

November 28, 2005

To the Honorable Common Council
Zoning, Neighborhoods and
Development Committee
City of Milwaukee

Dear Committee Members:

File No. 050580 is a substitute ordinance relating to the change in zoning from Multi-Family Residential (RM7) to a Detailed Planned Development (DPD) known as Renaissance's Park Lafayette, on land located on the Northeast Corner of North Prospect Avenue and East Lafayette Place, in the 3rd Aldermanic District.

The applicant proposes to construct two, 20-story residential condominium towers with 398,900 square feet of residential floor area. The development consists of a 153 unit residential tower (Phase 1) with a lobby entrance along Lafayette Place, 9 separate loft units, a 151 unit residential tower (Phase 2) with a lobby entrance along Prospect Avenue, 1,400 square feet of commercial retail space along Prospect Avenue to the north of the site and integrated parking. The total of 313 dwelling units would be composed of one, two and three bedroom units ranging in size from 650 to up to 1570 square feet. The units will be distributed equally between both towers. Units will range from 1 bedroom 1 bath units to 3 bedroom 2.5 bath units. The 1 bedroom units to the small 2 bedroom units would represent approximately 60% of the units with the remaining 40% being the 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom units. The exact unit mix and unit sizes may change as further market studies and design is completed. Outdoor amenities include a rooftop garden terrace above the parking structure, recessed balconies, landscaped open space along the corner townhomes. Building amenities include exercise and community rooms and secure bike storage. Additional visual merchandizing guidelines and storefront lighting guidelines are proposed for the commercial tenants.

The townhomes will have individual entrances along North Prospect Avenue and East Lafayette Place. The base of the building will be clad in masonry brick. Brick and a curtain wall glazing system will be incorporated on the upper levels. Glazing will comprise an average of 60% of the entire building enclosure for both towers. Commercial retail uses with a separate pedestrian entrance, are proposed along a portion of North Prospect Avenue.

The current zoning permits a high density, multi-family residential use and allows office uses as a special use in former one or two-family structures. The proposed retail/commercial space in the first floor lobby area of the building will be neighborhood serving uses consistent with those in other buildings along Prospect Avenue.

The site is zoned RM7. The original multi-family zoning district, R/A/85, was established when the City created its zoning regulations in the 1920's. It was designed as a high density district allowing 290 dwelling units per acre and a maximum height of 85 feet. It was intended to provide high density urban scale living environment. It also allows conversion of single-family homes to offices through the special use process.

In the 1960's, the Floor Area Ratio ("FAR") method was added to Milwaukee's high density zoning districts to allow flexibility in building design and encourage taller, narrower buildings with no height limits. Attached are graphics of the site depicting FAR.

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Under the current zoning, two options can be used to determine the size and intensity of new development. One method uses a lot area ratio to determine how many dwelling units are allowed. A height limit, setbacks and maximum lot coverage determine the building's size and location on the lot. Using this method, 312 dwelling units are permitted. The building could not exceed 85 feet in height and 2 off-street parking spaces for every 3 units are required. The building would also have to meet all setback and lot coverage requirements.

Using the FAR method and the current FAR of 4, a 20-story, 313-unit building could be built on this site under current zoning, if all of the units were 600 square feet. The building would also have to meet the same setback, lot coverage and parking requirements. Map A illustrates building heights in the district. 1 and 2 story buildings are in most cases, original single-family mansions that have been converted to other uses. The 3 to 8 story buildings represent either buildings that were built prior to 1920 or built using the conventional zoning method for this district. Most buildings of 9 or more stories were built using the FAR method. Map B indicates generally which buildings meet conventional and FAR zoning standards and which buildings exceed the FAR standards.

The Prospect Avenue Statistics sheet provides comparative information on buildings in the RM7 zoning district. Because of difficulties in acquiring data information on FAR, average unit size and units per acre is not available for all buildings. The statistics indicate that 19 or 35% of the buildings in the district exceed the original 85 foot height limit and 32% of those 19 buildings exceed the 4.0 FAR standard, ranging from a FAR of 4.3 to 6.3, with other projects exceeding this FAR outside of the RM7 district. The last column indicates the intensity of many of the buildings as measured by the number of units per acre. The more intensive buildings range from 87 to 244 units per acre. Park Lafayette is proposing a density of 292.5 units per acre (290 units per acre are allowed under RM7 and former R/A/85 zoning).

