

## Planning & Development Division

Planning & Economic Development Department



**Room 160** 411 West First Street Duluth, Minnesota 55802

File Number	PL 22-12:	PL 22-121  Variance – front yard setback		Contact Brett Cre Planning Commission Date		August 9, 2022	
Туре	Variance						
Deadline Application		ion Date	June 30, 202	June 30, 2022 6		August 29, 2022	
	Date Extension Letter Mailed		N/A		120 Days	October 28, 2022	
Location of Subject 3401 Grand Avenue							
Applicant	Brent Dah	Brent Dahlstrom		brent@r	brent@mergeurbandevelopment.com		
Agent	Chad Ronchetti		Contact	Chad.Ronchetti@krausanderson.com			
Legal Description Parcels 010		Parcels 010-2700-00100, 010-04	10-2700-00100, 010-0440-00550; 00610, 00630, 6650, 00420				
Site Visit Date		July 19, 2022	Sign Notice Date		July 25, 2022		
Neighbor Letter Date		July 22, 2022	Number of	Number of Letters Sent 27		27	

Proposal: Applicant is requesting a variance from the front yard setbacks to build an approximate 90,000 square foot, 80unit apartment complex comprising of a mix of 1- and 2-bedroom units. The proposed variance would require allowing a 25' setback compared to the 40' setback for buildings in an MU-N district above 35' in height.

**Recommended Action**: Approve variance with conditions.

	Current Zoning	Existing Land Use	Future Land Use Map Designation
Subject	MU-N	Vacant/Brownfield	Open Space/General Mixed Use/Neigh.
North	R-1	Single Family Homes	Open Space
South	MU-N/R-1	Single Family Homes/Comm.	Neighborhood Commercial
East	MU-B	Commercial	Open Space/General Mixed Use
West	P-1	Recreation/Open Space	Open Space

## **Summary of Code Requirements**

Sec. 50-37.9. B – Variance Procedures. "The Planning Commission shall...make a decision on the application based on the criteria in subsections 50-37.9. C – M..."

Sec. 50-37.9.C – General Variance Criteria (paraphrased): Granting of variances of any kind is limited to situations where, due to characteristics of the applicant's property, enforcement of the ordinance would cause the landowner exceptional practical difficulties or undue hardship. The Planning Commission must find the following for a variance to be granted: a) That the landowner is proposing to use the property in a reasonable manner, b) that the need for relief for from the normal regulations is due to circumstances unique to the property and not caused by the landowner, c) that granting the variance will not alter the essential character of the area, d) that granting the variance is consistent with the intent of the UDC and the Comprehensive Plan.

### Comprehensive Plan Governing Principles and/or Policies and Current History (if applicable):

### **Governing Principles**

- Principle #1: Reuse previously developed lands.
  - O The proposed site is an old gas station and would be a redevelopment of that lot.
- Principle #4 Support economic growth sectors.
  - The construction of mixed income housing, particularly in West Duluth, supports the growth of Duluth's economic base.
- Principle #5 Promote reinvestment in neighborhoods.
  - o Development on this lot supports the character of the neighborhood by creating a community that is walkable to the area's recreation infrastructure, and is a reinvestment in a neighborhood that can link Lincoln Park and the Denfeld neighborhoods.
- Principle #7 Create and maintain connectivity.
  - This project will be designed to maximize pedestrian access to neighborhood amenities and public transportation along the corridor.

### **Future Land Use**

Neighborhood Commercial: Small to moderate scale commercial, serving primarily the adjacent neighborhood. May include specialty retail; community gathering businesses such as coffee shops or lower intensity entertainment; offices; studios or housing above retail. Typically situated in or adjacent to residential neighborhoods. May transition to neighborhood mixed used.

Open Space: High natural resource or scenic value, with substantial restrictions and development limitations. Primarily public lands but limited private use is anticipated subject to use and design controls. Examples include: city parks and recreation areas, primary viewsheds, shorelands of the lake and streams, wetlands and floodplains, and high-value habitat.

