

April 13, 2021

**To:** Mayor and Members of City Council

**From:** Paula Boggs Muething, City Manager

*PBM for PBM*

202101440

**Subject:** Ordinance – Zone Change for the Cincinnati Zoo City Barn

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Transmitted is an Ordinance captioned:

AMENDING the official zoning map of the City of Cincinnati to rezone certain real property commonly known as 3502-3526 Vine Street in the Avondale neighborhood from the RMX, “Residential Mixed,” zoning district to the PR, “Park and Recreation,” zoning district to establish one consistent zoning district for the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden’s properties.

Summary

The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden (CZBG) is currently almost entirely zoned Park and Recreation (PR). The requested changes in zoning are primarily a clean-up exercise as the property is already owned and maintained by the CZBG, which desires to have a consistent zoning district for their properties. A similar measure was done in 2015. The applicant has requested three zone changes as three separate Ordinances for each area. These requests have been referred to as “City Barn,” “Facilities,” and “Parking Lot” in their applications. This proposed zone change is related to Council item 202101199, which previously incorporated this area. Each area is now a separate ordinance at the request of the Zoo.

The request (“City Barn”) is to rezone 2.575 acres along the east side of Vine Street between Tower Avenue and Beldare Avenue from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR). This site contains the City Barn building, a community garden, and several open spaces that are planned to be turned into pocket parks for the neighborhood.

The zone change is consistent with both *Plan Cincinnati* (2012) and the *Avondale Quality of Life Plan* (2020) and the parking lot will be consistent with the existing surrounding built environment and adjacent zoning districts. The City Planning Commission voted to approve the zone change at their March 19, 2021 meeting.

The Administration recommends Approval of this Ordinance.

cc: Katherine Keough-Jurs, AICP, Director  
Department of City Planning

April 13, 2021



Cincinnati City Council  
Council Chambers, City Hall  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Dear Members of Council:

We are transmitting herewith an Ordinance captioned as follows:

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The City Planning Commission voted to approve the zone change at their March 19, 2021 meeting.

Motion to Approve: Mr. Samad

Ayes: Mr. Juech  
Mr. Smitherman  
Ms. McKinney  
Mr. Eby  
Mr. Stallworth  
Ms. Sesler  
Mr. Samad

Seconded: Ms. Sesler

THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Keough-Jurs".

Katherine Keough-Jurs, AICP, Director  
Department of City Planning

KKJ: jmw

Encl.: Staff Report, Ordinance

Honorable City Planning Commission  
Cincinnati, Ohio

March 19, 2021

**SUBJECT:** A report and recommendation on proposed zone changes from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR) along Erkenbrecher Avenue and Euclid Avenue in Corryville, from Residential Mixed (RMX) and Single-Family (SF-4) to Park and Recreation (PR) at 3429-3447 Vine Street and 3412-3416 Marmet Avenue in Avondale, and from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR) at 3502 to 3526 Vine Street in Avondale.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

**Location:** East of Vine Street between Tower Street and Beldare Avenue, east and west of Vine Street just north of the existing zoo main parking lot entrance, and the southeast corner of Vine Street and Erkenbrecher Avenue.  
**Petitioner:** Jeff Koehn, IBI Group (representing the Cincinnati Zoo)  
**Petitioner's Address:** 23 Triangle Park Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio 45246

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Provided in addition to this report are the following attachments:

- Exhibit A – Location Map
- Exhibit B – Zone Change Applications, Legal Descriptions, and Plats
- Exhibit C – Preliminary Site Plan for the expanded parking lot
- Exhibit D – Coordinated Site Review Letters
- Exhibit E – Letters of support from Avondale and Corryville Community Councils

**BACKGROUND:**

The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden (CZBG) is currently almost entirely zoned Park and Recreation (PR). The requested changes in zoning are primarily a clean-up exercise as the property is already owned and maintained by the CZBG, which desires to have a consistent zoning district for their properties. A similar measure was done in 2015 for the existing parking lot at the southeast corner of Vine Street and Erkenbrecher Avenue and for the remainder of the Dury Avenue parking lot, which was already being used as a parking lot.