Both towers are located along the easterly property line to take advantage of views with townhomes wrapping the corners. The location of the towers and the building's massing along the street help relate it to the taller buildings nearby.

Current zoning requires 212 parking spaces (2 parking spaces for every 3 dwelling units, plus 3 spaces for commercial uses). With recent revisions, the project now proposes 486 indoor parking stalls located 5 levels below ground and 2 levels above. Access to the garage is off of North Prospect Avenue, on the north side of the building. The parking structure is concealed by locating 4 levels of parking below ground and using the 2-story townhomes along the corner of the site to screen the parking levels. The side facing the bike trail will be composed of a smooth face masonry. The roof of the parking structure will be developed as green space.

A single vehicular entrance is proposed along North Prospect Avenue. It also allows loading and unloading of vehicles for residents, guests and service functions to occur on-site and not in the public rights-of-way. Department of Public Works has found that there will be no significant impact on traffic based on the developer's traffic impact statement.

Four temporary marketing signs at the corner of Lafayette and Prospect are proposed. These signs would each be 16 feet long; with 2 signs being 8 feet tall and the other 2 signs being 12 feet tall. Type A wall signs for the commercial retail tenant/s are proposed. Recommended signage types are pin-mounted halo lit and stencil cut metal letters. Along Prospect Avenue, a 12' x 12' wall sign area and banner sign to the north of the commercial entrance are proposed. Additional wall sign/s would be permitted above the commercial entrance in a 3' high x 28'-8" wide sign band area with window display graphics. Signs are not permitted on the brick facade. Along the north elevation above the commercial entrance, the wall sign band area is 3' high x 12' wide with window display graphics. No permanent freestanding signs are proposed.

The 2 tower, 20-story proposal was presented to the Water Tower Trust neighborhood group where attendees voiced their support. Another meeting was held at a public forum Lantern Court condominium association and about 50 people attended. While there was opposition, most neighbors supported the proposal and were excited to see development at this vacant property. The developer also met with the North Avenue BID district board prior to City Plan Commission.

The initial proposal from the developer was a 14 to 17-story, 2 tower condominium building with 318 units and 1 story commercial/retail area at the corner. That proposal evolved into adding additional stories with less units and FAR, but narrowed the towers to provide view corridors, higher quality materials and added 3-story townhomes at the corner to further screen the parking structure. A proposed vehicular garage along E. Lafayette Pl was removed based on neighborhood input.

Combined storm sewer and water are available to serve this site. A storm water management plan will need to be approved by the City Engineer prior to issuing building permits. DPW also encourages the connection to the existing Oak Leaf bike trail system.

After analyzing the history and characteristics of the multi-family zoning district and the surrounding neighborhood, staff finds that the proposed Park Lafayette planned development to be consistent with the intent of the district and falls within the size and density of other buildings constructed in the area. The only significant standard of the RM7 district that the proposal does not meet is the FAR requirement of 4.0. Although FAR method does not limit building height, it has been found that a building meeting the 4.0 FAR standard could be built in excess of 20 stories, if the units were 600 square feet in size.

On November 28, 2005, a public hearing was held and at that time there was both opposition and support for the proposal. In general, the several neighbors who spoke in opposition were against the proposed height and density and therefore thought it did not relate to the context of the neighborhood. A few residents indicated that they liked the design but didn't think the building was appropriate for this site. Others raised concerns about traffic and congestion of street parking; especially during snow advisories. Late last week the developer added an additional level of underground parking and 40 parking spaces to address this issue. The Water Tower Trust did not formalize a position since there wasn't enough time. There were no objections by the North Avenue BID Board, but they didn't formally vote. However, the BID director did voice his own support of the project. Additionally, one neighbor indicated that he was excited to have a graceful development to bring additional residences on the east side to help with the City's tax rate. Another local developer indicated that the building would provide bookends to development along Prospect Avenue.

Since the proposed planned development is consistent with the City's plans for the area, City Plan Commission at its special meeting on November 28, 2005 recommended approval of this zoning change conditioned on: 1. Working with staff on the final building elevations, building materials and details.

Sincerely,

Rocky Marcoux
Executive Secretary
City Plan Commission of Milwaukee

cc: Ald. D'Amato
File