

Oakland Development Activities Meeting
December 15, 2020, 6 pm
Hosted by OPDC on Zoom

Project: 255 Atwood St.
Presenter: Jody Schurman, Lab8 Designs

Addition to 255 Atwood St. Existing building currently houses four dwelling units. We are proposing a new addition to rear of building. Four dwelling units in Oakland public realm zoning district is an existing non-conforming use, and thus subject to the procedures of a special exception for any sort of enlargement or enhancement. The enlargement of a non-conforming use is limited to 25% increase in total square footage of building. Existing building is 2,178 square feet. A 544 square foot increase is allowable, we are proposing 522 square foot addition (24% increase). Two-story addition, with 261 square feet per floor.

Two units per floor, four units total. Front units are not under our scope of work, but there will be minor cosmetic improvements done to them. Our work is on the rear-unit additions. Floorplan: open plan living/kitchen area leads into a corridor towards the rear with a bath and three bedrooms off of the corridor. There is a second exit at the end of the corridor that leads to the deck and rear yard (which includes existing parking pads). Second exit is not required by code, but we feel it provides a higher level of safety than partially sprinkling the building. Second floor is bedroom additions, small reconfiguration of living area to make an open floorplan. New exit stairs. Shed roof will tie into existing low-slope roof on building. Emergency escape and rescue buildings, proposing to re-clad entire building with vinyl siding (not including brick portion of front façade).

Q: What is the approval process? Is working happening on this right now?

A: No substantial work is being done. There may be a demo permit of 255, client also purchased 257 but I am not involved. Special exception for enlargement of non-conforming use will require Planning Commission approval (beginning of February) and Zoning Board of Adjustment (early January).

Q: Can you describe the access to parking in rear and if that's changing?

A: That is not changing. There is a breezeway on the site's south side, which gives access to rear parking pad. We are not adding any additional dwelling units, so there are no additional parking requirements that we have to accommodate. There's a certificate of occupancy already on file.

Q: How many bedrooms are being built?

A: Rear units will be 3 bedrooms each. First floor front is studio apartment, second floor front is two-bedroom unit.

Q: How many bedrooms were in the rear units prior to renovation?

A: I don't know the answer, units were in bad shape so it is tough to say. Between 2-3 bedrooms.

Project: 3559 Forbes Avenue

Presenters: Kevin McKeegan (Meyer, Unkovic & Scott LLP), Jay Silverman (Dwell Design Studios), Jessica Leo (CA Ventures)

Project is developing multi-family building with retail on the ground floor at the former Marathon gas station at McKee, Semple, and Forbes. Five separate but adjoining tax parcels were consolidated and approved by Planning Commission last week. Building: 102 feet tall (permitted with LEED bonus permissions). Design has been vetted by City Planning, completed Conceptual Design Advisory Panel, and will be presented to the Planning Commission January 26th, 2021. Project developer is CA Ventures, not Clark Street Holding (as previously called in previous meetings).

Since last presentation in August: met with Port Authority and accommodated BRT station at Forbes & McKee, adjusted building entrance and designed leasing entrance to be visually congruent with glass-backed BRT station, enhanced pedestrian mid-block crossing at back of site, looked at traffic flow through parking structure, changed exterior design, and added more detail at street level.

BRT station is on Forbes Ave, and the building's façade has been moved back in order to provide clear walking path around the station. Building entrance has been adjusted too. Keeping multi-family residential units on McKee with walk-up entrance, and retail space at corner of Semple and Forbes.

Pursuing LEED certification level. Plan to incorporate green roof, pedestrian mid-block pathway, incorporate internal water-saving and energy-saving features.

300 units, 212 parking spaces, 3,000 square feet of retail, 153 long-term bike parking offered in return for parking reduction. Units will be a mixture of studios, one-, two-, and three-bedroom units.

Q: Is the project student housing?

A: Project is multi-family housing, intended to appeal to students and young professionals.

Incorporating three-story walk-ups on McKee to help transition to the residential. Since August, introduced color and material changes on Forbes to break up building's visual. Plan for Uber drop-off spot. Design of flow through deck is intended to discourage need to go into neighborhood.

On materials: exterior skin is primarily fiber cement above street level, street level is masonry with metal and wood accents.

Q: How durable are the fiber cement panels? How long is the life span?

A: Very durable, up to commercial standards. Life span is about 50 years, and longer if it's maintained property. It is designed for high-rise and weather conditions in this region.