### Recent History:

The site is the location of a former Holiday Gas Station. After the gas station closed, the site has remained vacant. DEDA has currently acquired the site from the Holiday Company, along with some surrounding parcels from St. Louis County and the City of Duluth, to create an approximate 2-acre site for the development of an affordable multi-family housing complex. The site has recently been transferred to the developer via a Land Sale Agreement in order to facilitate an affordable housing development. DEDA, with assistance from the EPA, has completed a Phase I environmental assessment prior to conveyance to confirm that there are no environmental concerns on the site that need to be addressed.

#### **Review and Discussion Items**

- 1) The applicant is proposing to construct an approximate 90,000 square foot 80-unit affordable housing complex. The applicant is requesting a variance from the require 40' setback in MU-N for buildings above 35' to allow for a 25' front yard setback. Due to the unique layout of the site, this variance would allow the developer to include 33 parking spaces on the North side of the site behind the proposed structure and provide a spot for a concealed dumpster location. In order to make use of the northwest corner of the site, the variance is required and would provide critical fire access.
- 2) A practical difficulty exists on the site related to the pentagonal shape that hinders typical development; traditionally, setbacks are based on a rectangular lot and result in a building envelope that easily accommodates development.
- 3) Since the building would align with other residential structures along Grand Avenue, the variance, if granted, would not impair adequate light and air to surrounding properties.
- 4) The variance, if granted, would not result in congestion on the surrounding streets, would not impair fire or emergency service access, and would not diminish established property values in the surrounding area. The decreased front yard setback requested allows all fire response vehicles to safely access all sides of the building; as well as increased area for parking behind the building to provide proper space for safe ingress and egress onto the site without creating congestion.
- 5) The variance, if granted, would not impair the intent of the UDC expressed in Sec. 50-2. The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan designation of the property.
- 6) Other than those from the Fire Marshal, who requested more space behind the building for fire access and vehicle turnaround, no public or City comments have been received at the time of drafting this report.
- 7) Per UDC Section 50-37.1.N. approved variances lapse if the project or activity authorized by the permit or variance is not begun within one-year.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Based on the above findings, staff recommends that Planning Commission adopt the findings of the staff review and discussion items, and grant the variance with the following conditions:

- 1) The project be limited, constructed, and maintained in accordance with Preliminary Layout dated 4-13-22.
- 2) Any alterations to the approved plans that do not alter major elements of the plan may be approved by the Land Use Supervisor without further Planning Commission; however, no such administration approval shall constitute a variance from the provisions of Chapter 50.



### Planning & Development Division Planning & Economic Development Department

0	218-730-5580
8	planning@duluthmn.gov

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## APPLICATION COVER SHEET

### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Phone 319-406-2494	Email brent@mergeurbandevelopment.com
Address 604 Clay St.	
City Cedar Falls	State lowa Zip 50613
Owner's Agent (if applicable)_(	Chad Ronchetti
Phone <u>218-290-8702</u>	Email chad.ronchetti@krausanderson.com
Address 3716 Oneota St.,	
City Duluth	State MN Zip 55807

#### APPLICATION INFORMATION:

Street Address and Zoning of Property 3401 Grand Ave. Duluth, MN 55807 - MU-N Parcel ID Number 010-2700-00100, 010-0440-00550, 00610, 00630, 00650, 00420

Reason for this Request (Attach Additional Pages or Cover Letter if Necessary) Owner has a proposed multifamily apartment complex. The site has various constraints

requiring multiple planning commission actions. See below.

- 1) Easement Vacation, Street & Alley Vacation
- 2) Wetland Delineation Review and Approval
- Shoreland Setback Variance (50' Vegetative Buffer, Impervious Setback & Structure Setback
- 4) Building Setback Variance

The undersigned hereby represents upon all of the penalties of law for the purpose of inducing the City of Duluth to take the action herein requested, that all statements herein and attached are true and that all work herein mentioned will be done in accordance with the Ordinances of the City of Duluth and the laws of the State of Minnesota. Undersigned also understands that all documents provided to the City may be considered public data, per Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.

Signature of Applicant

**Reminder:** include application checklist and all supporting information, including pre-application verification (if applicable). Submit completed information to Room 100, Construction Services and Inspections.

\*Special Use Permit Checklist required to be submitted with this application coversheet.

