



Legislation Text

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Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting Date: September 15, 2022

To: Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Mikayla Schmidt, City Planner

Consider Resolution for Building Area Ratio Variances for the Bluff View Subdivision.

Action Requested:

The Zoning Board of Appeals is requested to consider an increase of the allowable percentage of building coverage from 30% to 46% for 34 lots of the Bluff View Subdivision, located in Blocks 1, 2, and 3.

Summary Report:

Bluff View is zoned Neighborhood General 2 (N2) and is located west of Maple St S along Ford St E and Aspen St on the southern Northfield border. The subdivision is platted for 46 new residential lots. The Bluff View subdivision final plat was approved on August 2, 2021.

The applicant plans to construct one-story two-family homes on Blocks 1-3 in addition to fourplexes on Block 3. Lot size for the three blocks ranges from 4,829 square feet (SF) to 7,998 SF. A goal of the Land Development Code (LDC) and Comprehensive Plan is to create higher density. These smaller lots meet that goal, but constrain the size of the home. Allowing flexibility from 30% building area ratio (BAR) up to 46% BAR helps to achieve this density, while maintaining a marketable building size that also meets LDC setbacks. The BAR includes the footprint of the principal building (which included the attached garage), detached garage, and covered porches as a percentage of the total lot area. The applicant has provided a rendering and chart, outlining the proposed building layouts and the requested coverage of 46% BAR, attached to the staff report. In addition, the applicant has provided updated stormwater calculations with the proposed building coverage, attached to the staff report. The City Public Works and Engineering Department has reviewed the applicant's memo and stated "The applicant storm water calculations indicate the proposed storm water facilities for the development are sized adequately for the proposed building area ratio change from 30% building coverage to 46% building coverage."

The criteria for approving a variance, according to Section 5.5.16(C), are as follows:

(1) Pursuant to Minn. Stat. §462.357, Subd 6, as it may be amended from time to time, the zoning board of appeals may only grant applications for variances where practical difficulties in complying with this LDC (Land Development Code) exist and each of the following criteria are satisfied:

- (a) The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of this LDC; and,
- (b) The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan; and
- (c) The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by this LDC; and
- (d) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner; and

(e) The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

Findings of Fact:

Northfield Land Development Code Table 3.2-2 Site Development Standards for N2 District sets the maximum allowed BAR at 30%. The applicant is requesting to increase this limit to 46% for Blocks 1, 2, and 3. Analysis of the variance request is addressed below.

Criterion (a) The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the LDC.

The purpose of the Neighborhood General 2 (N2) district is to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, such as found in the R1 district, with strong neighborhood qualities, such as a grid-like street pattern, consistent block size, compact development, a range of housing types and architectural styles, street connectivity, sidewalks, and homes located in close relationship to the street. In addition, the N2 district will include greenways and natural areas, and options for neighborhood-serving commercial. This development pattern is the preferred future pattern for the city, as expressed in the 2008 comprehensive plan.

Finding:

The project is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the LDC. The proposed use is consistent with the general goals for the N2 zone district. With the variance, the applicant will be able to provide a more compact development.

The Land Development Code was adopted to protect and promote the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the city. More specifically, the purpose of these regulations is to:

- 1.1.1 Maintain and enhance the community’s distinct small town character.
- 1.1.2 Preserve and protect the area’s natural, historic, and cultural resources while providing for improved methods of integrating these resources in the community.
- 1.1.3 Encourage growth in infill locations as the desired location of development with expansion on the edge of the city a secondary priority.
- 1.1.4 Create residential community areas with strong neighborhood qualities including pedestrian-friendly streets, community gathering spaces, and basic commercial needs within walking distance.
- 1.1.5 Encourage the development of neighborhoods that incorporate a variety of housing types to serve the needs of a diverse population.
- 1.1.6 Allow for places with a mixture of uses that are distinctive and contribute to the city’s overall vitality.
- 1.1.7 Provide standards and guidelines for continuing strategic growth and sustainable development.
- 1.1.8 Provide for the expansion and diversification of the economic base to assure a strong economy.
- 1.1.9 Promote an ethic of sustainability in all activities to ensure that proposed development and redevelopment will, at a minimum, conserve energy and natural resources.
- 1.1.10 Improve and promote connectivity to better serve residents and to improve the function of the overall street network.
- 1.1.11 Ensure that proposed development is of human scale, primarily pedestrian-oriented to the extent

appropriate, and designed to create exceptional streetscapes and pedestrian spaces.

1.1.12 Minimize vehicle traffic by providing for a mixture of land uses, pedestrian-oriented development, compact community form, safe and effective multi-modal traffic circulation (e.g., pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular), and adequate on- and off-street parking facilities.

1.1.13 Protect the rural character of certain areas of the community as identified in the comprehensive plan.

1.1.14 Encourage vibrancy in the downtown core and fringe areas.

1.1.15 Ensure compatibility between different types of development and land uses.

1.1.16 Create a comprehensive and stable pattern of land uses upon which to plan transportation, water supply, sewerage, energy, and other public facilities and utilities.

