

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

July 12, 2023

PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION



Project Address: 353 & 354 Bear Claw Way
Application Type: Planning Division Referral
UDC will be an Advisory Body
Legistar File ID #: [78640](#)
Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Background Information

Applicant | Contact: Kevin Burow, Knothe & Bruce Architects, LLC | Ryan McMurtrie, United Financial Group

Project Description: The applicant is proposing the construction of an age-restricted senior housing development comprised of two lots on two independent sites (Lot 2 and Lot 3). Lot 2 will be comprised of a four-story building that steps down to two, 162 residential units. Lot 3 will be comprised of a three-story building and steps down to three and 59 residential units. Both sites will be served by underground and surface parking.

Approval Standards: Pursuant to MGO Section 33.24(4)(a), the UDC “...may provide advice and make recommendations concerning urban design problems at the request of any City department, agency, commission or division.” Staff notes that developments of this size can be allowed with conditional use approval. Among the Conditional Use Standards is Standard 9, which states, in part, “...the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district...”

Zoning Related Information: Lot 2 is zoned Traditional Residential Urban 1 (TR-U1) and Lot 3 is zoned Suburban Residential Varied 2 (SR-V2). A zoning change is not being sought at this time. In both existing districts, developments of up to 24 dwelling units are allowed “by-right” with larger developments requiring conditional use approval. As such, staff notes that the current zoning allows for denser development than what is recommended in the adopted plans.

Adopted Plans: The Comprehensive Plan recommends “Low-Medium Residential” development, with up to three-story buildings and a recommended density range up to 30 dwelling units per acre. The project site is also located within the Elderberry Neighborhood Development Plan (the Plan), which recommends Housing Mix 2 (8-20 du/acre) for the project site. Housing Mix 2 is defined as being predominantly single-family, however other compatible housing types could include small multi-family with building up to three stories in height. While the Plan recommends up to 8-unit buildings, larger buildings are allowed either “by-right” or as conditional uses by the Zoning Code, as noted above.

Summary of Design Considerations

Staff recommends that the UDC provides feedback on the development proposal regarding the aforementioned standards related to the items noted below. As part of this review, staff recommends consideration be given to the following:

- **Building Mass and Scale:** The character of the area surrounding the project site is predominantly residential, with a variety of built forms, including smaller-scale multi-family residential buildings, townhome, duplex and single-family housing, however buildings remain relatively small in mass and scale.

As such, one of staff's primary questions is the size of the proposed structures in relationship to surrounding buildings.

As noted above, the existing zoning for both lots allows up to 24 units "by-right" with conditional use approval necessary for larger developments. Considering that the proposed buildings are larger than what was recommended by the adopted plan, with larger footprints and four-story height, staff requests the UDC provide feedback on the building mass and scale as it relates to Conditional Use Standard No. 9, which speaks to creating an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability and maintaining compatibility with context and identifiable character of the area.

Additional information on the referenced Zoning Purpose Statements is included as a reference appendix.

- **Building Orientation:** As shown on the site plan, building connectivity to the street is limited to only common building entries. In addition, generally the proposed development does not appear to be oriented towards Spirit Street, which is the residential street internal to the surrounding neighborhood. Staff have raised the need to adequately orient towards Spirit Street as a consideration in pre-application discussions. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback related to the building orientation and siting.
- **Site Planning Considerations – Surface Parking:** As indicated on the site plan, there are multiple surface parking areas between the two sites where the buildings surround the parking with residential units oriented towards them. While the current version of the plans now include additional landscaping to potentially add some screening, staff continues to have concerns (as noted above) about the relationship between these buildings, as well as the existing and future development to the south. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback related to the proposed surface parking areas, especially as it relates to providing sufficient screening from the street, and adequate buffers/transitions between vehicle and residential uses, as well as incorporating other design elements or alternative parking configurations that could promote pedestrian connectivity.
- **Building Composition and Materials:** As noted in the application materials, the material palette is primarily comprised of masonry and composite siding. Overall, the material palette is relatively simple and consistent with surrounding context. Staff requests the UDC provide feedback.

Appendix

Additional Zoning Information

The referenced statement of Purpose for the **SR-V (Suburban Residential Varied Districts)** states:

The SR-V Districts are established to stabilize and protect the essential characteristics of residential areas of varying densities and housing types, typically located in the outlying parts of the City, and to promote and encourage a suitable environment for family life while accommodating a full range of life-cycle housing. The districts are also intended to:

- (a) Ensure that new buildings and additions to existing buildings are designed with sensitivity to their context in terms of building placement, facade width, height and proportions, garage and driveway placement, landscaping, and similar design features.
- (b) Maintain and improve the viability of existing housing of all types, while encouraging the updating of older housing in a context-sensitive manner.
- (c) Maintain or increase compatibility between residential and other allowed uses, and between different housing types, where permitted, by maintaining consistent building orientation and parking placement and screening.
- (d) Facilitate the preservation, development or redevelopment goals of the comprehensive plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.

The referenced statement of Purpose for the **TR-U (Traditional Residential Urban Districts)** states:

The TR-U Districts are established to stabilize and protect and encourage the essential characteristics of high-density residential areas and to accommodate a full range of life-cycle housing. The districts are also intended to:

- (a) Ensure that new buildings and additions to existing buildings are designed with sensitivity to their context in terms of building placement, facade width, height and proportions, garage and driveway placement, landscaping, and similar design features.
- (b) Promote the preservation of historic buildings and districts within or close to concentrations of high-density housing.
- (c) Maintain and improve the viability of existing housing of all types, while providing for updating of older housing in a context-sensitive manner.
- (d) Encourage restoration of single-family dwellings previously converted to multi-family units back to single- or two-family dwellings.
- (e) Maintain or increase compatibility between residential and other allowed uses, and between different housing types, where permitted, by maintaining consistent building orientation and parking placement and screening.
- (f) Facilitate the preservation, development or redevelopment goals of the comprehensive plan and of adopted neighborhood, corridor or special area plans.