

Request for Deviation from Performance Standards

Midtown Center DIZ

5825 West Hope Ave (Former Walmart)

8/24/2023

AFS Milwaukee, LLC (Owner) is requesting a deviation from the performance standards for the Midtown Center Development Incentive Zone (DIZ) to allow for a mixed-use redevelopment. The Midtown Center DIZ was created in 2004 (File No. 040068) for the area bounded by West Capitol Drive (on the south), North 60th Street (on the west), and West Fond du Lac Avenue (on the north) and it was established to serve as the design standards for the redevelopment of the area. Since its inception, a mix of uses have been developed and, when necessary, the City has approved various amendments to accommodate the market conditions. See specifically 5800 W Hope Ave (former neighboring Lowe's) now an indoor wholesale and distribution facility.

This request concerns the 15+ acre site at 5825 West Hope Avenue. See Appendix 1, 4, 5, 8, and 10. The new owner proposes mixed-use redevelopment that will feature right sized commercial/retail spaces and climate controlled drive-in self-service storage within the closed 150,000 sq ft former Walmart site. These uses will be developed in a single phase. The Commercial/Retail spaces will total 42,500 sq ft of the existing space and the Storage facility will be 107,500 sq ft of the space, encompassing the majority of that footprint in the rear of the 400' deep building. Appendix 1 and 3

Currently the property falls in the RB2 Zoning District and within the "Midtown Center Development Incentive Zone (DIZ)". The uses permitted by the DIZ currently do not include indoor self-storage. Appendix 6 The owner is proposing to occupy only part of the site with the storage use as an ancillary use for the building that is currently too deep for normal commercial/retail users. The owner is proposing this use because it's a good adaptive reuse of a large building where retail has not been viable over the past 7 years. The owner believes that bringing new jobs and companies to the area will help revitalize the neighborhood and bring activity to this vacant building. Appendix 9 and 11

This project will upgrade the exterior façade with new store front windows with vision glass, a sign band area and/or canopies with signage, and reactivate the front of the building with additional landscaping. The building entrances shall be clearly identifiable and visible from streets and easily accessible and inviting to pedestrians. The new façade will add a drive-in lane for the storage so no loading or unloading will be outside of the building. No outdoor storage will be allowed. The owner will construct an initial demising wall between the storage area and the new right sized commercial/retail spaces and will build out further demising walls between bays as new tenants choose the amount of square feet they desire for their lease. Appendix 1, 2, and 3

This project will also include the depaving of the parking lot in the area no longer needed for the amount of commercial/retail space and landscape the same. Greenspace will also replace the greenhouses to the northwest of the building. The depaving work and new green space will be installed in the spring 2024. Appendix 2

Permits for the build-out of the indoor drive-in climate-controlled self-service storage facility, demising wall, and façade improvements will be filed as soon as possible after the approval of a deviation. Once approved, construction will begin as soon as permits are in place.

The self-service storage space will be a drive-in facility with keypad access, 60+ security cameras, tenant access from 6am -10pm, and management on site 7 days a week. We pride ourselves by having the nicest facilities, best managers and delivering the best overall customer experience in the industry. All tenants will unload from the inside of the building. Approximately 5-10 vehicles per day are expected to access the indoor self-storage facility. The drive-in entrance will have adequate queue space for vehicles to access the facility and no vehicles are expected to extend onto the public roadways. There will often be days when no vehicles will use the drive-in door. Absolutely no storage is allowed outside of the indoor facility.

DEVIATION CRITERIA:

As the current owner of this facility having recently purchased it, the property has been sitting vacant for the last 7 years, and owner is prepared to invest in the overall redevelopment of the 15+ acre site.

As the property has been vacant for some time now the site improvements stated above will not only bring the property back up to code but will add additional features (new right-sized commercial/retail, upgrading façade, updated landscaping, and additional greenspace) that will improve the aesthetics of the site. Owner believes that the upgrades to the property along with the new tenant. Spaces to right-size the vacant big box store will be consistent with the comprehensive plan of the overlay zone. Our redevelopment plans have been designed to meet the four criteria outlined in 295-311-9 of the Milwaukee Zoning Code with respect to this request for deviation from the performance standards:

1. The purpose of the overlay is met: The operations of the indoor drive-in climate-controlled self-service storage facility at the site will be internal, and no storage will be allowed on the exterior of the site. All the alterations to the facility will fit within the existing traffic pattern at the Midtown Center and will not hinder the traffic flow and there will be sufficient queue space at the drive-in entrance so that no vehicles will extend onto the public roadways. The use is unique in the midtown center DIZ and will not be allowed in other buildings so it will not result in a proliferation of self-storage facilities in the DIZ.

