



Legislation Text

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To: Mayor and City Council
City Administrator

From: Mikayla Schmidt, City Planner
Mitzi Baker, Community Development Director
David Bennett, Public Works Director/City Engineer

Presentation and Discussion on the Conditional Use Permit for St. Olaf College - Ole Avenue Housing Project for the Perimeter Transition Area.

Action Requested:

The Northfield City Council is asked to hear a presentation from staff and follow with discussion and questions on the Ole Avenue Housing Project proposed by St. Olaf College. This discussion will inform preparing a resolution, or alternate resolutions, for action in February (tentatively February 16 after the rezoning has been ratified).

Summary Report:

St. Olaf College proposes to develop new student housing that will facilitate decompressing and improving existing dorms and will also replace aged honors houses. College owned properties along the north and south sides of St. Olaf Ave, west of Lincoln St. are proposed for site improvements including new student housing, stormwater management, landscaping, parking and gateway enhancements. The St. Olaf project will be comprised of several multi-story structures, including a 300-bed residential hall to be constructed on the south side of St. Olaf Avenue, townhome-style residences with 140 student beds, to replace the existing honors houses on the north side of St. Olaf Avenue; and a total of 189 replacement and supplemental parking stalls throughout the project site. Gateway enhancements, new landscaping, pedestrian facilities and bicycle parking will be included in this project as well.

The Planning Commission (PC) approved, unanimously, to recommend approval to Council, the Conditional Use Permit with the conditions in the staff memo plus the condition that new parking be removed from the site plan. Based on the PC's recommendation, one forthcoming resolution will be prepared with the added PC's condition to remove all new parking from the site plan. Another resolution will be prepared without the added PC recommendation, as staff did not concur with the additional condition as many of the stalls replace existing student related parking and insufficient accommodations is likely to result in more parking in adjacent neighborhoods. Staff will be looking for direction from Council on the PC recommendation as well as the alternative staff recommendations and/or other conditions to further inform preparing resolutions for consideration. The City Council is the authority on a final decision. A map of the PTA overlaid on the site plan is forthcoming and is planned to be sent out in a supplemental memo. The resolutions for the CUP are not attached to this staff report and will be

presented at the February 16 Council meeting for formal action.

Process:

Most of the St. Olaf campus is currently zoned CD-S. This zone is comprised of two sub-districts; the IDA - Internal Development Area, which is more than 200 feet from the external boundary of the District; and the PTA - Perimeter Transitional Area, which is the outer 200 feet of the CD-S zone and/or center line of right-of-way. Development within the PTA sub-zone is subject to review by the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process. The Planning Commission and City Council will consider this CUP for development within the PTA, consistent with the Land Development Code (LDC).

Multiple steps and development applications are required for this project, beyond the CUP. A request to re-zone property, to expand the College zone, is being considered concurrent with this CUP. Other applications/approvals are administered by staff and include: Site plan - including layout, landscaping, lighting, parking and circulation; civil plans - including grading, storm water management, and utilities; fire safety and emergency access; and building/construction permits.

Neighborhood Meeting:

A neighborhood meeting and parking study are also required as part of the PTA review. St. Olaf College held a neighborhood meeting on September 21, 2020. Invitations were sent to the surrounding addresses that were 350 feet from the project area and 20 households attended the open house. A report from the first neighborhood meeting is attached. A second neighborhood meeting was held by St. Olaf College on December 21, 2020. Invitations were sent to the surrounding addresses that were 500 feet from the project area.

Parking and Traffic:

Student enrollment at St. Olaf College is currently approximately 3,000 and is not proposed to expand further. The 440 beds created from the project will decompress existing residence halls on campus and bring about 100 students currently living off-campus, back to living on campus. Leaving approximately 100 students living off-campus, most of whom live within a ½ mile and mainly walk or bike to campus.

A parking and traffic impact study were also completed. Table 3.8-2 in the LDC lays out the parking requirements. For CD-S zones, the minimum states:

Campus-wide requirement as determined through a parking study. One parking space for each faculty, staff, student vehicle, and the number of parking spaces equal to the average visitor parking demand as documented in a parking study. On street parking adjacent to property owned by a college may be counted towards meeting the parking requirement.