Incorporating art into building streetscape (generator enclosure, pedestrian mid-block walkway, garage design). Retail on Forbes and Semple now incorporates neighborhood's suggestion to incorporate garage doors into retail for indoor/outdoor space. Added pedestrian entrance to service and parking area on Semple. Two-story lobby entrance and setback is designed to help with mobility around BRT station. Designing leasing office to have symmetry with BRT, but ultimately BRT design is up to the city.

Q: How high is the overhang?

A: About 10 feet.

Q: How high is the building?

A: 102 feet.

Q: Where are transformers located?

A: Transformers are below ground in a vault, there is a generator enclosure outside but the rest of services are enclosed in building

Q: Which LEED level are you going for?

A: We are committed to achieving basic certification.

Comments: Architecture quality and materials – other projects in the area are not using high-quality materials. We don't want to benchmark against those.

Q: Did you have to go to the Zoning Board of Adjustment for height?

A: Zoning code has provision to encourage buildings to achieve LEED certification. By doing this, you can get bonus for floor area ratio or building height (limited to 20% base zoning height in district (85 ft in Oakland + 20% = 102 ft). You have to provide Zoning Administrator registration with Green Building Council, and have a LEED accredited professional on your project team. Credits are available for meeting certain design requirements. LEED certification is not given until after the building is complete. City code allows up to 3 years after receiving certificate of occupancy. If you don't get the final certification, the city can collect 1% of total construction cost as a penalty. Details can be found in section 915.04 of Zoning code, which allows for this in any non-residential zoning district. Done through Zoning Administrator's office.

Q: What existing bike garages and bike system are you looking at for this project's bike storage?

A: There will be a safe and accessible room for bikes. Bikes will be on a rack system.

Q: Concern that this will exacerbate lack of affordable housing in Oakland by adding market-rate units without providing affordable housing.

A: Project planned as market-rate project. We understand particular affordable housing issues in Pittsburgh. Not every project has to have an affordable component. CA is willing to engage in conversation, but we are not in a position to make any promises.

Q: Family House has questions on impacts on their neighboring property. What are mitigations for noise, lighting, and trash loading that are being proposed?

A: Pedestrian walkway will be buffer between project and Family House property. Trash and loading will take place interior to building. Traffic patterns should not be impacting Family House.

Q: Will the generator exhaust at street level or roof?

A: Generator is on the ground, and will be enclosed.

Q: Why does the 40-foot setback requirement on McKee not apply to this property?

A: 40-foot area is shown on an old neighborhood plan that is ambiguous in how the 40-foot rule applies to this property, or whether this property is even subject to that. Title insurance company and attorneys that handled acquisition of the property said that 40-foot area does not apply to this parcel.

Q: What is OPDC's involvement and will OPDC fight for the easement?

A: OPDC does not set the zoning envelope, that's the city. As for the easement, OPDC will gather information. At this point, we can commit to doing research. We will update our website.

Response: I will send over information from title company and closing attorneys. This is not a city requirement, but a private right of this subdivision plan.

Q: What is the transit shelter design for the BRT station?

A: We have met with Port Authority planners, and they have emphasized the importance and anticipated heavy use for this sight. Their current design is represented here in size, but design is not finalized. We are working closely with them. The bus shelter is in city right of way (sidewalk), so the design is not up to us.

Comment: Port authority is planning on having public meetings on BRT

Q: What is the required setback on Forbes?

A: The minimum front yard setback on Forbes is 0 feet.

Q: Is the garage supergraphic just going to be numbers, or will there be art too?

A: We are using a metal mesh material, and will change the color to make numbers. Currently planned to just be numbers now, but we will consider art.

Comment: There is interest in seeing more than just numbers or building logo on garage – we would like more works of art.

Response: Anything like that will have to be permitted, but I think that's a great point.

Q: Can you give us a unit breakdown?

A: We are a mix of studios (17%), one-bedrooms (17%), two-bedrooms (29%), and three-bedrooms (35%).

Q: What is your attention to water retention?

A: There will be a retention strategy, part of which is the green roof. There will also be an underground tank under parking garage to store additional runoff.

Q: What are the plans for the setback on Forbes and the general feeling of openness?

A: We have provided 10 feet behind the BRT structure to keep good pedestrian flow.

Q: Can you describe the percentage of units accessible for people with disabilities?

A: This building is served by an elevator, so all residential units are adaptable for people with various abilities. A certain percentage will have more adaptability. CA works with ability consultant to spread these units throughout the building so there's no discrimination with location of these types of units.

Q: If most of the units are three-bedroom units, this seems geared towards students?

A: We appeal to students and young professionals. Three-bedroom units are a good way to bring a more affordable rate to students and young professionals in the area.