MEETING MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, November 29, 2017
7:00 P.M.

Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, James C. Lytle Council Chambers

Members Present: Jim Ford (Chair), Terri Dubin, Carol Goddard, Peter Isaac, Colby Lewis, Andrew Pigozzi, Jolene Saul

Members Absent: Simon Belisle, Patrick Brown

Associate Members Present: none

Associate Members Absent: Scott Peters

Staff Present: Johanna Leonard, Director of Community Development
Scott Mangum, Planning and Zoning Administrator
Meagan Jones, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Mario Treto, Assistant City Attorney

Presiding Member: Jim Ford, Chairman

1. CALL TO ORDER / DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chairman Ford called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: November 8, 2017

Commissioner Lewis made a motion to approve the minutes from November 8, 2017. Commissioner Goddard seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken and the minutes were unanimously approved, 6-0. (Commissioner Saul arrived after minutes were approved).

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. PLANNED DEVELOPMENT 15PLND-0117

601 Davis Street
David Cocagne, Vermilion Enterprises, LLC, requests approval of a Planned Development and Special Uses in order to construct a 33-story, 318-unit
residential building with 7,481 square feet of ground floor commercial space (including a drive through for a financial institution, Chase Bank) and 176 parking spaces. The applicant seeks site development allowances for: 1) Number of dwelling units (318 where 93 allowed); 2) Floor Area Ratio (approximately 12.25 where 8.0 allowed as a site development allowance); 3) Building height (313-feet, excluding 40 feet of parking floors, where 220-feet allowed as a site development allowance); 4) Number of parking spaces (176, including 36 compact, where 267 required); 5) A curb cut/driveway on Davis Street, where it is not allowed (between building and ROW); 6) 5 total loading berths required (1 commercial, 1 university, 3 residential), 3 total loading berths proposed (1 existing); 7) A ziggurat setback of 29.3' at 58' building height along Davis Street where 40' at 42' building height is required; and 8) A ziggurat setback of 21.6' at 63' building height along North property line where 25’ ziggurat setback required above 42’ along north property line (interior side yard). In addition, the applicant may seek and the Plan Commission may consider additional Site Development Allowances as may be necessary or desirable for the proposed development.

Ms. Jones provided a brief overview of the planned development then stated the site development allowances being requested by the applicant.

Mr. Dave Cocagne, Vermilion Development, provided an overview of the development team which also consists of Remark Corporation, GDS Consulting, Campbell Coyle Real Estate, Kettlekamp and Kettlekamp, and Solomon Coldwell and Benz. He then provided a brief timeline of the proposed project to this point. Devan Patterson, Solomon Coldwell and Benz, provided a project overview, mentioning the inclusion of the historically landmarked University Building, the context of the proposed development within the area and the studies conducted as part of the application. He also stated that the project would be an economic catalyst for the area and contribute to walkability in the area. Mr. Cocagne then reviewed the development’s proposed public benefits.

Mr. Mangum presented the staff recommendation of denial of the proposed project, briefly explaining the standards used to come to that recommendation.

Chair Ford opened up the public hearing to questions from the Commission to the Petitioner which included:

- Who owned the University Building and governed any changes proposed to it.
  
  Mr. Mangum responded that the Preservation Commission would need to
approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for any exterior changes that are proposed. The Preservation Commission reviewed the proposed project focusing on the podium of the building and the University Building and recommended approval with conditions including that any exterior modification to the buildings would need to be brought back to the Commission.

- Whether or not there was any subsurface parking provided and considerations taken. No underground parking is proposed for the site and a number of items were considered in making that decision.
- How the proposed amount of parking aligns with parking requirements. The proposed number of parking spaces falls below the required .55 parking spaces per bedroom required for developments within Transit Oriented Development areas.
- Clarification on whether or not the units will be for rental or for sale. The proposed development will consist of rental units.
- Whether or not there were any plans or discussions to move the proposed drive through to a site on the periphery of downtown. Mr. Cocagne stated that the Chase Bank ATM is seen as a necessity for the bank’s operations and that as proposed the new drive through would reduce the wide curb cut that currently exists.
- Whether or not Chase Bank would own the airspace of the drive through with the proposed development. Mr. Cocagne responded that Chase would own the airspace and that there is the ability to buy that space back should the ATM drive through no longer be used.
- How many other entities currently use the adjacent alley? Mr. Luay Aboona of KLOA stated that the alley is used by other businesses and observations showed that 85 back and forth trips occur in the morning, 125 in the evening. The alley is 20 feet wide and operates similarly to a street. No significant truck movements during observations, however, trucks that were observed did not block alley traffic. It was found that the new development would not significantly alter the amount of through traffic in the alley.
- Remediation needed, if any. No remediation is needed for the site.
- How the development scale is justified. Mr. Cocagne stated that preserving the University Building became a large driving force of design constraints. Development rights essentially being transferred to Vermilion.
- Clarification on the “up to” dollar amounts provided for public benefits. Mr. Cocagne stated that exact amounts would be used, omitting the “up to” included in the list.
- Clarification on if the calculated FAR includes the land the University Building is on. The FAR includes the lot the University Building is on as well as the lots that the new building will be constructed on.
Chair Ford Question for staff included:

- Clarification on what the heights for the site development allowance would be. Ms. Jones clarified that the site development allowance for height omits the 4 floors that are dedicated to vehicle parking.
- Whether or not the drive-through is a part of the Chase Bank Building planned development to the west of the alley. Staff did not believe that the site was included but will look for documentation regarding the site.
- A reference to the 708 Church project and a question of whether or not there are any issues with Fire Department access. Ms. Leonard explained that there were general concerns that the Department would not be able to reach all parts of the proposed 708 Church Street building. The Fire Chief at the time explained the various forms of fire suppression that could be utilized. That was not a reason the height of that development was lowered.

Chair Ford then opened the hearing to questions from the public regarding the proposal(s) presented. Six members of the public presented questions which included:

- How will the building be more desirable given the number of new apartment buildings built and approved? How will retail space be filled given the existing vacant spaces in downtown? Mr. Cocagne stated there have been discussions held with possible retail tenants so there is confidence in being able to fill the commercial spaces. A comprehensive market study was also conducted to ensure interest in the proposed units and the unit mix includes a greater number of 2 and 3 bedroom units which is seen as desirable.
- How will project affect the wind tunnel affect at the street level. Mr. Patterson stated that the development team would work with a wind engineer to conduct a wind tunnel test and develop a strategy to mitigate effects of the wind at the street level and on the terraces above the podium.
- How the project will impact Police, Fire and EMS services. Building will be design to meet Fire Safety and Building Codes. Do not anticipate a significant effect on EMS or police department services but taxes generated by the development could be used for increased services if needed.
- How the property values would not be negatively affected? Mr. Cocagne stated that new developments are generally viewed as a positive for property values.
- How would traffic and parking not be affected? Mr. Kyle Smith, Antero Group, provided trends showing that there is less car ownership within both the region and downtown Evanston. He continued with data that predicted that the peak parking demand would be met by the parking provided on site.
How bird friendly design has been addressed. Mr. Patterson stated that work had been done primarily at the podium level to integrate bird strike mitigation measures. Have been using LEED 55 guidelines and will develop further.

Why no in-depth discussion of the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance requirements was to be discussed. Chair Ford stated that the topic of IHO requirements is outside of the standards the Commission must look at. Mr. Treto continued, stating that it is outside of the purview of the Plan Commission and would be discussed at City Council.

Reference to Section 6-3-5-9(B) which prohibits variance approval with a planned development. Mr. Mangum clarified that the exceptions being asked for are site development allowances permitted within the zoning code and not variances.

Whether or not the proposed development would be financially feasible without the requested allowances and if anything could be done to reduce the request. Mr. Cocagne stated that the development as contemplated would not be feasible within the allowances. As part of the project analysis, the IHO proposal was looked at by staff and independent financial advisors and determined that the minimum thresholds for feasibility warranted the development as proposed. Allowances requested were seen as necessary to create a viable development.

Information on how many vehicles would be crossing the bike line at the site. Mr. Aboona responded that he did not have hourly data but that at peak hours, 80 vehicles were seen entering and exiting the site in the morning and 120 in the evening. Project would add 40 vehicle trips in the morning and 70 vehicle trips in the evening respectively.

Whether or not the parking study consulted with downtown residents. Mr. Kyle Smith responded no, data had been collected from a number of households from over 40 multi-family residential buildings in Evanston and across the Cook County, wheel tax information, and discussions occurred with Park Evanston. He mentioned that there was a key distinction between vehicle use of condominium buildings versus that of rental buildings. Parking study also does not include recently approved Albion development and the Target store which will be leasing parking spaces within the Sherman Plaza garage. Peak parking times would likely be different for each use so no conflicts anticipated.

Whether or not parking would be included in rental rates. Will be an additional charge.

