

SUBJECT: A report and recommendation on a proposed zone change from RMX (Residential Mixed) to RM-0.7 (Residential Multi-family) at 548 and 588 Blair Avenue in Avondale.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Location: 548 and 588 Blair Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45229 (Exhibit A)

Petitioner: Kingsley + Company
30 West Third Street, Floor 4
Cincinnati, OH 45202

EXHIBITS:

Provided in addition to this report are the following exhibits:

- Exhibit A Location Map
- Exhibit B Zone Change Application
- Exhibit C Zone Change Survey
- Exhibit D Legal Description
- Exhibit E Site Plan, Landscape Plan, and Renderings
- Exhibit F Coordinated Site Review Letter
- Exhibit G Letter from Avondale Community Council

BACKGROUND:

The petitioner, Kingsley + Company, requests a zone change at 548 and 588 Blair Avenue in Avondale from RMX (Residential Mixed) to RM-0.7 (Residential Multi-family) to permit the construction of a four-story, multi-family residential building with 44 units. The subject property is 1.291 acres and located just west of the intersection of Reading Road and Blair Avenue. The area is characterized by a mix of single-family and multi-family housing.

The subject property is currently zoned RMX (Residential Mixed). The RMX zone is intended to create, maintain, and enhance areas of the city that have a mix of lot sizes and house types at moderate intensities (one to three dwelling units). Existing multi-family buildings of four or more units are acknowledged but new construction is not permitted. This zone permits heights up to 35 feet or approximately three stories.

The proposed zone is RM-0.7 (Residential Multi-family). This zoning subdistrict is the most intense residential district and it will normally consist of tall multi-family or condominium structures. The character is intended to be urban and should be used where high intensity residential is needed to provide a residential base for important commercial areas. This zone does not have a maximum height for multi-family buildings and therefore would permit the proposed four-story, multi-family building.

ADJACENT LAND USE AND ZONING:

The subject properties are currently zoned RMX (Residential Mixed) as shown on the attached map (Exhibit A). The zoning and land uses surrounding the subject properties are as follows:

North:

Zoning: Residential Multi-family (RM-0.7)
Existing Use: Multi-family residential

East:

Zoning: Residential Multi-family (RM-0.7)
Existing Use: Vacant (to be multi-family residential for Blair Lofts Phase I)

South:

Zoning: Residential Mixed (RMX)
Existing Use: Single-family and multi-family residential

West:

Zoning: Residential Mixed (RMX)
Existing Use: Single-family and multi-family residential

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:

The proposed development is the second phase in the Blair Lofts project. Blair Lofts Phase I is located adjacent to the subject property to the east at the intersection of Reading Road and Blair Avenue. Blair Lofts Phase I consists of a four-story, multi-family building with 64 affordable units at 30-60% AMI and a parking lot. It received Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) in May 2020. Blair Lofts Phase I is located within the RM-0.7 zoning district which is the proposed zoning district for the subject property.

Blair Lofts Phase II is designed to complement the first phase of the project. The proposed development would consist of a four-story, multi-family building with 44 units and a parking lot with 65 spaces (Exhibit E). The multi-family building is situated to have a minimal setback along Blair Avenue. Vehicles would enter the parking lot at the rear of the lot behind the building by a driveway on the far west of the site. 6,155 square feet of the site will remain as open space and will be landscaped with a variety of non-invasive, native, drought tolerant, and adaptive plant and tree species.

The petitioner plans to apply for LIHTC in February 2021. The affordability standards will be similar to Blair Lofts Phase I. The units will be reserved for residents making 30-60% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

Under the current zoning, the desired four-story height and multi-family building would not be permitted. RM-0.7 is being requested in order to permit the development at its proposed density and height. If the zone change is approved, all new construction will have to conform to the guidelines set forth in the Cincinnati Municipal Zoning Code in a RM-0.7 zone.

ECONOMIC INCLUSION:

The team working on the proposed development is a partnership between the Avondale Development Corporation, Kingsley + Company, a certified MBE, and Gorsuch/Fairfield Home, a certified WBE. The petitioner has an aspirational small business inclusion standard of 30%.

COORDINATED SITE REVIEW:

The petitioner submitted their proposed project for Coordinated Site Review as a Preliminary Design

Review in September 2020. The need for a zone change was identified during this process and the Department of City Planning suggested RM-0.7 as an appropriate zoning district for the proposed development.

Other City departments provided feedback and requirements to fulfill prior to permitting. The petitioner will need to work with the Fire Department to confirm adequate access for fire equipment and fire hydrant flows. They will also need to coordinate with Greater Cincinnati Water Works on installing a new water main. These requirements do not impact the zone change itself. All departmental comments can be seen in the feedback letter (Exhibit F).

