

With new design changes, Avery apartments get OK from Asheville Planning Commission

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A large apartment complex in downtown Asheville is moving to the final step of its approval process on a positive note after a new round of design tweaks.

The Avery, which is proposing apartments and retail space at the corner of Clingman and Hilliard avenues, got a unanimous vote in favor of a needed conditional rezoning from the Asheville Planning and Zoning Commission on Feb. 2.

Developers made a new round of design changes to The Avery, a 187-unit apartment complex proposed at the corner of Hilliard and Clingman Avenues downtown. Renderings of the development show the view along Clingman Avenue, looking toward Hilliard.

Commission members responded positively to changes made to the building's design following a negative vote from the city's Design Review Committee on Jan. 20.

In its third review before that committee, members said the plans still didn't meet city standards of breaking up long facades to create the feel of multiple buildings.

But in presenting the plans Feb. 2, Asheville attorney Wyatt Stevens said designers worked through the weekend after that meeting to make further changes to the long facade along Clingman Avenue, changes that some Design Review Committee members and Planning Commission members felt brought the project in line with what the city requires.

The Avery is proposing 187 residential apartments and about 14,000 square feet of commercial space in two buildings with 201 parking spaces, including 76 structured spaces underneath the larger building.

Most of the units and the commercial space would be housed in the larger building at the corner of Clingman and Hilliard avenues with only residential units planned in another smaller building set for the corner of Hilliard Avenue and Pearl Street.

Planner Will Palmquist said 159 of the residential units will be in the larger, five-story building and 28 in the smaller building, with all of the commercial and amenity space in the larger building.

The project needs a conditional rezoning, which must still be approved or denied by Asheville City Council.

Design changes hit the mark

Developer Daniel Jimenez with Delray Ventures noted at the Jan. 20 meeting that the Design Review Committee's review of the project is necessary, but its approval is not, calling much of the committee's issues with the design "personal opinion," and calling it "a good architectural design for the building and for this location."

Members of the committee disagreed, saying city standards are clear, and voted to recommend the Planning and Zoning Commission vote to deny the proposal.

Palmquist said developers had worked hard to break up the massing with different materials and multiple entrances, noting changes in windows, balcony features and added steps to the sidewalk from entrances along Clingman.

Planner Will Palmquist discusses updated plans for The Avery apartment complex at the Feb. 2 meeting of the Asheville Planning and Zoning Commission.

Those changes were added since the Jan. 20 Design Review Committee meeting, and at least three members of that committee have voiced that if they were reviewing the updated plan, they'd vote to approve it, he said.

One member of the committee, Bryan Moffitt, submitted an email to the commission on the project, saying that while he made the motion to deny the plans, he would vote to approve it as the planning board saw it Feb. 2.

"The design has incorporated many improvements that recognize and invite human scale and experience," he writes.

Of the changes, he mentioned specifically breaks in composition at the two corners of the building, pedestrian access via walk-up units and said, "I appreciate the inset openings, integrated canopies, brick detailing, and differentiated mullion spacing."

More: The Avery apartments downtown get thumbs down from Design Review Committee

Commission Chair Joe Archibald said the project has come a long way since he last saw it at a December Design Review Committee meeting.

"I will say, certainly there have been some great changes since what I saw in December," he said, pointing out specifically the stoops along Clingman Avenue that he said many developers are wary of but which is a great way to activate a street front.

Archibald said the smaller building is now reminiscent of rowhouses seen in older cities.

The project will head back to the Design Review Committee in February, Palmquist said, regardless of the commission's decision Feb. 2.

Renderings included with the agenda for the Feb. 2 Asheville Planning and Zoning Commission show the proposed The Avery apartment complex at the corner of Hilliard and Clingman Avenues.

No members of the public called in to speak during the meeting, but two others, Pattiy Torno and David Nutter, wrote comments in favor of the project.

Torno wrote that the area of the neighborhood has stood vacant for many years, and that infill housing is the best use though some neighbors feel the project is too big.

Citing the Design Review Committee's evaluation, Nutter said the project "has taken excellent steps forward," and that "The Avery will be a blessing in our rental housing starved city, especially in this strategic location."

Bringing part of WECAN alive

Stevens spoke of the success of The Patton, an apartment complex next door developed by the same family, saying "they don't just want to build buildings they want to build nice buildings, and they want to bring that part of the WECAN neighborhood alive in a way that it probably hasn't been in more than 50 years."

"I think this is something we all should be excited about," he said, noting bike lanes, 10-foot sidewalks and a turn lane onto Pearl Street from Hilliard.

Developers conducted a traffic impact study and found that it would have essentially zero impact in the area, he said.

"Folks from the WECAN neighborhood and elsewhere, they're going to gravitate up to this new retail level," Stevens said, something he called a risky addition to the project, noting spaces in Biltmore Park that are still unleased.

Jimenez said developers are hopeful that one of the retail spaces will be a coffee shop, and the others are still in progress but developers want them to complement what the coffee shop would bring to the area.

Five percent of the units will be deeded affordable to 80% of the area median income for 20 years, Palmquist said, a condition of the rezoning, as is the requirement that five units accept housing choice vouchers.

Asheville's matrix lists 80% AMI for a single-person household at \$42,100, and for a two-person household at \$48,100. Rents tied to 80% AMI with utilities included are \$1,128 for a one-bedroom apartment and \$1,353 for a two-bedroom.

The vacant Kmart store and strip mall at 1001 Patton Ave could be replaced by a new Ingles store and retail space.

More:'Elevator music': Downtown Commission pans apartment design at Hilliard and Clingman

Stevens said developers sought a Land Use Incentive Grant, which requires at least 20% of the units to meet that 80% AMI level or better, something he said developers couldn't do after crunching the numbers.

"This is a very challenging, expensive site," he said.

Stevens noted that across the street at 360 Hilliard, the city sold the land at below market rate for affordability reasons and granted developers a Land Use Incentive Grant for the project that includes 40% affordable units.

"That's how affordable housing gets created," he said, with partnerships, grants and tax incentives. He called the 5%, or nine total units, included in this plan "more than reasonable."

Plans also call for utility lines to be buried along Hilliard and Clingman avenues, with engineer Warren Sugg saying while plans are still being hammered out on exactly how and where those lines will go underground, lines on Hilliard will go underground near Pearl Street.

Ingles on Patton, Long Shoals apartments postponed

Two more conditional rezonings, for a plan to turn the former Kmart building on Patton Avenue in West Asheville and more than 200 apartments on Long Shoals Road near Lake Julian, were postponed to the commission's March 2 meeting.

Both will also be decided ultimately by City Council.

More:Ingles' new store, Long Shoals complex pass technical review

Ingles' plan for the 17.5-acre lot shows a new 88,584-square-foot main store with three attached retail spaces, a separate retail building at the corner of Patton Avenue and Hawkins Lane and a 10-pump gas station near Wells Fargo.

The project cleared the city's Technical Review Committee Jan. 10.

Renderings for townhomes proposed off Long Shoals Road, part of a 218-unit development with a mix of apartments and townhomes near Lake Julian.

The apartment complex proposed for Long Shoals Road in South Asheville hopes to build 218 new housing units next to the Ingles store there on the roughly 11-acre site abutting Lake Julian.

Charlotte developers Lat Purser & Associates submitted plans for 198 residential units in six buildings and 20 townhomes.

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