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CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

TO: Planning Board and Board of Aldermen Land Use Committee
FROM: George Proakis, Director of Planning
RE: Powderhouse School Zoning
DATE: June 2, 2016

The item before you tonight is a zoning amendment for the Powderhouse School area. The proposal will permit the disposition and reuse of the Powderhouse School, after a community process that has been going on since 2010.

History

The Powderhosue School was closed down in 2004. After that time, there were a number of discussions about possible uses for the building, including the review of municipal facilities. Between 2004 and 2010, these re-use options were reviewed and rejected, leaving the building as a surplus city asset.

In 2010, the Planning Division engaged in a community process to create a vision for future use of the school site. When seeking out an advisory committee to lead this process, over 75 residents volunteered for the committee. With significant neighborhood interest, the decision was made to include the entire community in the committee and move forward with a public outreach process for the reuse of the school.

At the conclusion of this process, the Planning Division developed a request for proposals to seek out a developer partner that would redevelop the school site. As a part of the RFP, the developer would be required to meet community expectations about the redevelopment of the site, and provide for at least 40% of the total site as public open space.

The first set of RFP responses included proposals from six development teams. The Mayor selected an advisory committee including residents from the community, the Ward's alderman and school committee member, two at-large aldermen a local business owner and staff from OSPCD. The committee interviewed the applicants and chose the Tufts University team as the preferred development partner. After leading a community design process, Tufts and the City were unable to come to terms on a Land Dispositon Agreement, and the RFP process began again.

The RFP was edited, based upon community feedback, and the edited RFP was issued in 2015. This time, the advisory committee chose the MarKa team, and the Mayor accepted their recommendation. The MarKa team engaged the community in a series of design meetings and developed the proposed project to re-use the school. The zoning and land disposition agreement have been developed for the purpose of implementing the vision that MarKa and the community have developed for the school.

The Development Plan

The MarKa proposal will re-use the core structure of the building. It will permit the lower level to be used for vehicle and bicycle parking. On the levels above, the project will include a retail space, a creative shared maker space, and up to 48 residential units. These units will include market rate and affordable units. Some will be sold as condominiums and the rest will be apartments. The residential condominiums will be sold to members of a group called the Community Living Project, a group of Somerville residents that have been seeking to develop a cooperative living arrangement in Somerville.

The Proposed Zoning

The proposed zoning creates a new Section 6.7 that will be a new district over the Powderhouse School site. The open space portion of the school site is moved into the open space district. To balance out the rest of the map, the back half of the Tufts Administration Building is placed in the RC district.

The new zoning district requires the following provisions:

- All projects must to undergo Site Development Plan approval under Section 5.4 of the zoning ordinance.
- Development must include a minimum of 10,000 square feet of commercial use, and the commercial use must occupy 100 linear feet along Broadway.
- A list of permitted uses is provided, including a mix of compatible residential and commercial uses
- Dimensions are set in Table 6.7.5 to match the proposed MarKa project
- A minimum of 16% of units must be provided as affordable housing and must be provided on-site.
- Parking regulations are set in Section 6.7.7, requiring 48 automobile spaces and 100 bicycle spaces on-site.
- Development is required to locate mechanical, storage and dumpsters in the building.

Recommendation

The Planning Division recommends approval of this zoning, as it will work together with the Land Disposition Agreement to achieve the community goals for the redevelopment of the school and the creation of the adjacent parkland.