



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 9454 Spirit Street (formerly 353 Bear Claw Way)

**Application Type:** Planning Division Referral  
**UDC is 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 a three-story building and steps down to two stories and 59 residential units. The project site will be served by both underground and surface parking, as well as amenities, including a community room, exercise room, and outdoor spaces.

**Project Schedule:**

- The UDC received an Informational Presentation on July 12, 2023.

**Approval Standards:** This item has been referred to the UDC at the request of the Plan Commission Secretary. 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.” Section 28.183(5)(a)6 states that applicant may choose to go to the Urban Design Commission for an advisory recommendation and comment prior to going to the Plan Commission if advised by the Plan Commission Secretary or District Alder.

Staff notes that developments of this size require conditional use approval. As part of the UDC’s evaluation of the proposed development, the Commission should also give consideration to the applicable Conditional Use Approval Standards, including:

Conditional Use Standard No. 9, which in summary states: “When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building 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...”

Staff recommends that the Commission include findings related to the applicable Conditional Use Approval Standards, especially as it relates to the design considerations noted below, in their recommendation to the Plan Commission.

**Zoning Related Information:** Lot 3 is zoned Suburban Residential Varied 2 (SR-V2). A zoning change is not being sought at this time. The SR-V2 zoning district allows for developments of up to 24 dwelling units “by-right” with larger developments requiring conditional use approval. As noted in the Zoning Code, and in general summary, the SR-V2 zoning district’s intent is to ensure that development is designed with a sensitivity to context, including building mass, scale, placement, height, landscaping, etc., as well as maintains compatibility between developments of varying intensities through the siting of buildings, parking and screening. For reference the complete purpose and intent statement for the SR-V2 zoning district is attached to this memo.

Staff notes that the current zoning allows for denser development than what is recommended in the adopted plans, as noted below.

**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 and more intense developments 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 review the development proposal and make findings and a recommendation giving consideration to the following design-related items noted below and the aforementioned Conditional Use Approval Standards.

- **Building Orientation:** The proposed development does not appear to be oriented internally towards the surrounding neighborhood, but instead it is oriented to the external streets, including Elderberry Road and Bear Claw Way. In addition there is limited building connectivity to the street, which serves only common building entries. Staff has raised the need to adequately orient towards Spirit Street, the internal neighborhood street versus externally from the neighborhood as a consideration in pre-application discussions.

As noted by the Commission in their Informational Presentation comments, there was question as to the orientation of this building given its size and scale being more appropriate to Spirit Street, consistent with the neighborhood, rather than Elderberry.

Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and findings related to the building orientation and siting.

- **Site Planning Considerations – Surface Parking:** As indicated on the site plan, there is a surface parking lot located centrally on the site with residential units directly adjacent to the parking area. While the landscape plan shows landscaping along this building edge, consideration should be given to the providing adequate year-round screening to prevent/limit headlight glare and provide privacy for these units.

In addition, staff continues to have concerns about the relationship between the building, parking, and the surrounding internal neighborhood streets, especially with regard to screening, maintaining a positive building orientation to the street, as well as existing context and future.

As noted by the UDC in their Informational Presentation comments, consideration should be given to providing a better balance between the parking and the open space amenities, including providing adequate buffers, screening, and creating and defining edges.

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.

As noted by the Commission in their information comments, consideration should be given to simplifying design elements, including the roof form and pitches, the datum of the stone material, the window mullions and openings, removing arched forms, etc.

Staff requests the UDC provide feedback and make findings related to the exterior building materials, especially as it relates to the Conditional Use Approval Standards.

## Summary of UDC Informational Presentation Comments

As a reference, the Commission's comments from the July 12, 2023, Informational Presentation are provided below.

- The staff report notes concerns with the aesthetic compatibility with the stated plans.
- What is the parking ratio?
  - 1.3 ratio, achieving 1:1 underground while trying to keep the surface parking to a minimum.
- The scale of the buildings. The Comp Plan talked about low to medium residential up to three stories and 8 units, this is so much larger. The four-story building is still troubling to me along Lakota Way. With the scale of the buildings, I wonder if it would be better to orient Building 31 toward Spirit Street versus Elderberry, I'm thinking of the apartments facing the street, that it might be a more peaceful setting out your front window to face a residential street rather than a roundabout.
  - We've laid this out as such for the outdoor gathering space on the southern side wherever possible, and trying to help anchor this corner (it is not a traditional street corner) by providing a contiguous building form along Elderberry, breaking down to a smaller scale along Spirit Street where we transition to smaller scale single-family residential.
- The question for the Commission other than the design of the buildings will be that aesthetic compatibility with the neighborhood, among other things.

The Commission discussed the following:

- Regarding the site plan view and renderings of the park space to the east: I like the network of trails and space as an amenity, but it has such a long boundary on two sides by vehicular circulation. That edge of the park itself along the parking lot really feels like it needs a healthy landscape buffer so you can feel comfortable and get good use out of that space, more separation from the cars. In general I feel like the parking ratio is a little high for the use, and that would certainly help your site planning and outdoor amenity spaces if you had less surface parking. It doesn't need to be a drastic shift, even losing some here and there for better pedestrian connections and crossings, more generous open space seems like something you could afford to do within your overall numbers. Otherwise there's some nice outdoor amenities and it seems like pretty good connectivity between sidewalks and those amenities. Focus on a better balance between the parking and open space, the edges of the amenity spaces.
- I'm struggling with how much is going on. I appreciate the restraint of the materials. There's a lot of roof pitches, this could be improved by simplifying some things; the roofline could be one form. The datum for the stone elements comes and goes, if you use the stone element on one full geometric element rather than try to stop and start it in a horizontal way, it might be beneficial. Same with some of the window forms, the size of the penetrations and the mullion patterning. If you could simplify it I think it would benefit without changing your plan at all or changing the feel of the whole development. It's a

little chaotic and random for where things start and stop. The bumped out prowed areas with a heavy cap, if you look at where that interacts, that tension, the edge of the cap wants to hit the roof form coming around (downspout), those are the things that start making it look not purposeful. Clear all that away and start to layer things in a more purposeful manner to give the forms more stability. The arched forms look foreign, maybe if they were squared off, they're starting to look a little institutional, like in a church or campus building.

- Of all these elevations, that four-story component is really out of place with the neighborhood, especially on Lakota Street, considering with what we know is across the street. I'm thinking that if you could take those gabled prowed elements, they would be the masonry units and the recessed portion is where you use some of your residential lap siding so these really start to express themselves as tenant occupied elements, with a form of being more like townhouses rather than a big sprawling building. You could do that to some degree around the entire project. It's not meant to be a one-size-fits-all design solution but to express those units more like a townhouse unit like you might see throughout the rest of the neighborhood. With regard to the site plan, for that Building #3, I agree with Shane's comments but want to be sure the berming of that park along Spirit Street isn't creating an isolated zone that is separated from the neighborhood. One of my biggest concerns is that four-story element along Lakota, and screening as much of that parking lot of Building #3 from Spirit Street, which is much more of a residential street. That's a good corner to try and anchor.

## 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.