

STAFF REPORT FOR B-1 FORM-BASED NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS PROJECT

ZDP 2015-12 THISTLE STATION 308-310, 312 & 330 Newtown Pike

Article 8-16(o)(3) of the Zoning Ordinance was recently created to govern a new “special provision” in the Neighborhood Business (B-1) Zone. Paragraph 3 in that section specifies the conditions under which the Planning Commission may approve a form-based neighborhood business project. These provisions have the following requirements:

1. A site over one acre in size.
2. Submission of a development plan and an area character and context study. The study must demonstrate that the proposed development will enhance and compliment the area’s character and further demonstrate the developments integration with the surrounding neighborhood. In return, the proposed development’s lot, yard, height and setback requirements are governed by the approved development plan and not the standard B-1 zone requirements.
3. Such a project is not subject to the square footage restrictions under 18-16(o) (1).

Zoning Development Plan Submission

The proposed project is on a site 3.78 acres in size located at the intersection of Newtown Pike and West Third Street, and is proposed to be rezoned to a Neighborhood Business (B-1) zone. The site also has frontage on West Fourth Street to the northeast and an active railroad line along most of its southeastern property boundary.

Site Improvements - A 191’ tall, sixteen story building is proposed along the Newtown Pike frontage. Some 16,000 square feet of retail space is proposed on the first floor and 15 floors of residential units are requested above, which would contain 202 dwelling units and over 171,000 square feet of floor area. Access to the site consists of a right in entrance and a right-out egress to Newtown Pike, and a full access point on Fourth Street. The 16-story building is to be set back 50’ from the Newtown Pike right-of-way and the West Fourth Street building is to be setback only 8’ from that right of way. There is a separate two story 7,650 square-foot building located on the West Fourth Street frontage. The applicant is proposing 264 surface parking spaces located primarily in the interior of the site between the two new buildings.

Character & Context Study

The applicant submitted the required character and context study along with their zone change application. That study describes the proposed development relative to the surrounding area and street system.

Buildings - The proposed 16-story building is to be setback a fairly short distance from Newtown Pike to create what the applicant characterizes as a more “friendly front yard.” The study states that the building will buffer the smaller scale uses to the east while providing separation from the intensity of Newtown Pike (US 25 & KY 922) which is classified by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet as a major arterial. The orientation of the buildings is designed to facilitate views of the surrounding area while the large parking lot is located in the interior of the site. At that location, it can be screened heavily by perimeter landscaping, possibly including the trees along the railroad spur.

Height - The study analyzed other buildings and structures in the Urban Services Area that are taller than 8-stories in height. Also reviewed were the 3-8 story structures a short distance to the south and east of this location. According to the submitted study, the 191’ tall 16-story building is to be stepped down in scale as viewed from West Third Street. This is to respect and compliment its relationship to the historic area located to the south of this location. About 2/3 of the building is proposed to be 16-stories in height, while the southern 1/3 of the building is to be only five stories of residential use above the first floor of retail/restaurant space. A single level of commercial use is then to be part of the building on its southern-most end. Thus, the building will have a 1-6-16 story (stair-stepped) orientation from West Third Street, with the two side elevations reflecting this variation (when viewed from south to north). The tallest orientation of the proposed building will be from the north, where the BCTCS institutional (higher education) use is located a short distance away.

Design - The building itself is to be designed on three major elements, the base (one story), middle (six stories) and cap (top story). Various façade elements, balconies and a roof garden are designed to integrate the base and the middle floors to the surrounding area. The “cap” is at a height consistent with other tall buildings in Lexington, but will be the tallest building in the immediate area. Still, there are “tall” buildings and structures on this edge of the general downtown area, and the potential for more in the future to the north if the BCTCS campus continues to grow at the current rate. The Fourth Street building is to be two stories in height, to be located close to the street and is intended to present a strong urban presence similar to the Fourth Street historic context. This is consistent with the recent Fourth Street Study recommendation for “varied” building heights to be encouraged along this redeveloping corridor.

Open Space – Rooftop open space is proposed on top of the six-story (i.e. middle) portion of the proposed building, along with a rooftop swimming pool for residents. There is also proposed a large, ground-level plaza proposed at the tip or triangle portion of the property located near the intersection of the railroad and Newtown Pike to provide outdoor public open space. There is no obvious public open space in the area of Fourth Street to strengthen that component of the form-based project relative to the Fourth Street corridor.

Pedestrian accommodations - Improved pedestrian facilities are an important aspect of the form-based project requirements, and the applicant has proposed well delineated pedestrian ways along both street frontages and one internal walk from the Fourth Street entrance to the 16-story building on Newtown Pike. The internal walkways will be augmented with dedicated pedestrian crosswalks throughout the development.

Landscaping - Supplemental landscaping is another criteria of the form-based project requirements and the study states that they shall be used on this site. However, there is little detail on the scope or the nature of the supplemental landscaping in the study or on the submitted zoning development plan. The areas for perimeter and internal landscaping on this site plan are larger than normal, but would accomplish little without more detail as to the retention of existing trees, or being augmented with additional plantings.

Conclusions

The applicant’s proposal makes a strong effort to address the intent of the form-based project in a Neighborhood Business (B-1) Zone. This is especially true regarding the site constraints such as a major arterial street like Newtown Pike that more often serves as a neighborhood boundary instead of a unifying urban design feature. The active railroad line is another challenging feature, as is the limited frontage of the subject site along West Fourth Street.

The height of the main building will allow for a significant residential density, and will create a signature (and perhaps, gateway) building along this major arterial. While challenged to compliment and enhance the existing neighborhoods nearby, the proposed architecture and varied building height will be respectful of its neighbors. The internalized off-street parking, the public spaces proposed along Newtown Pike and West Third Street are strong design features, as are the buildings’ placement along on both existing street frontages.

Recommendations (as of February 4, 2015 submittals)

The staff believes that the project can improve its compliance with the B-1 form-based code objectives by providing additional detail on the use of supplemental landscaping, further delineation of the pedestrian system - especially in the ground-level plaza around the south end of the 16-story mixed use building - and by clarifying the base, middle, cap information on the submitted zoning development plan. Specifically:

1. Resolve the discrepancy between the zoning development plan and the staggered height of the southern tower, to match the Character and Context Study information.
2. Provide a preliminary landscape plan, or information to assess tree preservation efforts and supplemental landscaping concepts that are to be proposed.
3. Detail the improvements or uses proposed outdoors in the vicinity of the site’s one-story retail use oriented along West Third Street.

3/19/2015

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