

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Anne McClung, Planning and Building Director 

DATE: July 31, 2020

RE: RZN 20-0002 - Request to Amend RZN 17-0006 for the Midtown development at 501 South Main Street by Steve Semones (agent) on behalf of Midtown Development Partners LLC (applicant/owners) and Town of Blacksburg.

On July 29, 2020, the Planning and Building Department received supplemental information from Balzer and Associates for the rezoning amendment to the Midtown project. The revised materials were submitted in response to discussion at the July 21, 2020 Planning Commission work session and the July 7, 2020 Town Council work session. The applicant also submitted materials on July 15, 2020, which were previously provided to the Planning Commission. Staff was not able to review the July 15, 2020 materials prior to the July 21, 2020 Commission work session. The newest materials dated July 29, 2020 are attached for your review. The staff analysis is provided below and is based on the most recent information.

Parking Lot Screening

The applicant has provided more information on the screening proposed for the new parking lot at the corner of Eheart St. and Church St. The applicant has revised the graphics to provide the height of the screening wall and the dimensions of the planting area and the corner seating area. The wall varies in height from 6 to 8 feet and 10 feet at the highest point where the wall is serving as the required screening for the dumpster. The landscape plan shows sufficient width for the plantings proposed. Staff, however, does suggest reallocating the area along Eheart St. to give more space to the planting area. The approximate 18' depth shown could be split with 9' of planting area and 9' of grass. This would benefit the growth of the trees that are softening the screening wall particularly as a portion of the area is where the wall is taller to screen the dumpster. Staff has reviewed the planting scheme and requests clarification if the shrub variety proposed along the screening wall on Church St. is evergreen. A hedge of primarily deciduous plants will not effectively serve the purpose of screening and softening the look of the screening wall. In addition, any use of sweet gum trees should not include varieties that drop fruit. The planting suggestions have been relayed to the applicant and if further changes are submitted, the revisions will be forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Downtown Commercial Building Materials

- The existing requirements for Building Materials were discussed in the June 26, 2020 staff report on pages 8-11.

- At the work session there was a question about the use of the “STO” system as a masonry material since the product from the company is primarily known as an EIFS product. The applicant has provided information on the different types of products from the company and included web site links.
- The applicant has also provided per the request of the Council and Commission information on why the changes to the approved building materials are proposed.
- In terms of revisions to the percentages of different building materials, the applicant has differentiated the requirements applicable to Parcels DC #2 and DC #4 from Parcels DC #5 and DC #6.
- **For Parcels DC #2 and #4**, the applicant indicates that a minimum of 25% of the façade will be “window and/or storefront”. This wording replaces the term “glazing” which as discussed at the work session could include materials such as spandrel glass panels versus more typical window glass. The applicant’s intent was not use spandrel glass but that glazing would refer to windows, including storefront windows. Facades may have a maximum of 40% windows and/or storefront.
- **For Parcels DC #2 and #4**, a minimum of 37.5% of the façade will be “Masonry Materials” which would include the STO product described. In the proposed wording, this product is referred to as “hard-coat stucco”.
- **For Parcels DC #2 and #4**, the remaining 37.5 % (maximum of 37.5%) would be made up of “Alternative Materials” which could be fiber cement panel systems, EIFS, or metal siding. The applicant has retained the limitation on EIFS to be used only as an accent material and EIFS is not permitted on the ground floor on buildings on Main St., Eheart St. or the Commons. The applicant has also retained the requirement that a maximum of 20% of each floor façade can be EIFS used as accent panels.
- **For Parcels DC #2 and #4**, the applicant has included the prohibition on the use of lap siding in the DC district. The applicant, however, has not precluded other types of residential looking products. Further information on the other types of products was covered in the June 26, 2020 staff report and is excerpted below:

“The fiber cement panel systems come in a variety of textures and styles from a variety of manufacturers. Many of the products are very residential in character. For example, the wood grain texture, lap siding style, and shakes/shingles styles are appropriate for residential applications and are not appropriate for an urban mixed-use project. A product that is vertical siding that looks like board and batten is also available and again based on use can bespeak a more residential product.”

