

**VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD MEETING MINUTES
November 7, 2019**

A meeting of the Village of River Forest Development Review Board was held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 7, 2019 in the Community Room of the River Forest Village Hall, 400 Park Avenue, River Forest, Illinois.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: Members Fishman, Dombrowski, O'Brien, Schubkegel, and Chairman Martin

Absent: Members Crosby and Kilbride

Also Present: Assistant Village Administrator Lisa Scheiner, Assistant Village Administrator

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 20, 2018 DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD MEETING

A MOTION was made by Member Fishman and SECONDED by Member O'Brien to approve the minutes of the March 21, 2019 Development Review Board Meeting.

Ayes: Members Fishman, O'Brien, Schubkegel, and Chairman Martin

Nays: None

Abstain: Member Dombrowski (he did not attend the September meeting)

Motion Passed.

III. PRE-FILING MEETING AND CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR APPLICATION REQUIREMENT WAIVERS: Proposed Planned Development – 1101-1111 Bonnie Brae Place

Chairman Martin explained the purpose of the pre-filing conference for the property at 1101-1111 Bonnie Brae Place. He stated that there is no application on file so there is no recommendation to make but that the Development Review Board may be asked to discuss and vote on a request for the waiver of certain application requirements.

John Schiess, JSA Architects at 7706 Central, River Forest, introduced the proposed multi-family townhome development at 1101-1111 Bonnie Brae Place. He stated the owner and petitioner is Art Gurevich, Bonnie Brae LLC. Mariano Mollo, Avenue One, is their marketing and sales consultant.

Mr. Schiess presented information regarding the conditions of the development site which currently includes a parking lot at the corner of Bonnie Brae and Thomas with a driveway

along Thomas. There is a three-story six-unit apartment building and detached garages on the adjacent lot to the north.

Mr. Schiess presented the proposed site plan, which includes 19 three-level townhomes in four buildings that run perpendicular to Thomas and parallel to Bonnie Brae. Each townhome has a two-car garage underneath. He stated that each townhome is generally 37 feet long by 20 feet wide and approximately 2,000 square feet of living space.

Mr. Schiess pointed out the building arrangement and the two buildings along the eastern elevation with a gap between them to mimic the existing street rhythm. He noted that the garages on the western elevation are accessible from the alley. He noted how guests would access the units and identified the location of two guest parking spaces on the northwest corner of the site as well as two guest spaces along the east elevation. He noted that the curb cut along Thomas would be moved west.

Mr. Schiess stated that the townhomes are each three levels with a bedroom on the lower level that could be used as a guest room or office since they come with a full bathroom in the basement. The garage space is in the back of each townhome. The second floor open floor plan includes a kitchen, dining room, great room, bathroom, and cantilevered balcony. The third floor plan includes two bedrooms and two bathrooms. Each unit has a top floor with access to a roof deck. All the decks face the back and would be hidden from view from someone walking down the sidewalk along Bonnie Brae. He noted the washer/dryer is on the third floor for each unit.

Mr. Schiess displayed the west elevation demonstrating that the gray elements are cast stone building material and they are proposing the use of two colors of masonry brick. He pointed to areas where bay elements will protrude from the building facade. He then displayed the south elevation showing the roof access and noted that the roof decks are visible from the street, but only from a distance. He noted the location of the cantilevered balconies, driveway, and undulating courtyard.

Mr. Schiess displayed a preliminary landscape plan and noted that they plan to mimic the rhythm of the street and plant parkway trees in addition to the existing trees. They have recommended plant species but they are open to the suggestions from the Village.

Mr. Schiess stated that the lot area for the development site is 27,681 square feet. They are proposing 19 townhomes in four buildings. The parking for the townhomes is two spaces per unit for a total of 38 spaces plus four guest parking spaces.

Mr. Schiess presented the zoning analysis which indicates the zoning relief that would be needed for this project. He stated that permitted lot coverage is 70% and they are requesting 75% lot coverage. He stated that the required front yard setback is 20 feet and they are requesting a 15-foot setback. The required side yard/south setback is 25 feet and they are requesting a 5-foot setback. The required rear yard setback is 27 feet 8 inches and they are requesting a 2-foot setback.

Mr. Schiess noted that the property previously had an approved planned development that has expired with certain site development allowances. He said compared to that development, the building height that is now proposed is lower. The petitioner is seeking the Development Review Board's feedback on what they're proposing tonight.

Mr. Schiess said the petitioner is requesting only one waiver from the planned development requirements, which is a professional traffic study.

Art Gurevich, manager of Bonnie Brae Construction, LLC, petitioner, and also the general contractor for the project stated that the reason for their request is because the traffic pattern for this proposed development is less intensive than what was proposed in the previously approved project for which a traffic study was conducted. He stated that the impact of the project is de minimis and they are requesting a waiver to have to conduct a new traffic study. Mr. Schiess further explained the traffic study that was conducted for the previously approved planned development.

