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Amended Bailey Site Plan Gets City-Level Approval ^[1]

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By:

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Above: artist's drawing of a planned new three-story addition to the Bailey School

Hearing the concerns of the Bailey neighborhood with regard to its plans for redevelopment of the Bailey Community Center, the Capital Area Housing Partnership (CAHP) amended their site plan to some degree since last week, and on Tuesday night, East Lansing's City Council approved it in a 5-0 vote. CAHP is now planning to submit a federal-level funding proposal for the project.

The goal is to restore the historic exterior of the old Bailey school, replace a newer one-story addition with a three-story addition, and create low-traffic commercial space (possibly including a daycare) and 25 senior independent living rental apartments. Twenty of the apartments will be restricted to low-income seniors, and the project will need to win federal support to be completed.

Last Thursday, September 10, the earlier site plan was approved by the Historic District Commission. Some Bailey residents came to that meeting to express concerns about removing of play structures, going from a one-story to three-story addition on the east, and having low-income housing. Some expressed concern about how fast the project was moving?too fast, some thought, for all the necessary details to be worked out. Others questioned whether this was the optimal use of the property.

Responding to those neighborhood concerns, CAHP said in a letter ^[2] to the City, dated September 11, that the new site plan:

- eliminated the northern-most six parking spaces
- reduced the size of the new wing so that, instead of decreasing the adjoining park space by 6.75%, it will now be decreased by 6.3% (see an aerial map ^[3] to see how the park will be changed; the white line shows the current line between the park and building area, and the orange line shows the new line)
- removed a sidewalk planned for the north side, leaving a green space on the north side
- moved three spaces just east of a the largest maple tree near Bailey street further east, to give more space around the tree's base.

CAHP also said that it was unable to satisfy the wish expressed by neighbors of the project to eliminate all plans for north-side parking (the side that faces the park). CAHP says that the State Historic Preservation rules, plus the size of the proposed project, plus the likely mortgage lender's reading of the proposed project size, means CAHP has to have some parking on the north side.

According to a staff memo ^[4] on the matter, CAHP is "proposing to mitigate the impact on the park by contributing funds to the city toward the replacement of the small playscape." The memo also says, with regard to construction staging, that "CAHP intends to use the areas around the building for staging. However, the paved asphalt area may also be needed. If so, this may allow the asphalt to be removed as part of the construction project rather than by the city. Appropriate fencing and protection would be put in place." The City indicates it plans to repair and extend the park fence as necessary for this project.

During Council's meeting this week, Konrad Hittner, Chair of the Bailey Community Association (BAC), thanked CAHP and the City staff for working on the project proposal. He said the BAC supports the plan. They do want to see "in fairly short order" restoration of the park including the play structures and that they want to keep as much of the park as possible accessible to users during the construction. He said they were pleased with attempts to save the very mature maple and they accept the loss of other trees because their main concern is preservation of the Bailey school building.

At Council's meeting, Mark Meadows, who is currently moving his residence to Phoebe Lane from the Bailey neighborhood and who works with CAHP, thanked Council and the citizens for support of the Capital Area Housing Partnership's plan for redevelopment of the Bailey Community Center. He said that while it had moved quickly, he believed appropriate feedback, dialogue, and review had occurred. He defended the site plan before Council and said he is convinced "we are going to finance this project."

Council also decided, as part of their approval of the project, to require nothing additional to meet the "percent for art" requirement, a relatively new City ordinance ^[5] that requires large new developments to financially support public art. City staff said that this wouldn't create a precedent where other developers could get out of the "percent for art" requirement because this project is in the "community facilities district," i.e., is a publicly-owned property. Under the CAHP plan, the City will continue to own the property and will long-term lease the building to

CAHP. (Read more ^[6] about the lease.)

At this meeting Council also held a public hearing for draft Ordinance 1353 which created a 'service charge in lieu of taxes' for the CAHP project. As we previously reported, this aims to generate the equivalent of property taxes on the planned leasable space and five market-rate apartments. Staff estimates ^[7] this will be set around \$30,000 per year in total for 'the appropriate taxing jurisdictions,' and that the City would retain about \$9,000 of that per year. Council approved the Ordinance ^[8] in a 5-0 vote.

Mayor Pro Tem Diane Goddeeris said that some people who have come to her are unhappy with this plan. She said they thought there could be other uses of the property that could generate a greater income to the City. She said she thought for this site this was the best possible approach, even though it involved giving up tax revenue. Mayor Nathan Triplett said he had also hear from people unhappy with the plan but that he supported it.

Councilmember Susan Woods again called CAHP 'angels' for this plan. Triplett wished the group good luck with their funding proposal, which is due October 1 and required these City-level approvals.

Reminder: You can communicate with Council in person at its weekly meetings or write to Council directly at council@cityofeastlansing.com^[9]. You can speak or write on any issue involving the City, not only what is on the published agenda.

UPDATE: On Septemer 20, 2015, the sentence "Council also decided, as part of their approval of the project, to waive the 'percent for art' requirement..." was corrected to read "Council also decided, as part of their approval of the project, to require nothing additional to meet the 'percent for art' requirement..." becasue Coucil decided the project met the fine print of the ordinance.

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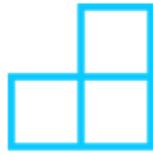
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