



Department of City Development
City Plan Commission
Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee
Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation

Lafayette L. Crump
Commissioner

Vanessa L. Koster
Deputy Commissioner

November 9, 2020

To the Honorable Members of the
Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee
City of Milwaukee
City Hall, Room 205

Dear Committee Members:

File No. 200695 relates to the change in zoning from Industrial Heavy, IH, to Industrial Mixed, IM, for the properties located at 123 and 147 East Becher Street, located on the south side of East Becher Street, east of South 1st Street, in the 14th Aldermanic District.

The approximately 10-acre subject site was home to the former Filer and Stowell manufacturing campus and was sold in 1997 by a subsidiary of the company. It is now owned and used by Southwind Marine, a company specializing in boat storage, service, and repair. The site consists of two brick buildings fronting on East Becher Street, long metal structures, formerly used for manufacturing, that stretch north-south along most of the site, and an adjacent abandoned railroad corridor. The current zoning, Industrial Heavy, allows heavy and intense manufacturing uses on the site. The proposed zoning, Industrial Mixed, would allow a wider variety of uses including commercial, retail and residential.

During the month of October, the applicant, Bear Development, offered two tours of the site to interested parties and Ald. Marina Dimitrijevic hosted a virtual public meeting on October 26th regarding the proposal. Prior to the November 9, 2020 City Plan Commission meeting, DCD staff received 7 emails and letters regarding the proposed zoning change. Of these, one letter was in opposition to more new apartments, stating that parking was a problem and there have been additional problems relating to break-ins, assaults, and crime associated with newer residential developments in the area. The balance of the letters and emails were in support of the development, and a few strongly encouraged the proposal to include an off-street extension of the KK River Trail via conversion of the former rail bed through the site. One of the letters also encouraged the City to require designated affordable housing as part of the development, and a certain parking and green space ratio.

On November 9, 2020, the City Plan Commission held a virtual public hearing. City staff discussed the history of the site, the proposed rezoning, and how the rezoning would be consistent with the recommendations of the Harbor District Water and Land Use Plan. A representative from Bear Development then spoke about the zoning change and their plans for the property. While specific development plans are not approved as part of this zoning change, the applicant provided an overview of their plans for the site including their intention to preserve and renovate the site's historic buildings and create approximately 300 units of rental housing. More specifically, the developer explained their plan to finance the project with a mix of sources including Historic Tax Credits and Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) to develop mixed-income "high-quality housing for working individuals and small families."

Ald. Marina Dimitrijevic also spoke, discussing the virtual public meeting that she held on October 26th. She talked about discussions at the meeting and shared that an informal poll conducted revealed strong support for the project with 98% of those who voted expressing support for the project. She then conveyed two questions to the developers: one about the extension of the Kinnickinnic River Trail bike trail through the site and another about shared parking. SR Mills of Bear Development said that they were open to the former and were willing to discuss the latter after further development of their parking plan. For the record, Ald. Dimitrijevic stated she had no objection to the zoning change. Lilith Fowler of Harbor District, Inc. also spoke and voiced support for the rezoning per 2018's Harbor District Water and Land Use Plan.



Commissioners encouraged Bear Development to include a good balance of affordability within the development, specifically to include units accessible for very low income households. Mills explained that lower-income units within the development would be reserved for residents making between 30-80% of Area Median Income and would comprise about two-thirds of all units. He said current plans would reserve approximately 40 units for households making 30% of Area Median Income.

A representative from the Rails to Trails Conservancy spoke during the public hearing session and voiced support for the project as well as his hope that the KK River trail could be extended through the property. Staff also summarized the seven letters described above.

Since the proposed rezoning of the site to Industrial Mixed is consistent with the Harbor District Plan recommendations in terms of allowing a greater mix of uses on the site, including residential, the City Plan Commission at its meeting on November 9, 2020 recommended approval of the subject file.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Crump", followed by the word "for" in a plain font.

Lafayette L. Crump
Executive Secretary
City Plan Commission of Milwaukee

cc: Ald. Dimitrijevic