THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE

STAFF REPORT

Council Meeting Date: August 24, 2021

Subject: Conditional Zoning Request for 22 Woodfin St. (Four Points Sheraton)

Staff Resource(s): Todd Okolichany, AICP, LEED AP ND, Planning & Urban Design Director;
Shannon Tuch, RLA, Principal Planner

Action Requested: Conditionally zone the property located at 22 Woodfin St. from Central Business District (CBD) to Central Business District Expansion - Conditional Zone (CBD EXP - CZ).

Project Location and Contacts:

- The project site consists of a single 3.55 acre parcel located at 22 Woodfin St, (PIN 9649-41-6829).
- Owner: 22 Woodfin St. LLC

Summary of Petition:

- This petition is to construct a 7 to 11-story, mixed-use building that wraps around an existing 150 room hotel, along with associated site improvements including parking, open space and sidewalk/streetscape improvements.
- The project area will take up the entire three and a half acre site and will total approximately 480,000 gross square feet, including:
    - The existing 150 room hotel (87,000 square feet)
    - 8 additional standard hotel rooms
    - 49 extended stay hotel suites
    - 106 residential dwelling units (mix of apartment and condominium)
    - Approximately 8,000 square feet of non-residential/commercial space at the ground floor, (possibly including a 3,000 square foot grocery store).
- New construction includes approximately 393,000 square feet.
- The applicant is seeking a rezoning via conditional zoning due to the overall size (over 100,000 square feet) and height (over 100 feet) of the project.
- The subject property is located within the tallest height zone in height. as identified in the Unified Development Ordinance (“UDO”).
- The tallest height zone allows buildings up to 265’ in height.
- The maximum height of the proposed building addition is 119 feet-7 inches, as measured per the UDO.
- The subject property is also located within the Hotel Overlay zoning district which allows large and small hotels.
- The resulting hotel use will include 238 guest rooms and will be classified as a large hotel.
- As a conditional zoning application, public benefits as described in Appendix 7-A (Sec. 7-9-7(g)(2)(e) do not apply.
- The applicant may choose, however, to incorporate public benefits into their project as a way to mitigate or offset certain impacts.
- An approximately 11,500 square foot green roof is included in the design and public art is proposed along the wall(s) on Central Ave.
- The applicant is also proposing to incorporate building design consistent with two Green Globes (no commitment for certification).
- The applicant may work with the City Council on incorporating additional public benefits into the project in order to help offset the overall impact of the project.
- Affordable housing is not included in the project.
- Off-street parking for the hotel use is required; 238 guest rooms require a minimum of 119 off-street spaces.
- No parking is required for the other uses.
- The project provides 302 off-street parking spaces (174 structured spaces + 128 surface spaces).
- The project also proposes six on-street parking spaces with four spaces proposed along Woodfin St. and two spaces added to Central Ave.

- Vehicular access to the property includes two driveways into the surface parking, one each on Woodfin St. and Central Ave.
- There is an additional driveway into the parking deck proposed on Woodfin St.
- The project proposes to reduce the existing two westbound lanes on Woodfin St. to one lane for approximately 200 feet.
- This allows for the addition of four on-street parking spaces in front of the commercial ground level.
- A minimum 10 foot wide sidewalk is required along both Woodfin St. and Central Ave.
- Sidewalk ranging in width from 10 feet to 12 feet+ with courtyard space is shown.
- Most of the sidewalk will be constructed within the city rights-of-way but a portion will fall on private property requiring an easement for public use.
- Landscape requirements are minimal and limited to street trees, street buffer and parking lot landscaping.
- Open space is not required but Tree Canopy Preservation ("TCP") is required at a rate of five percent of the total site.
- The project will comply with TCP.
- The project proposes a limited "road diet" along approximately ⅔ of the Woodfin St. frontage, reducing the four travel lanes to three in order to accommodate wider sidewalks and four on-street parking spaces.
- A Traffic Impact Analysis ("TIA") was required and completed, following the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and City of Asheville review process.
- The study recommended standard signage and markings at the driveways and did not require any mitigation to the surrounding intersections.
- The applicant is seeking modifications to certain design requirements including:
    - Expanses of blank wall with a horizontal width greater than 20 feet facing Central Ave. (wall measures approximately 25 feet wide).
    - Maximum setback on the Central Ave. facade shall exceed 20 feet in front of the terrace/courtyard, as shown on the building elevations and site plans (setback measures approximately 22').
    - The building exceeds the maximum horizontal wall dimension of 145 feet for the portions over 75 feet in height.
    - The lack of windows, doors and other openings along Central Ave. as the grade of the sidewalk drops below the floor level, which results in a blank wall that is over six feet in height (wall ranges in height from four to 12 feet).
    - Setting aside 50% of the street facing facade as a separate storefront on the Central Ave. facade (project sets aside 16%).