**Check One Box** Accessory Home Share-\$250 Accessory Vacation Dwelling Unit Limited -\$250 Appeal to Planning Com. - \$407 Concurrent Use of Streets - \$797 District Plan - \$1,144 EAW or EIS- \$2,856, plus any applicable professional fees Historic Construction/Demolition - \$59 Resource Designation - \$103 Interim Use Permit \$1,600 Planning Review - \$1,068 Sidewalk Use Permit New Permit- \$171 Renewal Permit - \$86 Special Use Permit, General - \$1,606 Special Use Permit, Wireless Telecommunications' Modifying or Co-locating -\$2,856 New Facility or Tower -\$5,716 Escrow Deposit - \$9,717 Subdivision Plat Approval or Amendment: Concept Plan - \$286 Preliminary Plat - \$1,138 Final Plat- \$857 Minor Subdivision-\$427 Plat Amendment or Boundary Line Adjustment - \$286 Registered Land Survey-\$737 Temporary Use Permit - \$275 **UDC Zoning Map** Amendment/Rezoning General - \$912 MU-P or R-P \$2,578 Vacation of Street or Utility Easement - \$905 (2) Variance - \$855  $($855 \times 2) = $1,710$ Wetland.

> De Minimus, Delineation, or No Loss-\$227 Exemption-\$177

Replacement Plan - \$851 Zoning Verification Letter-\$96

# 3.9 Checklist

### Variance (SETBACK)

These types of applications allow for a variance from the terms and provisions of the UDC (typically bulk standards, such as setbacks, structure height, lot area, etc). See UDC Section 50-37.9 for more information.

### **Starting the Application Process**

Call 218-730-5580 or email <a href="mailto:planning@duluthmn.gov">planning@duluthmn.gov</a> to schedule a preapplication meeting. The pre-application meeting is intended to discuss the application process and general timeline. A comprehensive review of the proposed project is not possible at this meeting; detailed review of the project will occur once a complete application, with sufficient supporting information and exhibits, is submitted.

### **Your Application**

- Application Cover Sheet, available at <a href="https://duluthmn.gov/planning-development/land-use-zoning-and-applications/applications-checklists/">https://duluthmn.gov/planning-development/land-use-zoning-and-applications/applications-checklists/</a>, and applicable fee
- A survey of the property (required for all variances, unless waived in advance by the Land Use Supervisor). Also, a site plan or exhibit with the location of current structures on the property and the proposed requested variance area (such as proposed location of new structure). This information can also be illustrated on the survey. For shoreland variances, include the location of the Ordinary High Watermark (OHM) of the waterway, and the distance to the subject of the variance (proposed structure, etc)

A brief written statement affirming that the property has obtained all required City permits (i.e. all the structures on the property have received building permits, where applicable; property owner has a valid rental license, where applicable, etc).

TO COME LATER

Application Dead

- ▼ Variance supplemental application form
- Materials for specific variances:

Variances to lot size in unsewered areas: a permit or letter of intent to issue a permit for on-site sewer treatment from the County

### TO COME AT LATER DATE AS DESIGN PROGRESSES

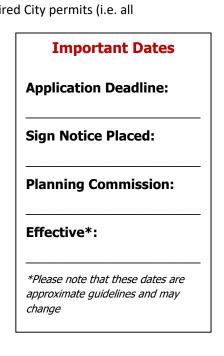
- ▼ Variances to reduce setbacks: a landscaping and buffering plan
- Variances to flood plain regulations: documentation regarding flood levels and flood protection may apply
- Variances to shoreland regulations: A plan to mitigate the impacts of the variance on shoreland areas

Variances within Skyline Parkway Overlay: see Skyline Parkway Materials in Appendix

#### Variance

Submit Application	
	_
Staff Review	
<b>—</b>	
Planning Commission  Public Hearing and Decision	(P) on
•	
Appeal to City Council	(P)