The LDC points to having one parking space for each faculty, staff and student vehicle, not a parking space for each faculty, staff and student. St. Olaf College has reviewed the parking for the Ole Housing project area and found approximately 28 net new parking stalls will be created from the proposed project. The remaining 161 parking stalls were existing as part of the honor houses, President's House and event parking.

The public works department has provided further analysis of the Traffic Impact Study from St. Olaf College. The PowerPoint presentation explains the existing traffic conditions and anticipated traffic

conditions from St. Olaf Ave., Lincoln St. and Hwy 19. The PowerPoint also shows the intersection operation at its current status and anticipated status after opening of the housing project. Total traffic is not anticipated to increase, but there will likely be a redistribution of some trips from the Hwy 19 entrance to Lincoln St. N. / St. Olaf Ave. Vehicle trips on St. Olaf Ave. after the housing project opens are anticipated to increase by 65 trips per day, which is less than the previous traffic volumes from the early 2000's.

Conditional Use Permit Analysis:

The St. Olaf project area encompasses land currently zoned CD-S, as well as land zoned R1 that is being considered for re-zoning to the CD-S district to facilitate expansion of the Campus on properties owned by the College. As stated above, development in the PTA requires a CUP. A CUP follows the Type 4 Review Procedure found in Section 5.4.7 of the LDC. When reviewing a CUP, the Planning Commission and City Council is to consider the following criteria (Criterion a) must be met and b) through n) shall be considered):

a) The proposed use is allowed as a conditional use in the district for which it is proposed.

Concurrent with this application, a request to rezone a portion of the project area from R1-B to CD-S is being considered. When reviewing the project under the CD-S, the proposed uses are permitted, and those within the PTA are allowed as a conditional use.

b) The conditional use will be in accordance with the general objectives, or with any specific objective, of the city's comprehensive plan and this LDC.

The Ole Student Housing Project upholds the objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan in the following categories:

Chapter 3: Community Identity - Objective 7: Continue to support local schools and colleges

CI 7.2 "Cooperate with the local colleges to minimize negative impacts of parking and traffic on Northfield neighborhoods."

- The proposal includes 188 new on-site parking spaces to reduce parking overflow into the adjacent neighborhoods. The number of proposed on-site parking spaces adhere to the City's parking standards for the proposed use, according to City Ordinance Chapter 34, Article 3, Section 3.6 Off-Street Parking Space Requirements, and more specifically, Tables 3.6-1 and 3.6-2 relevant to the parking requirements in the CD-S District.
- The traffic study, as discussed in question 12 below, demonstrated the proposed on-site residences would not result in total traffic increases.

CI 7.3 "Collaborate with the local colleges to provide the overall community with quality public programs, and quality open spaces."

- The site plan incorporates thoughtful open space and pedestrian connections around the proposed residences. The outdoor spaces will include intentional landscape design and spaces for people to gather and enjoy the continued collegiate ambiance that already exists on the St. Olaf campus.

Chapter 4: Land use - Objective 3: Encourage a compact development pattern, and support infill, redevelopment and land intensification.

LU 3.2 "Work collaboratively to identify structures and sites for redevelopment, intensification or reuse."

- The college commissioned a housing study and found that redevelopment of the President's House and Honor's Homes would be the best option for increasing on-site residential opportunities to meet the needs of the student population.

In addition, the Framework Map of the Northfield Comprehensive Plan delineates the parcels as appropriate for Neighborhood Central. This zone consists of single-family homes on smaller lots and includes some multi-family and mixed-use development. Walkability is a strong component and a range of housing types.

The Comprehensive Plan explains this zone also begins to change at the edge of this zone. The edges change from an urban square grid to suburban style development and start to lose consistency with square blocks. Future development should be reinforced by the character of the Neighborhood Central zone. The character of the proposed buildings, sidewalk connection and landscaping reflect a transition from neighborhood to campus, and support the values of the Neighborhood Central zone.

The proposal will need to meet the Site Development Standards for the CD-S Zone District as defined in Article 3 of the LDC and the Use Specific Standards found in Article 2. Staff will complete a final review after the CUP process has been completed, and will incorporate any conditions added to the PTA zone by City Council.

- c) **The conditional use will be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained so as to be harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general vicinity and that such use will not change the essential character of the same area.**

The architecture of the proposed residential hall and townhouse-style residences is designed to complement St. Olaf structures and design. The quality of materials, design, colors and aesthetics are intended to create visual continuity with existing campus buildings. Intentional design adds permanence and contributes to harmony with the existing character of the college campus. The new campus residences will also be operated and managed similarly to the existing student housing to ensure the students abide by campus policies and respect the surrounding neighborhoods.

