
TO: St. Francis City Council
FROM: Beth Richmond, Planner
SUBJECT: St. Francis Apartments Concept Review
DATE: 4-30-2025 for 5-5-2025 meeting
APPLICANT: North Shore Development Partners (Matt Alexander)
LOCATION: 3731 Bridge St NW and PID 32-34-24-31-0016
COMP PLAN: Medium Density Residential (north half) and Medium/High Density Residential (south half)
ZONING: R-2 and R-3

OVERVIEW

The applicant, North Shore Development Partners, represented by Matt Alexander, has applied for review and discussion of a concept plan for the development of a multi-unit building on an approximately 6 acre City-owned site located at 3731 Bridge St NW and an adjacent parcel to the north (PID 32-34-24-31-0016). These properties are north of City Hall and interior to the block bounded by Ambassador Blvd NW and Butterfield Dr NW. The proposed use is a 120-unit apartment building that would be accessed via a new public street that would be constructed to the south and west. The concept plan is discussed in greater detail in the April 17, 2025 Planning Commission memo, attached.



The purpose of the concept plan review process is to provide the applicant with an advisory review of a specific development concept before the applicant enters into binding agreements, incurs substantial expense, and/or files a formal application. This process is intended to inform the applicant of the City's regulations and the Comprehensive Plan and to identify elements of the development concept which may not be in compliance with current requirements. Ultimately, the goal is to provide feedback to the applicant who can then determine whether or not the development is worth pursuing.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Following the submittal of the Planning Commission report, Staff had several additional discussions with the applicant and the City's Metropolitan Council sector representative to clarify a number of points about the application:

1. The applicant clarified that the project is not intended to be developed in phases. If unforeseen issues arise, the project could be phased, but the current plan would be to move the full project forward at one time.
2. This site is currently guided for Medium/High Density Residential use (7-12 units per net acre) on the south half of the site and Medium Density Residential use (3-7 units per net acre) on the north half. When calculating net density, the City follows the guidance provided by the Metropolitan Council. This means that local roads and rights-of-way are included in the net area for the site. Wetland areas may also be included. Using this calculation method, the applicant is proposing 120 units on roughly 6.5 acres, or a net density of 18.5 units per net acre. This meets the allowable density for the City's High Density Residential (12-20 units per net acre) land use category. In order to develop at this density, a Comprehensive Plan amendment would be needed to reguide this land to High Density Residential.
3. As submitted, the current concept may not align with City regulations in two different areas:
 - a. **Lot area per unit.** For apartment uses, 2,000 square feet of lot area is required per unit. At 120 units, 240,000 square feet (~5.5 acres) of lot area would be needed. Once land is dedicated for public roads, the remaining site may not be large enough to meet this requirement. Specific plans would be needed in order to determine if this requirement is met.
 - b. **Parking requirements.** Required parking for apartment buildings is based on the type of unit (number of bedrooms) as illustrated in the table below. The applicant is currently proposing 119 total spaces, with 94 of those spaces enclosed. This is fewer than the number of spaces required by Code for a development of this type.

Unit Type	Minimum Area
Apartment	1.5 spaces per efficiency and 1 bedroom unit
	2.25 spaces per unit for 2+ bedroom units
	1 space per unit shall be enclosed

Any elements which do not meet Code standards would need to be addressed either through a modification in the number/type of units or the size of the site, or through a variance request or the use of a Planned Unit Development (PUD). Councilmembers should come prepared to discuss these elements and to provide direction about whether or not they would entertain a development similar to the one shown in the concept.

PLANNING COMMISSION FEEDBACK

The Planning Commission reviewed the concept plan at their April 17 meeting and asked questions regarding the following aspects of the proposal:

- What is the plan for the northwest remnant parcel?
The applicant indicated this would be retained for drainage and stormwater management as it is currently wet and unbuildable. It would not be developed further.
- What is the anticipated timing for the second phase?
The applicant stated that they would prefer to construct the entire project from start to finish without a break, but that the unknowns of the economy right now might require them to pause after the first phase is complete.

Members of the public also attended the Planning Commission meeting on April 17th and voiced their thoughts on the proposed project. Staff responses are provided in *italics*.

- Why does the City need more housing?
Anoka County completed a housing study in December 2023 which found a need for 173 additional rental units in St. Francis. This study can be found on the City's Community Development webpage. The revenue generated by the project would also help to address some of the financial issues the City is facing.
- Could townhomes or single-unit homes be proposed instead?
The applicant noted that given the cost to develop, the price of townhomes or single-unit homes would be exceptionally high. The market likely would not support townhomes or single-unit homes at that pricepoint. Higher density housing was planned for this area because it lends stronger support for the City's vision for Bridge Street as a downtown area. Housing near retail establishments is a symbiotic relationship, as those residents may work at and/or frequent the nearby businesses.
- Concerns about increases in traffic on Ambassador Blvd and Bridge St – will a traffic study be conducted?
Because Ambassador Blvd and Bridge Street are County roads, if an application is submitted, the City would work with Anoka County to determine if a traffic study and/or roadway improvements are needed to mitigate any safety risks. At this time, Anoka County does not anticipate any need for changes to the Ambassador Blvd/Bridge Street intersection. Increased traffic in this area may prompt updates to the intersection by the County. The proposed public street through the development facilitates longer term redevelopment of the parcels fronting on Ambassador Blvd and overall safety through the corridor by giving them the ability to reorient access points to the new local road and reduce driveway cuts on the County road.

- How will stormwater be managed?
Stormwater would be required to be mitigated on-site to prevent any runoff onto neighboring properties. By addressing stormwater ponding and improving grading on the site, this project is expected to aid in better drainage within surrounding properties.
- At four stories, the building is too tall and does not fit the character of the single-unit neighborhood.
The City's R-3 zoning district allows buildings up to 4 stories in height or 50 feet, whichever is less.
- Why were the trees removed at this point in the process? Will they be replaced if the apartment is not constructed?
The City had a window of time to remove trees related to the City's public roadway project on the site that avoided potential impacts to threatened species. Any development that is approved will need to comply with City tree and landscaping standards.
- How will snow storage and removal be handled?
The site will be required to address snow removal in the project design.
- How will kids be prevented from cutting through adjacent yards? Does the wetland present a danger to them? Does the stormwater pond need a fence around it?
This development would be subject to the same regulations for trespassing, wetlands, and stormwater ponding as any other development in the City. Wetlands and stormwater ponds exist on many residential parcels in the City with minimal safety issues – the same steps for protection would be taken here as are taken for all developments in the City.
- Amenities proposed for the project include a dog park and pickleball court. Why do we need two of these in town?
These amenities would serve the residents of the apartment complex and are separate from those that the City owns and operates. Private amenities are the choice of the developer and are not subject to approval by the City.

ACTION TO BE CONSIDERED

The City Council is requested to provide feedback to the applicant on the proposed concept. No motion is required. Comments shared are not binding on the City nor do they constitute official assurances or representations of the City on future recommendations or approvals. Council may wish to discuss the following topics at the meeting:

1. Project density/Comprehensive Plan land use guidance for the site
2. Lot area per unit
3. Parking requirements

ATTACHMENTS

- Concept Plan
- April 17, 2025 Planning Commission memo