Mr. Schiess stated that a lack of market support for the previously approved condominium project resulted in it not being built. Based on the analysis conducted by Mr. Mollo of Avenue One, the petitioner believes there is market demand for this project. Mr. Schiess also discussed the financing requirements for the previously approved condominium project compared to the financing and construction phasing requirements for a townhome development that create advantages for a townhome development.

Mr. Schiess stated that there are compensating benefits for this proposed planned development including sustainable development, smart growth, supportive housing types specific for River Forest, and that this type development will support property values.

Member Fishman asked why the petitioner believes a townhome project is more marketable than a condominium project as well their target buyers. Mariano Mollo, Avenue One, stated that they are finding that their target buyers have roots in River Forest or in surrounding areas that are looking to downsize but still entertain family. They have empty nesters looking for townhome products as well as young couples and professionals. They're also looking for new construction and low maintenance, avoiding high homeowners' association fees. The previous sale price of the condominium project of \$600,000 to \$800,000 per unit lacks a market. He noted that the price point of the townhomes will be marketed from \$599,000 to \$615,000, which in his experience is a sweet spot for buyers.

Member Fishman stated that she is not sure that empty nesters would be drawn to multiple levels. She asked if this would be sold to families starting out with more children impacting school system. Mr. Mollo replied that their buyer would likely be couples planning on having a family but once they start their family they start moving on to single family homes. He noted that the townhomes are starter homes.

Chairman Martin stated that, when this was last before the Development Review Board, the petitioner had a similar presentation from the sales staff at that time that their product was what the Village wanted and needed. They had done studies and focus groups and people

were interested in their product. Two years later the petitioner is presented a different economic analysis and they need to be prepared to defend it. The Development Review Board has to make sure the project will succeed and they will not waste their time like they did a few years ago by getting a project approved that they could not build. The petitioner will have to convince him it is economically justified.

Mr. Gurevich stated that he still believes there is a buyer for the previous project, however, before they sold it they needed to build it and finance their very expensive project without pre-sales. The average age of the buyer for that project was around 70 and those buyers were not willing to make a four to five commitment for the project. The townhomes are different because there are no presale requirements making it easier to finance, sell, market and build in a shorter timeframe. He still believes the previous project would work but the financial commitment was beyond what anyone would make.

Member Dombrowski noted that there is a townhome project on Madison with units that have not been sold and have been listed for two years. He asked how this development is different and why that project still has unsold townhomes. Mr. Mollo stated that his company worked on the townhome project across the street that sold out in a year's time. The townhomes on Madison Street were built with an outdated design that doesn't appeal to buyers. There are more than four townhomes left in that development. He noted success he has had with another project across the street.

Chairman Martin stated that they will have to explain what the difference is between the two types of townhomes. Mr. Mollo stated that it has a lot to do with the elevations, there is nothing different about any of the elevations, and it's a prairie style. Today's buyers are looking for large windows and units that don't look identical to each other.

Mr. Schiess discussed the history of the transition from the previous project to the current project. Mr. Mollo's team came in to analyze the previous development and determined that it could not be salvaged. The team advised the petitioner what needed to be done to develop a marketable product. Mr. Schiess acknowledged that he was a part of the previous development team as well, but not as the architect.

Chairman Martin asked if there's anything else they want to present at this point. Hearing none he invited members of the public to speak. He stated that this is a helpful meeting and that there is no concrete proposal for the Development Review Board to vote on.

Edmond Burke, 1809 Bonnie Brae Place, stated that he lives in Valencia House. He noted that traffic is tight on Bonnie Brae and discussed his wife's driving behavior to avoid this area. He stated that Dominican University runs a shuttle six times per day six days per week. These shuttles are wide vehicles and it's hard for cars to come down the block north/south, plus there are college students and Grace Lutheran students in the area. He and others have concerns about traffic. He noted that it always busy on Augusta and Division. There are older residents in the Valencia building who still drive. His principal concern is the traffic impact of the proposed development.

Collen Dunnigan, 1009 Bonnie Brae, asked whether parking is located underground or at grade. Mr. Schiess replied that it is at grade and drivers will pull in off the entrance.

Ms. Dunnigan asked where HVAC units will be located for each unit and whether they would be inside or outside. Mr. Schiess stated that these units are attached single family homes so all the HVAC units, plumbing systems, water heaters, etc. are individual and all that is shared is a wall and some of the driveways.

Ms. Dunnigan stated that each unit will have 3.5 baths and asked whether they would access sewer on Bonnie Brae or Harlem and whether the sewers would be adequate for the development. Mr. Schiess replied that the civil engineering team will look at that and submit their calculations to the Village. The Village will review that data and determine the impact of the development.

Ms. Dunnigan asked whether other residents hop on to other utilities such as telecommunications. There was a brief discussion regarding telecommunication and electric utilities. Mr. Schiess stated that they have to work with the utilities.

Ms. Scheiner explained the Village's role in examining the impact of the proposed development on Village services, including public utilities such as water and sewer infrastructure.

Chairman Martin explained the role in the Development Review Board in examining appearance, architecture, safety, and details of the application that will be provided.

