

BROOKFIELD

Bishops Woods workforce housing proposal narrowly approved

Common Council discusses affordable housing, future of development in city

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BROOKFIELD — After over an hour of discussion, the Brookfield Common Council last week passed three ordinances related to a mixed-use workforce housing project called the Flats at Bishops Woods over objections from neighbors and some aldermen.

Developers Lincoln Avenue Capital are proposing a four-story building with 203 one, two and three-bedroom apartment units. The proposal also includes eight live-work units, where residents can have a storefront or office attached to their apartments.

Currently occupied by two office buildings that the city has called obsolete, developers requested that the two lots at the southeast corner of Bishops Way and Bishops Lane be merged and rezoned to a Planned Development District (PDD), which is in association with their proposed redevelopment plans.

The Common Council approved the developer's preliminary concept map 8-6 at their meeting Tuesday, sharing differing viewpoints on what type of housing should be available in Brookfield and which stakeholders they should listen to.

Workforce housing

The proposal is for workforce apartments, or housing that is for people making between 40% and 80% of the Brookfield median income—between \$43,000 and \$86,000. Developers say this is necessary as rents continue to rise in Brookfield.

Alderman Christopher Blackburn did not support the project, saying that apartment buildings are essentially commercial buildings because they exist for someone else to make money off rents, unlike owner-occupied units, which are residential.

"Quite frankly, people who live in apartment buildings have rights too," Alderman Mike Hallquist said. "I don't like the sometimes majority framing that single-family home owners are the only people in this city."

But Alderman Kris Seals, who represents the district for which this project was proposed, compared this type of unit to a freebie.

"My concept to this is if you want to live in Brookfield like all of us that do live in Brookfield, you put your nose to the grindstone and live in Wauwatosa or West Allis and save that money until you can afford to live in Brookfield," Seals said.

At a public hearing in October, local business leaders and other area organizations supported the project, saying it was vital to Brookfield's economic future.

"The project would provide a supply of housing that accommodates a variety of income levels, age groups and household sizes, and would help to fulfill life cycle and local workforce housing options," said Nicole Ryt, executive director of the Waukesha County Center for Growth, at the meeting Tuesday.

Business interest vs. neighbor interest

Most neighbors oppose

the project, submitting a petition with over 100 signatures to the council. Dennis Russell spoke at the meeting on behalf of owners of the neighboring Bishops Grove Condominiums.

"Bishops Grove is a beautiful condominium project currently, and we hope we can keep it that way," he said.

Several aldermen said they support this project because they want to help businesses with staffing problems and want to keep Brookfield a premier business destination. However, others said the concern from neighbors should be considered more.

"I don't represent the Waukesha Business Alliance, the whatever businesses are saying they love this idea," Seals said. "I don't work for them. I work for the citizens of Brookfield and the citizens that I work for don't like this building the way it stands."

Neighbors' primary concern was the height and size of the building. According to city documents, the building is about 50 feet tall, but due to the slope of the land, the building appears taller looking from the east.

Other concerns include public safety, noise, traffic and infrastructure being overloaded.

"For many other reasons than just the size and the shape of the building, many of us oppose it for the stress on our community and also for safety reasons," said neighbor Peggy Hamill. "This size of a project and the intent for changing the makeup of our area is totally unacceptable."

City staff said that there will be no issues with the water supply or sewers and they don't anticipate traffic issues either, though a traffic analysis has not been completed.

Future of Brookfield

The council also discussed what type of development the city will see in its future and what type of development it should see.

City staff has maintained that this project is in line with the city's 2050 comprehensive plan, which calls for denser development in some areas.

"I thought that The Reserve (a nearby apartment building) was too big and... really diminished the quality of that portion of Bishops Woods... I thought that every one of these enormous apartment buildings was too big," Blackburn said.

He added that without a gridded street pattern and other changes in infrastructure, Brookfield can't support high density development.

"There's a reality that if you were to build out Brookfield to its capacity as planned now, that it still going to be a primarily single-family residential city, with a ration of 80-20%," Hallquist said. Most officials and residents agreed that they want to see this lot in Bishop's Woods developed, but some were concerned that if the city makes development too hard, developers will look elsewhere.