

January 20, 2015

The Commons

Lots 1 & 2, Block 9, Steel Yards Replat

Concept Review and Comment - Written Statement

Introduction:

The proposed project, The Commons, consists of two commercial buildings on the remaining two vacant lots in the Steel Yards to the east of Junction Place. This project will create a commercial development that is highly sustainable, provides engaging active uses along the ground level, and incorporates mobility connections appropriate to the transit-rich Boulder Junction. The form of the building creates a buffer for the rail lines to the east, a transition to the residential and mixed-use buildings to the west, and is optimized for solar and daylighting opportunities. The northern building will be approximately 60,000 sf with 65 underground parking spaces, including designated car share spaces; and the southern building will be approximately 40,000 sf. The project is intended to be designed to a LEED platinum standard as a minimum, but will likely exceed that metric.

The basic form and mass of the building has arisen simply from the program, context, and sustainability goals. The main volumes of the structures are kept to the east side of each site, creating a buffer between the railway tracks and the residential units in the Steel Yards, as well as protecting the Junction Place pedestrian space from noise and train activity. This also allows for uninterrupted solar access on the roof and east facade of the buildings, as shown in the accompanying solar intensity studies. The buildings step down toward the street on the west side, creating an appropriate streetscape whose human scale helps to create a transition between the larger format projects to the south of Goose Creek and the finer scale of the Steel Yards to the west and north. A variety of public spaces, ranging from full plazas to simple extended thresholds and widened sidewalks, help to create the complexity and interest that form a quality pedestrian experience. A public plaza in the center of the project creates an entry location for both buildings; an outdoor gathering space with a variety of seating; car and bike share access; shade structures and landscaping; trees; and a location for outdoor events, both during the day and in the evening.

The buildings will be highly sustainable. To achieve this, there are a number of strategies that are designed into the project from the outset. In addition to the solar array tuned to the building's aspect on the site, the project will seek to reduce its demand loads on an annualized basis. The buildings provide optimum widths for daylighting, and to this end, incorporate a light well on the northern building which doubles as an internal public plaza, reducing the need for artificial light. There will be venting, allowing air flow through the building to provide natural cooling at night, and thermal mass in the floors to help carry that cooling throughout the day. A responsive HVAC strategy, such as a variable refrigerant system, will allow the building to respond to the actual unit needs rather than conditioning on a full-building scale, and a variety of tenant-based ideas are being considered to reduce plug loads. A highly advanced building envelope, consisting of thermally broken windows, tuned window-to-glass ratios per facade, and architectural designed shades will complete the package, reducing heat gain in summer and heat loss in winter.

The project will incorporate a variety of community based elements including a mobility hub, a gallery that can also function as a community room, a planned coffee shop to engage the central plaza, and a restaurant focused to the south. In order to extend the transit connections to the next level in Boulder Junction, the project incorporates its own "mobility hub" (including a car share program and B-Cycle station), routes the eastern bike path through the center of the project to join with the multi-modal Junction Place, and is compatible with future bus and rail stop connections. The lobby will double as a community gathering space which can be reserved and utilized by community groups, and is also available for large scale meetings for the tenants of the buildings. The south end of the building, abutting the Goose Creek Greenway, creates a prime location for public interaction and gathering, and is planned to be a restaurant space. This will capitalize on the axis created by the diagonal bridge over Goose Creek, creating a visual termination with public interest as Junction Place turns north.

Compliance with Title 9, Land Use Regulations:

1. Concept Plan Criteria:

a. *Techniques and strategies for environmental impact avoidance, minimization or mitigation:*

The site is currently a vacant parcel without any existing trees. The new buildings will be designed to LEED platinum standards and will include large arrays of solar on the roofs and possibly the eastern facade. The building widths are set to accommodate optimal daylighting and also incorporate a light well on the northern building. Landscaping will be incorporated into the public plazas.

b. *Techniques and strategies for practical and economically feasible travel demand management techniques:*

This project is located to the north of Boulder Junction and is connected by Junction Place. In addition to being connected to the large transport hub, the site intends to have its own "mobility hub" hosting a car share and B-Cycle station and provides opportunity for future connections to a multi-use path to the east. There is also potential for this site to be connected to future rail and bus stops. The provided underground parking has been limited consistent with the intent of the district. This is one of the best connected multi-modal sites in Boulder.

c. *Proposed Land Use:*

The existing zoning for these lots is MU-4. The project will be commercial with potential offices, community space, retail and restaurant uses.

Changes requested from the MU-4 Zoning Standards:

- *Minimum Front Yard Landscaped Setback*

As discussed with staff, this project is an urban building on Junction Place, which makes the standard 20' front yard setback inappropriate. The applicant has worked with staff on this metric and the project utilizes a 10' front yard setback, which provides building faces at the street yet still allows for a generous, pedestrian oriented sidewalk with space for amenities like café seating.

- *Minimum Front Yard Setback From a Street 3rd Story & Above*
Due to the architectural form, there is a small portion of the building on the south that is closer than this setback. This minor change to the standard is appropriate in this location as it allows the building form to highlight the axis of Goose Creek Bridge and present a public terminus on this part of Junction Place. The great majority of the upper floors comply with the by-right setback guidelines.
- *Maximum Stories*
The project lies in the Rail Plaza district of the TVAP, which is intended to be a high density district with 3- to 5-story buildings. Site Review is required in MU-4 for projects over 3 stories in height. The project is designed to be 4 stories, below the 5-story intended maximum.
- *Maximum Building Height*
The project lies in the area of the TVAP, which is intended to be a high-density district with 3- to 5-story buildings. Site Review is required in MU-4 for projects over 35 feet in height. The project is designed to be 50 to 55 feet (within the 55-foot maximum).
- *Maximum Floor Area of Any Principal Building*
MU-4 defines that buildings with principal areas over 15,000 sf must go through the Site Review process. The maximum FAR is listed as 2, and the site has a proposed FAR of 1.7. This is significantly below the maximum, and meets the intent of the density desired in the Rail District.

This project is designed to be integrated into the surrounding area and could only work in this specific site. Every part of the design arises from the location, the context, the sustainability requirements, and the community goals. The buildings and site are truly part of Boulder Junction, and are intended to further the intent and stated goals of the area plan.

Thank you for taking the time to review this Concept Plan Review Application. We are looking forward to working with City staff and Planning Board to make this project a reality.