Ms. Dunnigan asked if there would be three floors of stairs and whether any of the units would have elevators. Mr. Schiess confirmed the presence of stairs and stated that no elevators will be provided. Ms. Dunnigan asked how people will move in and how older residents will handle those stairs. Mr. Schiess replied that this townhome prototype is not new to the area. He stated that there are buyers his age that are mobile and find these units desirable. He stated that young buyers will use these units with one child who is not yet in school and will move to a single family home once the second child comes. The maintenance of these units are low and the association will take care of snow removal and landscaping, which also makes the units desirable.

Chairman Martin stated that the developer has to show the market viability and the applicant will have to present information that these units can be sold.

Ms. Dunnigan asked about presale requirements and how many units would be rented. Chairman Martin replied that they have to give the Development Review Board a letter from a bank stating presale requirements in order to obtain financing. Mr. Schiess stated that the letter they submitted indicates that there are no presale requirements.

Gene Sullivan, 1009 Bonnie Brae, stated the he and his wife have lived there for 10 years. There is limited parking on Bonnie Brae. The parking lot at the school only allows students to park there. He's concerned that there is insufficient guest parking. He's very interested in

the traffic concerns and traffic impact of the development particularly given the narrow road and proximity to other schools and the new assisted living facility. He discussed traffic patterns in the area and that he doesn't think the previous traffic study is a valid way to examine this.

Chairman Martin stated that the Zoning Ordinance dictates the number of parking spaces that are required per unit and how the developer may or may not need relief from those requirements. He stated that they requested that the traffic study requirement be waived but the Development Review Board has not ruled on that yet.

Mr. Sullivan asked when the Zoning Ordinance was written and whether it is appropriate for today. Chairman Martin stated that since the Zoning Ordinance was adopted it has been modified several times and the Development Review Board is bound by those requirements. If a traffic study is required, then that it will deal with traffic flow, parking, turning maneuvers and other matters.

Ms. Scheiner replied that the last time the multi-family parking requirements were modified was 1995. Anecdotally, the Village hears from developers that the Zoning Ordinance requires more parking than what is needed, meaning the code is too restrictive and requires too much parking. Ms. Scheiner stated that she is not an expert and cannot say whether that is true or not. For a three-bedroom unit, developers are required to provide 2.5 spaces per unit plus guest parking. The petitioner is requesting something less than what the Zoning Ordinance requires and the Development Review Board will have to take that into consideration when they review the formal application.

Mary Sullivan, 1009 Bonnie Brae, stated she agrees with the statements of the previous speaker.

Member Dombrowski asked whether the apartment building and garage would be demolished. Mr. Schiess confirmed that they would and noted that the petitioner owns both properties.

Mr. Schiess concluded his comments.

Chairman Martin stated that since this is a pre-filing conference the Development Review Board is not recommending anything to the Village Board of Trustees. If anyone on the Development Review Board wishes to ask the petitioner to address anything now is the time to give them suggestions.

Member O'Brien stated that there are 29 townhome units on Madison with similar floorplans and approximately 16 have sold. She said she is anxious that 19 of the same thing could be difficult. With three-story living and all stairs, some people are looking for ranch style and master bedrooms on the first floor. A revised floor plan may result in fewer units, but she believes 19 identical units is a tough sale. Member Fishman asked about the sale price of the units along Madison Street. Member O'Brien replied that the range is \$479,000 to \$549,000.

Chairman Martin summarized for the petitioner that they have heard that they will be questioned about parking, pedestrian safety, appearance, and feasibility of the project. The petitioner is required to bring in material samples.

Chairman Martin stated that the petition has presented one request to waive the traffic study requirement. Member O'Brien stated that she does not think the Development Review Board can waive it and noted other projects in the area including the new Concordia dormitory. Member Dombrowski noted that the Fenwick field may have been under construction at the time and that there is more activity now than three years ago. Chairman Martin noted that three years ago there wasn't the project at Chicago and Harlem and that there are a number of different conditions. He does not favor using a study from one application in another application.

Chairman Martin asked the petitioner whether they will withdraw the request or if a Development Review Board vote is requested. Mr. Gurevich replied that, in their previous request/proposal there were 49 to 50 parking spaces and it was a more intensive use. That study said there is no significant traffic impact as a result of that proposed development. The new proposed project is less intense. Mr. Schiess stated on behalf of the petitioner that the request for a waiver of the traffic study has been withdrawn.

Chairman Martin stated that there is nothing more for the Development Review Board to do now. When the application is complete then a public hearing will be scheduled.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

V. ADJOURNMENT


A MOTION was made by Member Fishman and SECONDED by Member Dombrowski to adjourn the meeting of the Development Review Board at 8:40 p.m.

Ayes: Members Fishman, Dombrowski, O'Brien, Schubkegel, and Chairman Martin


Nays: None

Motion Passed.


Respectfully Submitted:



Lisa Scheiner Secretary



Frank R. Martin
Chairman, Development Review Board



Date