P Indicates Public Hearing Required



### **After Submitting Your Application**

- 1. Determination of Completeness. Within 15 business days of your application, you should expect to:
  - Receive an "Applicant Letter," which acknowledges a complete application, shares the date of
    the Planning Commission meeting and the assigned staff person, and notifies you of Statemandated deadlines for the City to make a decision, <u>OR</u>
  - Receive notification that your application is incomplete, with details on further information to submit.
- **2.** *Public Notice*. A <u>mail notice</u> will be sent by the City to property owners within 350 feet.
  - You are required to post a <u>sign notice</u> on the property at least two weeks before the date of the public hearing. See UDC Section 50-37.1.H for information on size, placement, and content of each sign; you may want to contact a sign company or printing company to have the sign made. You must provide evidence that the signs were in place; *submit photo(s) of the signs to the Planning Division at least two weeks before the date of the public hearing.*
- **3. Staff Review.** Planning staff will evaluate your application and prepare a staff report. When considering a recommendation for a variance, Planning Staff generally review the legal minimum requirements for a variance establish by State statute (literal interpretation of the UDC would result in exceptional or peculiar practical difficulty, special circumstances exist that are unique to the property, the situation was not created by the applicant, variance is necessary and not simply a convenience to the applicant, etc.), the standards specific to the type of variance being sought, any additional UDC criteria, and other related factors.
  - You will receive an email with the Planning Commission agenda and a link to this staff report about 5 days prior to the meeting.
- **4. Planning Commission Hearing and Decision.** Planning Commission meetings are scheduled at 5:00 pm on the second Tuesday of each month. **We ask that applicants or an agent attend this meeting.**

The Planning Commission will review the application, conduct a public hearing, and make a decision to approve, approve with modifications, or deny the application.

If approved, you will receive an Action Letter documenting approval.

Note that other City codes may apply to your project. Please be aware of any applicable Building Code (Construction Services Division), Fire Code (Life Safety Division), and stormwater/engineering (Engineering Division) regulations. The zoning approval may be only the first step in a several step process.

If a **wetland delineation** is needed for the project to proceed, it must be reviewed and approved before any zoning application will be accepted.

If a **wetland replacement plan** is required for a project to proceed, it must have been submitted and accepted as a complete application before the project zoning application will be accepted.



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# **Variance Application Supplemental Form**

In order to submit a complete variance application, please explain how your request meets all of the below variance criteria. This is information that is required by the zoning code and will be shared with the Planning Commission during their review. You may fill out this form, or attach your information in a separate letter. This information will be shared with the Planning Commission in order to help them determine the appropriateness of the variance application and request.

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4. Please explain how the application proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner, whic would not be permitted by this code except for a variance:	1
5. Please explain how that if the variance is granted it will not impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property, or unreasonably increase the congestion in public streets or the danger of fire or imperil the public safety, or unreasonably diminish or impair established propert values within the surrounding areas, or in any other respect impair the health, safety or public welfare of the inhabitants of the city:	e y
6 Please explain how, if the variance is granted, it will not substantially impair the intent of zonin code and the official zoning map, and will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood:	9
Does your variance request need to meet any of the specific criteria in UDC Section 50-37.9 subsections D through M (E. Unsewered Areas, F. Two Family Dwellings in R-1, G. Parkin Regulations, H. Reduce Setbacks, I. MU-C District, J. Airport Overlay, K. Flood Plain Regulations, I Shorelands, or M. Non-Conforming Buildings)?  Discuss what subsections are applicable and how this request meets those:	g

### **Setback Variance**

1. Please explain how the exceptional narrowness, shallowness or shape of the property, or exceptional topographic or other conditions related to the property, would result in practical difficulties under strict application of the requirements of the UDC:

Due to the height of the overall structure of 47', the setback required for the portion of the structure above 35 feet in height is 40'. The nature of the building design that has been presented to the City during the parcel acquisition process has a uniform façade as it grows in height above the 35 foot mark. By allowing a setback variance for the portion of the structure above 35 feet it would allow the entire building to slide towards Grand Ave. forward. This allows for increased off-street parking along the north edge of the property. Due to the pentagon shape of the site, without the setback variance the project would not be able to make use of parking behind the building which would eliminate approximately 33 parking spots and a concealed location for the building dumpster. Fire access to north side of the building is also critical for safety and has been discussed with the City Fire Marshal.