2. The deviation improves the aesthetics of the site: As of now, the site has been vacant for years which as seen some degradation to the building and landscaping. Given the size of the site and building itself, the complete lack of activity is glaring. The front north façade of the building will be modified and brought into alignment with the current design standards for the DIZ zone. Upgrades as shown in the project plan, that include the addition of windows and doors, will be completed by the owner during the initial phase of construction to lease the reconfigured and right-sized spaces to new commercial/retail tenants. This is to assist in adding some additional positive aesthetics and activity to the site. Our plan to convert the former Walmart building into an indoor climate-controlled drive-in self-service storage facility is a practical use of the rear portion of the vacant space that will also meet a community need given the lack of secure, indoor self-service storage in the area. This will also make the project financially feasible.

3. If applicable, the deviation addresses one or more unique site factors that make the application of the standard impractical: As previously stated, the building has been vacant and for sale since 2016. There has not been significant interest in this space since that time. This building is 150,000 sq ft and the sheer size of the building makes renting this as a single tenant space nearly impossible. The mixed-use Commercial/Retail/Storage approach allows for uses which will greatly improve the success of the project compared to attempting to lease to one large retail tenant. Using the rear area of the former Walmart building for climate controlled drive-in self-service storage allows the space to maximize potential by allowing a unique use in only this building that will not result in a proliferation of self-storage facilities in the Midtown Center DIZ. Approval of this deviation will also allow a similar style user to the rest of Midtown Center or a user that needs a bit larger space than that which is currently available in Midtown Center an opportunity to have their Commercial/Retail space in this area. This brings new jobs an activity to the area, and breathe some new life back to this vacant site.

4. The deviation is consistent with the comprehensive plan: The current DIZ plan does not allow the use of indoor self-service storage for this area. We are requesting that indoor self-service storage be listed as a permitted use for only the identified portion of the former Walmart building. The only deviation being requested is to allow for indoor self-service storage to be an allowable use in the rear portion of the existing building. This will require limited façade changes allowing for a drive-in door for the storage facility but will also allow for significant areas of greenspace to be added to the site. In order to advance the goals of the comprehensive plan to activate the Midtown Center and overall surrounding community. Please see Project Scope for details on the changes to the building and the current DIZ Standards.

More specifically under the West Side comprehensive plan, this deviation is consistent with the Commercial Land Use Strategy as noted for former big box stores on p. 58 of the plan: Encourage similar or compatible uses “to go into vacant space.” “Where the market will no longer support a retail use or a similar use cannot be reinstated, consider office or business services that support the commercial focus of the district or commercial corridor. If the principal use is converted to office or business services, retain street level storefronts (open and transparent, not shuttered).” While a single-tenant, bog box retail use is not longer feasible for the space, this plan supports those use policies where it will offer right-sized commercial and retail space along the Hope Ave. frontage with added storefront glass while adding a use (self-storage, located in the rear portions of the building) that is unique to the area but a compatible commercial use that will serve businesses and support the commercial focus of the district. Further, no outdoor storage will be allowed under this plan as discouraged by the West Side plan. (p.59).

The Midtown Center District is highlighted in the West Side comprehensive plan as a combination of a “wide range of uses, including institutional, service, retail, and residential.” (p. 88 of the plan) Our plan will allow for a mix of uses to be created within the existing building (commercial or retail storefronts with self-storage business support use in the rear of the building) as well as present a use that is unique to the area to further broaden the intended “wide range of uses.” Several Use Policies for the Midtown Center District (p. 94) are also met by this proposal where these new mixed uses will have regional and local market appeal, they will be integrated with the wide range of uses in the Center, and a significant number of parking spaces will be removed on the site so that parking does not exceed what is necessary. Likewise, several Form Policies for the Midtown Center District (p. 94) are also met by this proposal where additional landscaping is being added (depaved area and removed greenhouses both being replaced with greenspace) and only aluminum decorative fencing is being used (no chain link on site).

For the foregoing reasons the requested deviation is consistent with the West Side plan.