There are three requested zone changes:

1. The first is to rezone 2.575 acres along the east side of Vine Street between Tower Avenue and Beldare Avenue from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR). This site contains the City Barn building, a community garden, and several open spaces that are planned to be turned into pocket parks for the neighborhood. It also contains an apartment building that is being converted on the inside for long-term storage and for seasonal decorations.
2. The second is to rezone 2.215 acres on both the east and west side of Vine Street, just north of the existing main parking lot entrance and pedestrian bridge over Vine Street from Residential Mixed (RMX) and Single-Family (SF-4) to Park and Recreation (PR). The eastern portion contains existing facilities and offices adjacent to the main zoo and will remain unchanged. The western portion contains open space, including several mature trees, and a few houses maintained by the CZBG. There are no current plans to change this area, but there could be an approximately 40 space parking lot or a new entrance to the main parking lot to help with traffic sight-distance around the curve on Vine Street for cars turning left into the parking lot. Both options would be discussed with existing residents along Marmet Avenue prior to construction.

3. The third is to rezone 5.022 acres at the southeast corner of Vine Street and Erkenbrecher Avenue from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR). The purpose of this is to create and expand the parking lot from 433 spaces to slightly over 700 spaces with solar panels, south of Erkenbrecher Avenue, west of Euclid Avenue, north of E. Shields Street, and east of Vine Street. The parking lot plans include extending Euclid Avenue to Erkenbrecher Avenue with a new traffic signal, adding a right hand turn lane on eastbound Erkenbrecher Avenue to Euclid Avenue and Erkenbrecher Avenue, and adding a right hand turn lane on E. Shields Street to Vine Street. This requested zone change also includes several houses along Erkenbrecher Avenue, which are to remain unchanged at this time.

**ADJACENT LAND USE AND ZONING:**

For the first zone change containing the City Barn site, the existing zoning and land use surrounding the subject properties are as follows:

- North: Single-Family (SF-4) – Vacant land and single-family homes
- East: Residential Mixed (RMX) – Single and two-family homes
- South: Residential Mixed (RMX) – Single and two-family homes
- West: Single-Family (SF-20) – Single-family homes

For the second zone change containing the facilities site, the existing zoning and land use surrounding the subject properties are as follows:

- North: Residential Mixed (RMX) – Single and two-family homes
- East: Park and Recreation (PR) – CZBG
- South: Park and Recreation (PR) – CZBG main parking lot
- West: Single-Family (SF-4) – Single-family homes

For the third zone change containing the proposed parking lot expansion, the existing zoning and land use surrounding the subject properties are as follows:

- North: Residential Mixed (RMX) – Single and two-family homes
- East: Park and Recreation (PR) – CZBG
- South: Institutional Residential (IR) – Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Hospital
- West: Park and Recreation (PR) – CZBG main parking lot

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

City Planning Staff held a virtual public staff conference on February 25, 2021. Notice was sent to all property owners within 400 feet, and to the Avondale Community Council, Corryville Community Council, and Clifton Town Meeting as Clifton is within 400 feet of the proposed zone change. There were 23 people in attendance. After a brief presentation by the CZBG representatives concerning the changes in zoning, the conversation focused primarily on the future plans of the CZBG as they own several additional properties in the area.

There were initially concerns about the CZBG using eminent domain to acquire properties around them, but representatives from the CZBG stated that all purchases of additional land were done transparently by the CZBG with the existing property owner and that eminent domain cannot be used for this purpose.

There were questions about the future of the City Barn site, including an apartment building next to the City Barn facility. The CZBG representatives stated that the apartment building is being converted to storage but will still look like an apartment building, and that other parts of this property were planned to include additional parks for the neighborhood. There were also several questions and concerns from residents living on Marmet Avenue in regard to the CZBG's future plans for a potential parking lot or new entrance just north of the existing entrance, as there are mature trees and vegetation that buffer these properties from Vine Street and the CZBG parking lot. Representatives from the CZBG stated that there are required buffering standards, and that they would work with those property owners to ensure they would not be staring at car headlights from their home. They also restated that there are no plans to construct a parking lot or new entrance at this time but wanted to share those plans to be transparent with their neighbors.

There were also questions related to residents living along E. Shields Street and Louis Avenue, as the additional parking lot would potentially add to traffic on their streets, and how it was difficult for them to leave their neighborhood, especially if Louis Avenue west of Euclid Avenue was closed to through traffic. The CZBG representatives stated that improvements would be made with the signal at the extended Euclid Avenue and Erkenbrecher Avenue, along with a new right turn lane on E. Shields street to go north on Vine Street. It was also asked if the new traffic lights would be "no turn on red" similar to several other traffic lights in the area. They are currently proposed to allow right turns on red. That resident followed up by asking if the traffic lights would blink yellow and red at off-peak traffic hours, which is being discussed. Residential permit parking in this area was also briefly discussed.