2. Please explain how the special circumstances or conditions that create the need for relief is due to circumstances unique to the property, and were NOT created by the property owner or the property owners' predecessors-in-interest:

The shape of the site presented to us from city staff for this building presents some unique challenges due to its pentagon shape. In order to make use of the northwest corner of the site a setback variance is needed to allow the proposed building to slide towards Grand Ave.

3. Please explain the special circumstances or conditions applying to the building or land in question are peculiar to this property or immediately adjoining properties, and do not apply generally, to other land or buildings in the vicinity:

They way in which the site was platted with a north and south orientation while the road runs NE to SW creates a pentagonal shape to the property that is peculiar to this site. That orientation hinders typical development. Combined with the adjoining properties owned by the city and a railroad, the site is greatly restricted in site plan possibilities. The setback request of 25' would align roughly with other residential properties located on Grand Avenue. 20 feet is the minimum setback for structure less than 35 feet.

4. Please explain how the application proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner, which would not be permitted by this code except for a variance:

By allowing a variance for the entire structure to follow a 25-foot setback will for increased usable space for development while allowing the maximum amount of off-street parking possible. With the shoreland constraints and the setback for structures above 35 feet taken into account, the site provides limited space for parking a fire access.

The proposed use of this property aligns well with many of the Duluth Governing Principles including of the comprehensive plan;

- Principle #1: Reuse previously developed lands.
  - The proposed site is an old gas station and would be a redevelopment of that lot.
- Principle #4 Support economic growth sectors.

- The construction of mixed-use income, particularly in West Duluth, is a feeder neighborhood to Denfeld schools, and supports the growth of Duluth's economic base.
- Principle #5 Promote reinvestment in neighborhoods.
  - Development on this lot supports the character of the neighborhood by creating a community that is walkable to the area's recreation infrastructure, and is a reinvestment in a neighborhood that can link Lincoln Park and the Denfeld neighborhoods.
- Principle #7 Create and maintain connectivity.
  - This project will be designed to maximize pedestrian access to neighborhood amenities and public transportation along the corridor.
- Principle #8 Encourage a mix of activities, uses, and densities.
  - The project will be a mix of activities for the neighborhood, and in particular for this area, which has a robust base of recreational and commercial activities.
- 5. Please explain how that if the variance is granted it will not impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property, or unreasonably increase the congestion in public streets or the danger of fire or imperil the public safety, or unreasonably diminish or impair established property values within the surrounding areas, or in any other respect impair the health, safety or public welfare of the inhabitants of the city:

A variance allowing for a front yard setback variance will not impair adequate supply of light or air to any of the adjacent properties due to the fact there are none on either side. The parcel to the west is City park and to the west is railroad property. The site is located at an existing traffic signal that would be used to safely control traffic in and out of the parking lot. City Engineering staff has weighed in the use of the existing access location and traffic signal. They are comfortable with the access and understand that existing signal poles will be utilized while upgrading signal timing as required. The building construction would follow appropriate building codes and fire rated assemblies as well as a fire sprinkler and alarm system to diminish the risk of fire or imperil the public safety. Being located just east of the Wheeler Athletic Complex and Park, the project would leverage the city owned recreation facilities for the health of the residents, create a walkable area for the residents to utilize Wade Stadium, and advance the principals of the neighborhood objectives by combining livability with surrounding recreational activities.

6 Please explain how, if the variance is granted, it will not substantially impair the intent of zoning code and the official zoning map, and will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood:

Granting of this variance would actually allow the site to be used for the appropriate and existing MU-N zoning and would not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.

Does your variance request need to meet any of the specific criteria in UDC Section 50-37.9, subsections D through M (E. Unsewered Areas, F. Two Family Dwellings in R-1, G. Parking Regulations, H. Reduce Setbacks, I. MU-C District, J. Airport Overlay, K. Flood Plain Regulations, L. Shorelands, or M. Non-Conforming Buildings)?

YES, Section 50-37.9.H. Owner will hire a landscape architect to design a landscape and buffering plan to meet the requirements of the City of Duluth. The site plan provided provides ample space for planting and trees.

