

Council tells Block 7 backers: not so fast

Developer will have to address parking demand before adding 225 stalls for Multnomah Athletic Club members.

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Opponents of a Multnomah Athletic Club parking facility to be built in a current residential zone took heart from City Council's first crack at the issue.

The council leveraged a concession from the club and its private development partner that delays a decision and reduces the odds of accommodating the required zone change.

At the urging of council members, the developer's attorney agreed to go through Central City Parking Review as part of the requested zone change and comprehensive plan amendment. The parking review is a substantial hurdle in itself, and coupling it to the zoning/plan request gives council an additional reason to reject the scheme outright.

It certainly wasn't the course attorney Steve Janik, representing developer Mill Creek Residential Trust, wanted.

"This is probably going to push the project out another full year or year and a half," Janik told council after learning the parking review must be completed before taking the next step.

"We're in a vulnerable position," he said. "We had planned to work on the design if we got a comp plan change and zone change."

"Now we don't have that comfort, so we can't really spend the \$2 million or \$3 million on the design of the building until we get to the end of the CCPR process. ... What we're being asked to do—and which we're willing to do—is to risk



A proposed apartment building at Southwest 19th, 20th, Main and Madison streets with underground parking for Multnomah Athletic Club members is on hold as the city insists on a parking management plan to see if the 225 underground parking spaces are needed.

money for the CCPR process.

"We would like to get some indication today—certainly not binding—that we're not just going through an exercise that is going to be ultimately unsuccessful."

But Janik received no such assurances.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz gave every indication that she will oppose the zoning and plan changes.

"I'm finding it difficult to see a parking review that would convince me that commercial parking near light rail in this very congested area would be a good thing," said Fritz. "I don't see that we get all that much more furtherance of the comprehensive plan by changing to a commercial zone, and I'm very reluctant to do zone changes that have multiple conditions attached, which get difficult for our staff to track."

"I'm thinking that residential zoning is probably more appro-

priate for this block."

Commissioner Steve Novick said he didn't know how he would vote but having a completed parking review would be helpful.

Commissioner Nick Fish, the council member most openly sympathetic to the application, nevertheless indicated he is not yet on board.

"This is a tough case because it is without a lot of precedent," said Fish, noting that comprehensive plan amendments should not be granted easily. "I would benefit from the CCPR being completed."

Mayor Charlie Hales said, "The burden of proof is always on the applicant. You have to prove to the Hearings Officer and to us that this is better than what the community agreed upon in a legislative process. That's a very high bar."

"Every now and then for the right reasons in a particular case, we'll make a change," said

Hales, "[but] that is not assured well enough for me today to agree to the comp plan zone change."

The other commissioner, Dan Saltzman, recused himself and is not participating in the vote or deliberations. Given that Fritz has already tipped her hand, the applicants must persuade the other three commissioners to go their way to make this project possible.

"Opponents of the project took it as at least a partial victory."

"We didn't win, but we didn't lose either—and that's kind of a

'win' in itself," said Dale Cardin, a member of Friends of Goose Hollow, an advocacy group formed to fight the project.

"The main result is the City Council wants to see a proven need for more MAC parking," said Cardin, "validated by PBOT (Portland Bureau of Transportation) and with the entire parking issue publicly debated before a Hearings Offi-

cer before finally deciding on the zone change."

"Today's meeting showed us that our concerns are being heard and taken seriously," said Kal Toth, a member of the Goose Hollow Foothills League board and FOGH.

"Friends of Goose Hollow has advocated from the beginning that parking review was necessary before the comprehensive plan amendment and zone change could be approved," said Jennifer Bragar, attorney for FOGH. "The council's deliberations confirmed that position."

Multnomah Athletic Club General Manager Norm Rich said, "We're confident, working with city staff, we'll be able to move forward, and we're excited to move into the next phase."

The council will take up the issue again Thursday, Jan. 8, at 3 p.m. No new testimony will be taken, but council will hear from the parties on a possible compromise or future steps.■

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