.

Mr. McLeod noted that landscape improvements show a gazebo, and a dog park area within the depressed area; and he explained that this will create more of an amenity space for the development.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic asked what would be done to modernize the bus stop.

Mr. Kassab responded that they do not have an answer for that yet, and would probably start by exploring what the City was looking for and what has been done in surrounding areas. He commented that it would most likely be some sort of shelter to protect people from wind and rain.

Mr. Abdelnour added that they would make it a focal point that makes it easier

for people to be there and try to match the building, making it a whole project together.

Mr. McLeod explained that SMART creates the actual bus stop and adds a pad adjacent to the road; however, until service ultimately determines where SMART should put improved stops, they will not fund them. He stated that Mr. Kassab has indicated that they are willing to do that so that their residents can choose to use mass transit as an option, and it would provide an amenity.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic noted that discussion of a gazebo and asked what else would be planned.

Mr. Kassab responded that they have also discussed carports and some EV charging stations.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic suggested offering a children's playground area and benches.

Mr. Abdelnour added that they would also consider the gazebo, perhaps a playground, and a walkable track-like area.

Mr. Holdwick noted that Mr. Kassab stressed that the gazebo and potential walking trail needs to be handicap accessible, and stated that they will be providing ramps instead of stairs. He added that this would also benefit those with strollers and will provide a place for people to escape because it will be wooded.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that a playground should be away from the road.

Mr. Kassab noted that areas must also be left untouched to preserve the appropriate number of trees on the site.

Mr. Abdelnour commented that going to three stories will allow taking part of the parking area to come up with a playground space.

Mr. Kassab stated that he was actually working on this for five or six years, and noted that one big four-story building was not deemed acceptable by Planning Staff. He commented that he thinks this is a much-improved concept. He added that this is his first development, which is why he has his experts with him. He stated that he believes that two stories kills the project, and he is not sure that going from four to three is feasible. He mentioned that losing 19 units by going to a 70-30 ratio really hurts the project as well. He pointed out that he has not set the prices for rent yet and stated that he could not likely do that until he knows the cost to build.

Additional discussion ensued regarding the public benefit.

Mr. Abdelnour pointed out that they are trying to make the development handicap accessible, and commented that Mr. Kassab has worked with handicapped people all of his life and they want to ensure the project is

accessible including the playground. He added that they are trying to make it more of a community and walkable and want everyone living there to feel comfortable.

Mr. McLeod stressed that this proposal has only gone through one round of site plan reviews and comments and by no means is a finished project. He stated that he does not want to get into the record that this is what it will ultimately look like. He pointed out that there are comments that need to be addressed from all departments in terms of making sure that this proposed project works and there will continue to be an evolution to the site caused by review comments from Engineering, Fire and Planning.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that she thought it was important to ask what they are offering. She asked if there was room to offer carports, and commented that she did not consider that as a perk toward applying for a PUD. She stated that she would not consider four stories, and commented that it appears that the developers would not consider two stories. She stated that she thought there was a traffic concern with three stories.

Mr. Kassab countered that this would be less traffic than an office with three stories. He added that there is a lot of empty office space right now and might be hard to fill. He noted that the residential occupancy rate in the City is very high and there is need for more.

Vice Chairperson Brnabic stated that while she has not totally thrown out the three-story suggestion, she is not saying that she is supporting it.

Ms. Denstaedt questioned the adjacent land.

Mr. Kassab responded that the only thing that borders behind them is a storage facility for a grocery chain.

Ms. Denstaedt questioned whether the access to the trail would have to cross other driveways.

Mr. McLeod responded that they would have to be compliant crossings, and pointed out that it is no different than crossing at the Meijer gas station or Marketplace Circle.

Ms. Denstaedt responded that there are opportunities for bike racks or some other bike fixing station within the development. She commented that four stories is probably a no. She noted that three story would be possible for less density, and stated that she likes the look as presented. She commented that her biggest consideration is that the trail access be safe for young bikers.

Mr. Kassab stated that before the grant was received, they were willing and flexible to do the whole sidewalk.