PUBLIC COMMENT:

The Department of City Planning held a virtual public staff conference on this proposed zone change on December 17, 2020. Notices were sent to property owners within a 400-foot radius of the subject properties and the Avondale Community Council. There were nine members of the petitioner's team present including their project partners, the Avondale Development Corporation and Fairfield Homes, in addition to five community members. The community members consisted of nearby property owners and representatives from the Avondale Community Council. The Zoning Administrator and City staff from the Department of Community and Economic Development were also in attendance.

The representatives from the Avondale Community Council shared their support for the project, noting the need for affordable housing in the neighborhood and explaining the petitioner's engagement with the community starting in 2015. A nearby property owner expressed concerns about the proposed development, specifically the scale of the development and its effect on parking, traffic circulation, and nearby properties. The property owner inquired about if the building could be setback further from Blair Avenue. The petitioner explained that the building is situated in order to maximize the number of units; additionally, all parking is proposed to be located on the subject property. The petitioner's team also explained that they would be working with City departments to ensure that all requirements were met prior to permitting and that they would be open to working with the property owner and the Department of Transportation and Engineering on addressing any impact to Blair Avenue.

All property owners within a 400-foot radius of the subject properties and the Avondale Community Council were notified of the City Planning Commission meeting on January 15, 2021, in addition to staff conference attendees. The Avondale Community Council submitted a letter of support for the proposed zone change (Exhibit G). Staff has not received any additional correspondence on the proposed zone change as of January 6, 2021.

The petitioner worked with their partner, the Avondale Development Corporation, on community engagement efforts for Blair Lofts Phase I and will work with them on engagement efforts for Phase II as well. The Avondale Development Corporation has used social media and a webpage on their website to share information about the Blair Lofts project and to solicit questions and comments. The Avondale Development Corporation plans to host quarterly meetings to address the Blair Lofts development, both for Phase I and II, to engage the community throughout the development process.

CONSISTENCY WITH PLANS:

Plan Cincinnati (2012)

The proposed zone change is consistent with the Live Initiative Area of *Plan Cincinnati*, specifically the

Goal to, “Provide a full spectrum of housing options, and improve housing quality and affordability” (p. 164) and the Strategy to “Offer housing options of varied sizes and types for residents at all stages of life” (p. 169). This zone change would permit a four-story, multi-family building with 44 units of affordable housing. Additionally, the proposed zone change is consistent with the Geographic Principle in *Plan Cincinnati* to “Focus revitalization on existing centers of activity” (p. 86). The subject property is located within the walkable 0.25-mile radius of Avondale’s two Neighborhood Business Districts.

Avondale QOL: Avondale’s Quality of Life Movement (2020)

The proposed zone change is consistent with the *Avondale QOL: Avondale’s Quality of Life Movement*, the neighborhood plan for the area. It is specifically consistent with the Goal in the Improving Housing section to “Revitalize Avondale with a diverse quality housing stock which meets the needs of existing seniors, owners and renters and attracts new resident” (p. 86). It is also consistent with the Future Land Use Map which identifies Blair Avenue for residential land use and mixed-use at the Reading Road intersection. The proposed zone change would permit a multi-family building, a residential use, that would support the mixed-use nature of the corridor along Reading Road.

ANALYSIS:

The current RMX zone does not permit any new multi-family buildings with four or more units. The requested zone change to RM-0.7 would allow the petitioner to build the proposed four-story, multi-family building with 44 units of affordable housing. The proposed zone change would extend the existing RM-0.7 zoning district, located north and east of the subject property. Reading Road is a major commercial corridor in the neighborhood. Concentrating residential density near the Reading Road and Blair Avenue intersection will support the corridor and the two Neighborhood Business Districts, located within 0.25 miles of the subject property.

The proposed zoning district would permit multi-family housing in a neighborhood that has identified the need for more housing in its neighborhood plan, the *Avondale QOL: Avondale’s Quality of Life Movement* (2020). In addition, the petitioner is working in partnership with the Avondale Development Corporation, and has the support of the Avondale Community Council, two entities intimately familiar with the needs of the neighborhood and its residents.

CONCLUSIONS:

The staff of the Department of City Planning supports the proposed change in zoning for the following reasons:

1. The proposed zone is consistent with the existing surrounding built environment with regards to allowable uses, building scale, massing, and adjacent zoning districts.
2. It is consistent with the *Avondale QOL: Avondale’s Quality of Life Movement* (2020) which identifies the subject property for residential use in the Future Land Use Map (p. 65) and has a Goal to “Revitalize Avondale with a diverse quality housing stock which meets the needs of existing seniors, owners and renters and attracts new resident” (p. 86).
3. It is consistent with *Plan Cincinnati* (2012) within the Live Initiative Area, specifically the goal to, “Provide a full spectrum of housing options, and improve housing quality and affordability.”

RECOMMENDATION:

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

APPROVE the proposed zone change from RMX (Residential Mixed) to RM-0.7 (Residential Multi-family) at 548 and 588 Blair Avenue in Avondale.

Respectfully submitted:

Approved:

Samantha McLean, City Planner
Department of City Planning

Katherine Keough-Jurs, AICP, Director
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