Comprehensive Plan Consistency:

- The proposed development supports a number of Plan goals including:
    - Encouraging responsible growth by providing infill development in targeted growth areas and along transit corridors that are in proximity to employment, goods, and services (pp. 130-131)
    - Enhancing pedestrian infrastructure and overall walkability (p. 147).
    - Contributing to community placemaking through commitment to public art (pp.138-139)
    - Providing a green roof system, which supports goals for green stormwater infrastructure and improving the community's resiliency (pp. 209 and 224).

- While the project, as proposed, is aligned with certain key goals found in Living Asheville, the Plan offers the following comment regarding lodging in the CBD, "*While there are a large number of residential units in downtown, a percentage of them are used only part of the year, a trend that should continue to be monitored, while applicable short-term vacation rental strategies and best practices are explored. Lodging is essential to the mix of uses downtown and while additional lodging uses may be appropriate, they must be considered in context with other development so that the variety and mix of uses, which give downtown its distinctive character, is not compromised*." (p. 339)

Compatibility Analysis:

- The project is located in the tallest height zone of the CBD (allowing up to 265' in height) where large, multi-storied buildings are anticipated.
- The proposed building would be the largest building in the area but is designed to resemble a collection of buildings that would be in keeping with the size and scale of other blocks.
- Additionally, the subject property is not directly adjacent to another parcel and is separated by road or interstate rights-of-way on all four sides, including controlled access right-of-way for Interstate 240 on both the west and north sides.
- The design and site context helps to mitigate the scale and mass of the project (see Project Renderings attached).
- Other comparable large/tall buildings in the area include (square footage is approximate):
    - Grove Arcade = 200,000 s.f., 3-4 stories
    - Harrah's Cherokee Center = 200,000 s.f., 3-4 stories
    - Battery Park Hotel = 170,000 s.f., 13 stories
    - Arras Hotel = 200,000 s.f., 17 stories
    - Renaissance Hotel = 190,000 s.f., 13 stories
- The proposed mix of uses are compatible and similar to the uses in the vicinity, which include lodging, residential, office, and health and fitness facilities.

Council Goal(s):

- This project is most closely aligned with the City Council goal of *A Well-Planned and Livable Community*.

Committee(s):

- Technical Review Committee (TRC) - April 5 & April 19, 2021 - approved with conditions.
- Downtown Commission (DTC) - May 14, 2021. The Commission heard a summary of the project and expressed appreciation for the road diet and streetscape improvements but also expressed concerns over the Central Ave. facade and the proposed extended stay hotel units contributing to an imbalance of lodging units in the CBD.
- Design Review Committee (DRC) - June 17, 2021. The Committee reviewed the proposed project, along with the applicable materials, and recommended approval of the design with the following conditions.
    1. The applicant explore pedestrian improvements at the southwest corner of the project area;
    2. Landscaping and/or public art be applied to the wall on Central Ave. to soften the wall and provide interest for pedestrians; and,
    3. The applicant should work with the City Council on incorporating additional public benefits into the project in order to help offset the overall impact of the project.
- Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) - July 7, 2021. The Commission reviewed the proposed project, along with the recommendations from the DRC, and recommended approval with the same conditions as those identified by the DRC, in addition to some minor revisions to project conditions as suggested by staff.

  Note: The applicant has responded to the recommendations and has added a commitment for art along the Central Ave. facade, addressing condition #2 and partially addressing condition #3. Green building elements including a green roof and Green Globe building features were already included in the project as additional public benefits. The applicant has looked at possible pedestrian improvements to the southwest corner; however, due to existing site constraints combined with the goal to preserve existing trees, they were unable to change the sidewalk and ramp design.

Staff Recommendation:

- Staff concurs with the DRC and PZC and recommends approval of the project based on the reasons stated above, also recognizing that the applicant has largely met the recommended conditions.

Suggested Motion to Approve:

- Motion to approve the conditional zoning request for the property located at 22 Woodfin St. from Central Business District (CBD) to Central Business District Expansion - Conditional Zone (CBD EXP - CZ) and find that the request is reasonable, is in the public interest, is consistent with the city's comprehensive plan, and meets the development needs of the community in that the request: 1) supports infill development in a strategically located area; 2) expands opportunity for walkability; 3) provides green stormwater infrastructure improving community resilience, and 4) provides public art contributing to community placemaking.

Attachment(s)

(1) Exhibit A - Existing Zoning
(2) Exhibit A1 Map - Proposed Zoning
(3) Exhibit B - Aerial Map
(4) Exhibit C - Existing Future Land Use Map
(5) Exhibit D - Site Plans & Elevations
(6) Exhibit E - Project Conditions
(7) Project Renderings
(8) Ordinance
(9) TRC Staff Report & Comments
(10) DRC Staff Report
(11) PZC Minutes
(12) PZC Recommendation