Chairperson Hooper stated that he supports three stories as it makes sense for this location. He noted that they could work with earth tones and add split block, brick, or stone to dress the building up more. He pointed out that as more and

more amenities are added the price of rent goes up. He mentioned that he had the opportunity to visit the Legacy Apartments and pointed out that they are four stories and are beautiful. He noted that Legacy was governed by a consent judgment. He commented that from his perspective, three stories works fine, and stated that the last thing needed is more office space as there is no market right now. He suggested that several of the large mature trees might be saved, and commented that the trees are taller than a three-story building that could be built. He added that a 300-foot pathway connection to the Clinton River Trail is a pretty good perk for the City and is a pretty expensive item. He asked if there was already an easement attained for that.

Mr. McLeod responded that he believed the City has it.

Chairperson Hooper asked about an area to the north and what would go on that property.

Mr. Kassab responded that the area to the north was on their parcel and is slated for tree preservation.

Chairperson Hooper suggested a dog park could go in that area.

Mr. Kassab responded that one of his initial ideas was to put it on that side, but also use it for a nature walk.

Chairperson Hooper stated that he likes the relief elements of a building so it does not look like barracks. He added that he would not support a flat roof as it would not be architecturally appealing. He commented that they would look at one bedroom versus two bedroom in the future.

Mr. Struzik suggested for a public benefit coordinating with the Clinton River Trail to possibly add some kind of shelter, drinking fountain, or bike repair station at the trail where it would get the most benefit. He commented the Trailways Commission might be ecstatic to have someone fund that improvement. He noted that bike racks near a bus stop might be useful as well. He agreed with Chairperson Hooper that three stories might be doable.

Mr. Gallina stated that he would like to echo the Commissioners and stated that three sounds like something doable, and thinks there are some exciting things to be added to the development. He commented that he hopes that this transpires, and stated that he realizes that Penelope has to be something personal to Mr. Kassab. He suggested that perhaps a bench or area dedicated to the family could be a place for patrons to stop and think. He commented that he appreciates Mr. Kassab's passion and openness, and stated that they want to do what's right for the City and its constituents but also want to make sure that they are reasonable and can find something that will work.

Mr. Dettloff stated that there are a lot of comments for Mr. Kassab to take back. He mentioned the flat roof, and asked if there was a possibility of a green roof as an amenity.

Mr. Abdelnour responded that it usually makes the building way more

expensive, especially considering weight for a wood framed building. He added that it would be hard for anyone to see it from the streets, and the only people who would enjoy it would be the residents.

Mr. McLeod commented that an entire flat green area would sit on the roof and collect rainwater before it goes elsewhere. He stated that there could be variations of what could be a community garden, but would consider that more of an amenity versus a sustainable amenity. He pointed out that it would be a whole different design aspect.

Mr. Abdelnour added that it would need more of a cement-concrete building as this type of roof would be very heavy.

Mr. Kassab commented that he looked at a rooftop pool and found that this would not be feasible.

Mr. Dettloff stated that he would support three stories and hoped that they would come to some common ground.

Ms. Neubauer asked what the acreage was. Hearing the response that it is 3.3 acres, she asked if going to three stories would increase density by reducing apartment size to increase units as compared to the four story building. She commented that there is a difference between a daytime footprint and a 24-hour footprint, and this would be a footprint for 24 hours a day.

Mr. Kassab stated that he could not answer a question about the mix today and would have to see what it feasibly would look like.

Ms. Neubauer stated that she wanted to make sure everyone was reminded that it is not just height, but density to consider. She commented that feedback she hears is that overdevelopment is the problem, and the Commission should be cognizant of these things. She suggested that Mr. Kassab could put in a two-story residential community.

Mr. Kassab countered that it would not be feasible to do that.

Ms. Neubauer stressed that she represents 80,000 residents and gets feedback from them. She stated that she understands that it has to be financially feasible for Mr. Kassab, but pointed out that the property was intended for office or two-story and was not intended for a higher density three or four-story building. She added that even for an office, it was intended for three stories.

Chairperson Hooper stated that there will be the decision of the appointed body, the Planning Commission, and there is the elected body and politics that should be considered.

Mr. Kassab stressed that he is open to adjustment and does not have the experience of 1,000 ideas. He stated that he never had plans for two stories, and hoping to push it to four as it is on the outskirts of the city with no residential around it. He commented that he would love the Commission to consider three

stories as it would not be an eyesore.

Chairperson Hooper wished Mr. Kassab luck in moving forward and stated that he would end the discussion for the evening.

Discussed