- d) **The conditional use will not be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future uses.**

The proposed residential facilities will not pose any hazardous or disruptive conditions to existing or future neighboring uses. The new facilities will serve the needs of the college and help contain students on campus to reduce off-campus parking and housing needs. Landscaping design integrates placement of plantings and species selection that will soften light-shed and balance the need for safety and security.

- e) **The conditional use will be served adequately by essential public facilities and services such as streets, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, water and sewer.**

The residence hall and townhouses will front the existing St. Olaf Avenue, which would be preserved as a main connection from Lincoln Street North into the St. Olaf campus. Most of the proposed parking would be between the townhouses and the existing stadium with access from Lincoln Street North.

The residential facilities would connect to public water and sewer, and there is adequate capacity for the increased residential usage. The project area consists of an existing looped watermain a portion of which will be rerouted in order to accommodate the construction of the residence hall. If necessary for additional flow or pressure, booster pumps will be installed to adequately meet the needs of the residence hall. Sanitary sewer mains are available for connection in both St Olaf Avenue and 1st Street West so no downstream capacity issues are anticipated due to the construction of this project.

The Ole Avenue project will also involve construction of stormwater detention on-site and release into the municipal storm sewer system at the same or a lesser rate. Stormwater treatment of the runoff will also be provided on-site to ensure all State and Local requirements are met. Based on this information, existing municipal utilities are adequate to meet the requirements of the proposed student housing project.

Public facilities details and final design is subject to technical review and will be part of the final site plan and project approval.

f) The benefits of the conditional use outweigh the potential negative effects of the surrounding community.

The proposed project is the result of a 2018 housing study commission by St. Olaf College's Board of Regents. In this study, it was determined there is a 462-bed deficit in available on-campus student housing. To accommodate this need in the interim, the college has converted study lounges into rooms and added beds to double rooms. There has also been an increased need for students to procure off-campus housing options, resulting in more students driving to/from campus and potentially parking along streets in adjacent neighborhoods.

By providing additional on-site housing and parking, the overcrowding in existing residential facilities and off-campus demands can be resolved. This would help reduce off-campus housing needs and the resulting vehicular trips by those students to/from campus each day would be reduced accordingly. In addition, the proposal provides an additional 188 on-campus parking stalls to capture the parking needs of increased on-campus residential units and to accommodate students who travel off-site for additional skills development and work experience.

g) The conditional use will not create excessive additional requirements at public cost for public facilities and services.

All utility connections proposed will be constructed at the cost of the college as part of this project. No public cost will be incurred during construction of this project.

h) The conditional use will not involve uses, activities, processes, materials, equipment and conditions or operations that will be detrimental to any persons, property or the general welfare by reason of excessive traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors.

This development is not expected to result in operations that would be detrimental to any persons, property or general welfare by reason of excessive traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare or odors.

i) The conditional use will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage of natural, scenic, or historic features of major importance as may be established in the comprehensive plan or other city plans related to natural, scenic, or historic features.

The conditional use is not expected to result in the destruction, loss, or damage of natural, scenic, or historic features of major importance as may be established in the comprehensive plan or other city plans related to natural, scenic, or historic features. Since the proposed project will take place in a previously developed area largely encompassing existing residential homes, no disruption of natural or scenic features are anticipated. St. Olaf will also be preserving many of the existing on-site trees. In addition, none of the existing structures proposed for decommissioning are listed on the National Historic Register or are subject to other state or local historic designations.

j) The traffic and parking generated by the use will not lower the Levels of Services as described in the comprehensive plan update of intersections within a quarter mile of the site.

A traffic study was performed to analyze the impacts of the proposed project. It revealed that there would be little to no generation of new/additional traffic to and from the campus. Rather, existing traffic redistribution is expected to occur. The redistribution is expected to have minimal impacts to the adjacent public roadway network based on the conclusions of the traffic study. Essentially, students are already present on campus and commuting to campus from elsewhere in the community. The same students would be living on campus and no longer commuting, thereby decreasing the overall number of daily student trips to and from campus. Further, no change in Level of Service at the Lincoln Street/St. Olaf Avenue intersection or the Highway 19/St. Olaf Drive intersection are anticipated as a result of the project.