The proposal is not in conflict with any LDC goals. It meets the following purposes:

1.1.1 Maintain and enhance the community's distinct small town character.

1.1.4 Create residential community areas with strong neighborhood qualities including pedestrian-friendly streets, community gathering spaces, and basic commercial needs within walking distance.

1.1.5 Encourage the development of neighborhoods that incorporate a variety of housing types to serve the needs of a diverse population.

1.1.11 Ensure that proposed development is of human scale, primarily pedestrian-oriented to the extent appropriate, and designed to create exceptional streetscapes and pedestrian spaces.

1.1.12 Minimize vehicle traffic by providing for a mixture of land uses, pedestrian-oriented development, compact community form, safe and effective multi-modal traffic circulation (e.g., pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular), and adequate on- and off-street parking facilities.

Criterion (b) The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Land Use chapter of the Comprehensive Plan will be consulted for any development proposal based on the following steps. If a proposal is not consistent with recommendations of any one of these steps, the proponent should re-evaluate and make adjustments (or provide justification for deviation) if the proposal is not aligned with the following three aspects:

1. Intent: Development proposals will reflect the spirit and values expressed in the 12 principles (statements of intent) (pages 4.9 to 4.13).

2. Location: Development proposals will be consistent with the Conservation and Development Map (page 4.18) and location descriptions (pages 4.14 to 4.15).

3. Character: Development proposals will be consistent with the Framework Map (page 4.19) and recommendations and context descriptions (pages 4.15 to 4.17).

Finding:

The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Intent:

1. The small town character will be enhanced.

The proposal is to construct modest homes with a small town character.

2. Location: The natural environment will be protected, enhanced and better integrated in the community.

When the subdivision was platted, the project was integrated into the community and the surrounding natural environment through the street and trail network. The surrounding area is partially in a floodplain and existing wetlands have been incorporated into the way the neighborhood has been platted as an integrated asset to the community.

3. The preference for accommodating future growth is in infill locations, then redevelopment/ land intensification opportunities, and then on the edge of existing developed areas.

This project area is in the pipeline for growth.

4. New and redeveloped residential communities (areas) will have strong neighborhood qualities.

The proposed homes will have strong neighborhood qualities such as being in close proximity to the street, attractive architecture, a modest floor plan and area, and front porches.

5. Environmentally-sensitive and sustainable practices will be integrated into new developments and redeveloped areas.

The proposed homes are a modest size and developing residential units on smaller lots is an accepted standard sustainable approach to residential development.

6. Places with a mix of uses that are distinctive and contribute to increasing the city's overall vitality are preferred.

n/a

7. Neighborhood-serving commercial will be small scale and integrated with the residential context.

n/a

8. A wider range of housing choices will be encouraged - in the community as well as in neighborhoods.

The new custom homes are designed for single-level living, filling a gap in the housing market. The surrounding residential area consists of relatively new small-scale multi-family housing structures offering a variety of housing choice in the neighborhood.

9. Rural character of certain areas of the community will be protected.

n/a

10. Streets will create an attractive public realm and be exceptional places for people.

Streets in the development were platted to create an attractive public realm.

11. Places will be better connected, in part to improve the function of the street network and also to better serve neighborhoods.

The street network exists and is well connected.

12. Opportunities will be created to walk and bike throughout the community.

The development contains ample walking and biking connections.

Location:

The project is located in the Pipeline Area of the Conservation and Development map, which is appropriate for development.

Character:

The project is located in the Neighborhood General area of the Framework Map, typified by single-family homes.

Criterion (c) Property Owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the LDC.

Finding:

The requested variance will result in a reasonable use of the property otherwise not permitted by the LDC. The Building Area Ratio restriction is in conflict with the goal of creating more compact development and in conflict with the LDC setback requirements. The homes, as designed, meet the LDC setback requirements, therefore meeting the intent of the LDC. However, the percentage of lot coverage needs to be increased with the smaller lots.

Criterion (d) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.

Finding:

The plight of the landowner is due to a conflict within the LDC. The lots were platted to meet the intent and requirements of the LDC. However, the LDC emphasis on compact design failed to take into account how the lot coverage limit affects smaller lots.

Criterion (e) The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

Finding:

Supported: Granting the variance will not alter the essential character of the locality. The project will be compatible with the character of the surrounding properties. The home designs do not change and the setbacks will not change.

Staff supports approval of the building area ratio being increased from 30% to 46% for Blocks 1, 2, and 3.

Alternative Options:

1. The Planning Commission could approve no increase to the BAR.
2. The Planning Commission could approve a percentage between 30% and 46% BAR.
3. The Planning Commission could approve an increased BAR for certain lots, not all of Blocks 1, 2, and 3.

Financial Impacts:

There are no direct financial impacts to the City due to approving these variances. The variance request is based upon the requirements and elements necessary for this type of permitted use on this site to be functional. There is no financial benefit or impact in regards to lot coverage.

Tentative Timelines:

The applicant has submitted for two building permits and hopes to break ground this year. Curb, gutter and the

first lift of asphalt have been installed as part of the extension of Ford St. E. for the first phase of the development.