

7.01: Discussion Topic: Conceptual Architecture for Potential Townhome Project in The COR; Case of Jason Palmby and M/I Homes

Presentation

Senior Planner Anderson presented the Staff Report and asked for input on the front entryways proposed by the developer.

Commission Business

Chairperson Bauer stated that he asked staff to find supporting information on the original intent of requiring front porches.

Senior Planner Anderson stated that it was his recollection that the intention of The COR is to have everything pulled closer to the street to create a sense of community where people can gather, rather than segregate in backyards. He believed that previous discussions focused on single-family homes related to the front porch issue. He stated that he was unable to find anything that captured the discussion in review of previous minutes.

Commissioner VanScoy commented that there were discussions for both. He stated that at one time there was an architectural review committee that seems to have dissipated. He agreed that the intent was to create a sense of community in an area that is pedestrian oriented. He stated that the idea was that if a porch was provided, people would sit out there and it would make for easy conversation between neighbors. He stated that the developer has presented his preferred style, which appear to be a covered stoop. He noted that many of those include pillars and architectural features which look nice. He stated that he would not consider purchasing this type of architectural style home. He recognized that not all the townhomes that have been constructed in The COR are pleasing to him in terms of aesthetics. He stated that the stoop is functional but does not stand out. He was unsure how a six by six front porch would reduce lighting in the interior of the home.

Chairperson Bauer referenced examples of existing townhomes in The COR that were shown in the presentation and asked where those homes are located.

Senior Planner Anderson identified the areas in which those homes exist. He noted that one the examples would face this potential project site.

Chairperson Bauer invited the developer to address the Commission.

Jason Palmby, property owner, thanked the Commission for its consideration and the ability to provide feedback. He stated that in his initial discussions with staff, the theme was to create a sense of community. He noted that one of the ways to do that was through a covered front porch. He stated that in the research he has done, there are not a lot of layouts that meet that current requirement with the various plans they have reviewed. He stated that this project has done very well in the Chicago market. He recognized that this model is a bit more urban than what is currently in that area.

Emily Becker, representing the applicant, stated that she understands the significance of requiring a front porch as she was previously a City Planner. She felt that creating a sense of community is established with the patio and overhang and noted that the townhomes would still provide architectural significance. She stated that the customers of their townhomes like that the homes provide a lot of sunlight and the porch does block the sunlight. She stated that the porch also adds cost, which could hinder them moving forward with this project. She noted that this property has been vacant for a number of years.

Mr. Palmby stated that they are exploring the idea of creating a common area with picnic benches, or a barbeque area to create an added sense of community. He believed that would meet that desire.

Commissioner Gengler asked the approximate areas of the patios in front of the doors.

Mr. Palmby stated that they have been discussing that and the patio would go about four to five feet out and extend past the canopy above the door.

Ms. Becker stated that the City could set a minimum size for that patio area.

Commissioner Anderson stated that he is in agreement with Commissioner VanScoy. He commented that the proposed buildings look like Lego blocks and he does not prefer that style. He believed there should be covers on the steps. He asked whether there was a moratorium on townhomes in the City.

Senior Planner Anderson commented that the moratorium applies to City owned land and for multi-family apartment buildings.

Commissioner Anderson stated that he does not care for the proposed designs. He stated that he would want to see a different style building if this comes forward formally.

Commissioner Walker commented that there is a group that owns the property and will be investing money to complete the project. He stated that if they build something that people do not want to buy, that will fall onto them, not the City. He stated that perhaps this is a more modern design versus traditional. He commented that while he would not purchase a home like this, if the applicant believes it could be sold, they should be allowed to move forward.

Commissioner Gengler agreed that styles and tastes vary from person to person. She stated that she finds the buildings to be attractive. She stated that she agrees with having a strong front entrance that encourages people to be out and pedestrian friendly. She believed that the patio would encourage that activity more than some of the front porches that exist on other townhomes. She believed the patio reaches the goal.

Commissioner Peters also commented that he likes the look of the buildings.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that the City has had a requirement for the townhomes in The COR to have some sort of porch. He asked how many of those homes are currently vacant, as the comment was made that this is not a desire in the market.

Senior Planner Anderson stated that he would not have that figure.

Deputy City Administrator/Community Development Director Hagen commented that the townhomes are individually owned and are not rental units. He stated that the vacancy rate of the apartments is very low and therefore would suspect that the homes are well occupied.

Commissioner VanScoy commented that he has not noticed for sale signs for lengths of time. He stated that since The COR was initiated, the intent was to have a certain basic view of how things would be to encourage variety but also consistency. He stated that this townhome model does not appear to fit in with what exists in The COR. He stated that this would be a significant difference in architectural quality.

Commissioner Walker stated that he is hearing that the City was trying to dictate how some of this is developed to encourage people to have a sense of community and want to talk to each other. He stated that he struggles with making people want to be a part of a community. He noted that people will do what they want to do, whether that is socializing or keeping to themselves. He believed that variety is good and would drive competition. He stated that if these homes are on the market and the existing homes are on the market, it will be clear which homes people prefer. He stated that the risk would be of the developer, not the City and therefore he does not see a problem with what is proposed.

Commissioner VanScoy acknowledged differences in taste. He noted that they are not forcing people to communicate and gather but encouraging that and making it easier.

Commissioner Walker commented that if people want to engage with others, they will do so regardless of how their home is designed.

Chairperson Bauer stated that there was a change to allow 55 foot lots in the City, which some people did not think was a good idea but noted that those lots are selling as fast as they go up. He acknowledged that people have different taste and preference for their home and what they want. He agreed that this is the developer's money and risk and they would not build something they do not believe would sell. He agreed that variety is needed.

Commissioner Gengler commented that The COR was created with the idea of being a planned development and design aesthetic in mind. She commented that it is a more urban residential environment with doorways facing towards the sidewalks. She believed that the patio space still achieves the overall intent.

Mr. Palmby thanked the Commission for its input.