Building height of the Park Evanston. Through third party website, Emporis, Park Evanston is listed at 236 feet.

Chair Ford opened the hearing to public testimony. Twelve members of the public
spoke with comments including the following:

- Society of St. Vincent DePaul organization’s support of the proposed project and affordable housing plan proposed. Support of affordable housing proposal and the wrap around services that would be provided. Need more attention to programs that would help retain existing families.
- Bird Friendly Evanston provided an overview of the migratory bird trend and the need to include bird strike mitigation on new developments. The group has had conversations with the developer and Chair of the Plan Commission and recommends that LEED 55 be adopted as a standard for new development. The group expressed concerns with the glass railing and on the levels above the podium. Street level mitigation was done well.
- The need to discuss the affordable housing plan as part of the public benefits and the intent of the IHO being to produce more affordable units. Proposed affordable housing plan would provide services already in existence through the City and other organizations in the City.
- The development overall is too dense, too tall, will create wind tunnel issues on the street level and will create too much traffic interrupting the existing bike lane on Davis Street.
- Design Evanston’s support of the project to address blight of the existing site. Group reviewed the building design and stated that Vermilion has been responsive in addressing their concerns. Taller buildings at this site are seen as a plus. Project appears to meet recommendations of the 2009 Downtown Plan.
- The 2009 Downtown Plan being outdated and in need of updating.
- Issues brought up do not seem to have been vetted and the proposed development should meet zoning requirements.
- Character of the area will be undermined if the project is constructed and the development allowances will be seen as optional.
- The view that the public benefits proposed are more so requirements of new development (LEED Silver, IHO, removal of blighted space, etc.). Site development allowances proposed are significantly higher than the maximum permitted.
- Support of the project and the proposed public benefits, recognizing that Evanston has changed and the zoning should change as well.
- Questions on what the projected population for the City. Projected population is 79,529 residents by 2040 per CMAP.
- Lack of discussion of variances on the Albion project and full vetting of the project public benefits and site development allowances.
- Parking in the area may be exacerbated. The City should conduct its own studies and zoning code and plans should be respected.
Need to know the impact of luxury rental boom on affordable housing.
Project represents gentrification and diversity is needed in Evanston.

Chair Ford closed the public hearing and Mr. Cocagne provided closing statements emphasizing how the proposed building will remove a underutilized sites and fits with several nearby buildings. Mr. Mangum provided clarification on the population projection and the data utilized in the TOD Parking Study regarding vehicle ownership.

The Commission then entered into deliberation.

Commissioner Pigozzi stated that the applicant provided a good presentation and clear documents for the project and that it is a positive to develop the site but that it is unfortunate that the drive through will remain. He also voiced concerns regarding the height.

Commissioner Dubin expressed concerns about the traffic impact. She stated that with the Fountain Square redesign streets will occasionally be closed which could negatively affect retail across the street and in the area.

Commissioner Lewis agreed with an earlier comment regarding the need for change to occur. Dense housing seems appropriate in that area and the height seems to be increased due to the retaining of the university building. He the stated that the allowances requested seem extreme and he was not comfortable approving them.

Commissioner Goddard stated that the scale was too large and dense with too many variances and not enough public benefits.

Commissioner Saul stated that she is not opposed to density or height, however, the scale of development allowances are excessive and not compensated by public benefits.

Commissioner Isaac stated that overall he likes the site and development and he believes density is needed downtown but the height, FAR, number of units are in excess of what is appropriate for the area.

Chair Ford referred to the model and stated that the building at a different site would better fit. He stated that the building heights relative from one zone to the next is the issue since the intention of the Downtown Plan was to have a transitioning height down to the edge which is not done with this site.
The Commission then reviewed the standards provided within sections 6-3-5-10 Special Use Standards, 6-3-6-9 Standards for Planned Developments, and 6-11-1-10 Standards and Guidelines for Planned Developments in the D3 District.

Commissioner Lewis made a motion to recommend approval of the proposed planned development with the conditions as stated within the staff report and the added condition that if the proposed ATM drive-through closes, that space will no longer be permitted to be a drive-through. Commissioner Isaac seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the motion failed with a vote of 0-7.

Commissioner Goddard made a motion to recommend denial of the proposed planned development. Commissioner Saul seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken and the motion was approved, 7-0.

Nays: none

4. PUBLIC COMMENT
There was no public comment

5. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Dubin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Isaac seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved by voice call 7-0.
The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Meagan Jones
Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Community Development Department