- k) **In residential districts, the use is of a similar height, building orientation, massing, setback, and scale as to be compatible with surrounding uses in compliance with Section 3.5 Neighborhood Compatibility Standards.**

The use is proposed in the CD-S district and reflect design and massing expected on a college/institutional campus.

- l) **In the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA) within the college development district (CD-S) that abut residential and commercial districts, height, building orientation, massing, setback and scale shall be considered in building renovation and/or new construction in order to maintain compatibility with surrounding areas as described in Section 3.4 Neighborhood Compatibility Standards. These neighborhood compatibility stands are to be administered in order to maintain a harmonious neighborhood environment and absolute compliance with these standards is not intended.**

The proposed housing project abuts several residential lots, most of which are owned by St. Olaf College. In the PTA area the building height, orientation, massing, setback and scale have been considered in relation to the neighborhood. The height of the townhomes (at roof mid-line) is approximately 30 feet, which is the maximum height of homes in the R1 district. In addition, the facades of the townhomes have variation in depth, color, texture and exterior finishes. The townhomes are oriented towards the street and have sidewalk connections throughout and to the street.

The residence hall height ranges from 45 - 60 feet in height. This is higher than what is typically seen in the R1 zone, though multi-family buildings are allowed to exceed the 30 foot maximum if for every additional 10 feet in height the building is setback 5 feet from adjacent buildings and lot lines. The proposed residence halls are similar to the height of other campus housing. These structures will have facades that wrap around a courtyard. The halls also have façades that differ in depths, color and exterior finishes that help integrate it into the campus-neighborhood context, and are in keeping with the college architecture. The halls orient toward the street with connections through the courtyard and sidewalks.

- m) **Impacts such as noise, hours of activity, and outdoor lighting have been addressed to mitigate negative impacts on nearby uses.**

The residential facilities, walkways, and parking lots will incorporate outdoor lighting to comply with the 2.0 average maximum foot-candle requirement, and a 0.1 foot-candle for any lights within 15-feet to adjacent residential uses. The lighting placement and fixtures selected are intended to provide a safe night atmosphere without creating light pollution, and to use lighting as a design enhancement rather than a distraction. Landscape design and species selection is intended to soften and interrupt light-shed while balancing the need for safety and security.

The students will be expected to comply with the campus guidelines within residential facilities, which includes maintaining noise levels and hours of activity that are not a nuisance to other students or adjacent neighbors. Additionally, the attending Residential Advisor living in the residential facilities is planned to be present to help enforce the campus policies.

- n) **Parking is adequately provided for the proposed conditional use, but an excessive number of parking spaces are not proposed.**

With additional on-campus housing, additional parking is necessary. Parking study data confirms that the on-site parking increase proposed as part of the project will be adequate to meet the demand without requiring street parking. The current parking design and capacity was proposed based on data from the parking study as well as applicable City Ordinance Chapter 34, Article 3, Section 3.6 Off-Street Parking

Space Requirements, and more specifically, Tables 3.6-1 and 3.6-2 relevant to the parking requirements in the CD-S District.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends the City Council consider recommending approval subject to the following conditions:

- 1) The final plan will include a safe pedestrian connection from the north parking lot to the townhomes and athletic fields.
- 2) The final plan will incorporate adequate apparatus access and turn around for fire and emergency safety vehicles and personnel.
- 3) This project is subject to other City approvals, including site plan, which could result in required modifications.

The Planning Commission (PC) approved, unanimously, to recommended approval to Council, the Conditional Use Permit with the conditions in the staff memo (above) plus the condition that *new parking be removed from the site plan*.

Alternative Options:

The Council could approve subject to conditions recommended by staff, subject to those conditions as well as the additional item recommended by the Planning Commission, or subject to other conditions deemed necessary to meet the criteria.

If a proposed conditional use satisfies both the general and specific standards set forth in the zoning ordinance, the applicant is entitled to the conditional use permit. Importantly, if the applicant meets the general and specific ordinance standards, the city usually has no legal basis for denying the CUP.

Financial Impacts:

There are no immediate financial impacts to the City.

Tentative Timelines:

If approved, the pending zoning map amendment to expand the College Development District is anticipated to go into effect on February 12, 2021. This CUP would then be scheduled for action at the February 16, 2021 City Council meeting.