At the end of the public staff conference, Mark Fisher of the CZBG asked staff to send everyone who signed up for the meeting his email address if they had any additional concerns about the proposed zone changes, or any other CZBG-related matter.

#### **ANALYSIS:**

The CZBG has been open and transparent throughout this process, including using their name when purchasing properties and being approachable to working with surrounding residents and their concerns outside of the City process. The change in zoning will consolidate the CZBG properties into one consistent zoning district. The single PR zone designation will allow for easier building permit reviews for both the City and the CZBG.

The expansion of the parking lot east of Vine Street, south of Louis Street, and north of E. Shields Street towards Euclid Avenue will add additional parking spaces to slightly over 700 that should help alleviate the on-street parking congestion currently affecting the residents within the vicinity of the CZBG. The new expanded parking lot, bridge, and improvements to the surrounding streets will hopefully make visiting the CZBG a safer experience for patrons who will no longer have to cross a busy street to enter the premises.

The easement for the bridge, along with the proposed dedications of expanded right-of-way and the vacation of Louis Avenue west of Euclid Avenue will be reviewed by the City Planning Commission at a future meeting.

#### **COORDINATED SITE REVIEW:**

The proposed zone changes were initially reviewed by the Coordinated Site Review team as project CPRE200007 as a Preliminary Design Review when the plans were for a parking garage instead of the proposed parking lot. No objections were raised over the zone change, but additional requirements needed to be met before permits could be obtained, such as vacating Louis Avenue west of Euclid Avenue, dedication plats for roadway improvements and an aerial easement for a new bridge over Erkenbrecher Avenue. Due to the CZBG's decreased revenues due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the project was submitted again as CPRE210010 for a Development Design Review for a surface parking lot instead of a garage. Once again, no objections were raised, with the same requirements to obtain permits as before. Both letters are attached as Exhibit D.

**CONSISTENCY WITH PLANS:**

*Plan Cincinnati (2012)*

The proposed zone change is consistent with the Compete Initiative Area of *Plan Cincinnati (2012)*, and the Goal to “target investment to geographic areas where there is already economic activity” (page 141). It is also consistent with the Sustain Initiative Area Goal to “create a healthy environment and reduce energy consumption” (page 182). The new parking lot and pedestrian entrance is a significant investment in the CZBG property and the addition of solar panels in the new parking lot will help them generate clean, renewable electricity.

*Avondale Quality of Life Plan (2020)*

The proposed zone change is also consistent with the *Avondale Quality of Life Plan (2020)*. The CZBG is listed as a partner to “help implement safety recommendations” (page 31). The proposed pedestrian bridge over Erkenbrecher Avenue will provide a safe way for patrons to get to the Zoo without crossing a busy intersection. It is also consistent with Strategy 8.E – “Resident Groups/ Block Clubs explore pilot pocket park network in Avondale for future expansion” (page 79). The proposed additional pocket parks along Vine Street between Tower Street and Beldare Avenue meet this goal, and the CZBG has been listed as a primary partner.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

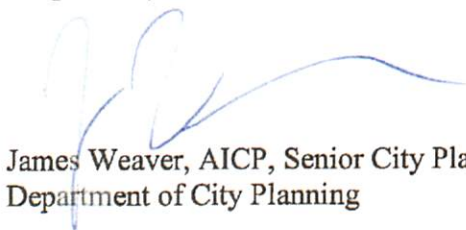
The proposed zone changes are appropriate as they are for property the CZBG already owns. Most of the properties already function as uses consistent with the PR zoning and besides the parking lot, are not proposed for any substantial changes to the built environment. The expansion of the Vine Street, Louis Avenue, E. Shields Street parking area towards Euclid Avenue will assist in alleviating the on-street parking congestion by adding additional parking spaces. The CZBG is making a meaningful effort to address the concerns of surrounding property owners and has been open and transparent regarding potential future plans in this area.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The staff of the Department of City Planning recommends that City Planning Commission take the following action:

**APPROVE** the proposed zone changes from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR) along Erkenbrecher Avenue and Euclid Avenue in Corryville, from Residential Mixed (RMX) and Single-Family (SF-4) to Park and Recreation (PR) at 3429-3447 Vine Street and 3412-3416 Marmet Avenue in Avondale, and from Residential Mixed (RMX) to Park and Recreation (PR) at 3502 to 3526 Vine Street in Avondale.

Respectfully submitted:



James Weaver, AICP, Senior City Planner  
Department of City Planning

Approved:



Katherine Keough-Jurs, AICP, Director  
Department of City Planning