Staff again suggest further restrictions on residential products would be appropriate for the Downtown Commercial zoned portion of the site.

- **For Parcel DC #5**, the applicant has indicated a minimum of 25% and a maximum of 40% of facades will be windows and/or storefront. A minimum percentage of 37.5% “Masonry Materials” and a maximum of 37.5% “Alternative Materials” are proposed for Parcel DC #5.

The applicant added in a restriction that no EIFS be used on the ground floor of the Midtown Way, Church St., Clay St. or Central Park sides of the building. This updates references included in the existing Pattern Book to Main Street and the Commons. This was an oversight in the existing adopted document since Parcel DC #5 does not face Main St. or the Commons. The new references are to the appropriate streets.

- **For Parcel DC #6**, the applicant has indicated the requirements for Parcel DC #6 (hotel) will remain as originally adopted in 2019. The applicant may want to update the requirements for Parcel DC #6 to reference the appropriate street frontages of Eheart St. and Church St. in relation to not using EIFS on the ground floor. It is anticipated that Parcels DC #5 and DC #6 will remain on the same pages in the Pattern Book but with the differing requirements for each parcel noted.

Planned Residential Building Materials

The applicant proposes changes to the building materials allowed in the Planned Residential portion of the development as well. The excerpt below is from the June 26, 2020 staff report. Staff confirmed with the applicant that what was proposed in the April submittal and covered in the staff report is still what is proposed for changes to building materials in the PR district. There are no updates or revisions as confirmed in the July 29, 2020 supplemental materials. **Staff continues to have the same concerns as expressed below in the staff report.** With the proposed change residential development, “Masonry Materials” has been changed to “Quality Materials” including fiber cement panel systems. This could mean that no masonry material is used. The proposed limitation is 75% of the façade as “Quality Materials” and the remaining 25% of the façade could be windows.

“The applicant proposes a similar wording change regarding “quality materials” to apply to the Planned Residential portion of the development. The wording change is contained in the applicable Proffer Statement Exhibits and the Pattern Book pages.

Adopted Pattern Book and Proffer Statement Exhibits for PR Parcels:

Façade Materials: Buildings shall be constructed with a minimum of 50% masonry materials such as brick or stone (including synthetic stone). In the PRD area, synthetic stone may be used on buildings for up to 35% of the elevation area on each side of any one or more buildings.

Alternative Materials: The remaining 50% of façade materials may include cast materials, glass, metal and cement composite siding, smooth finished concrete or equivalents as approved by the town. A maximum of 20% of each floor facade can be EIFS used as accent panels. No EIFS may be used on first floor.

Foundations: Foundations shall be monolithic slab or basement construction. All foundations visible on the exterior of the building shall be faced with brick, smooth finished concrete surfacing or parged/painted concrete.

Vinyl siding is not permitted.

The applicant now proposes the wording as follows:

Façade Materials

“Buildings shall be constructed with a minimum of 50% high quality materials such as brick, stucco, high quality synthetic stone or fiber cement panel system. Fiber cement panel systems may only account for 75% of the proposed facade materials. Synthetic stone shall be a minimum 1 1/2” thickness as approved by the Town. In the PRD area, synthetic stone may be used on buildings for up to 35% of the elevation area on each side of any one or more buildings.”

Staff has many of the same concerns about this change as noted for the DC material changes proposed. There is more flexibility in the style and texture since the PR section of the development is a residential product. However, the look and feel should still be of an urban townhouse project.”

Loop Drive and Parking Materials

Prior to action by Town Council on the rezoning amendment the alternative materials for the Commons loop drive and loop parking should be determined and included as a commitment from the applicant.

New Rendering for Parcel DC #5

The applicant was asked to prepare a rendering to show the view of the proposed building on Parcel DC #5 from the perspective of the small homes across Clay St. The rendering is included in the July 29, 2020 submittal.

Attachment: July 29, 2020 Balzer and Associates supplemental information