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September 13, 2019

RE: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

RE: Request of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy to amend Article XVII, District Map #1 of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 61 of the 1984 Detroit City Code to show a PR (Parks and Recreation District) zoning classification where a PCA (Public Center Adjacent District) zoning classification is currently shown for the properties generally bounded by West Jefferson Avenue on the north, Cabacier extended on the east, the Detroit River on the south, and Rosa Parks extended on the west and more commonly known as 1801 West Jefferson Avenue (**RECOMMEND APPROVAL**).

NATURE OF REQUEST

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is requesting to amend District Map No. 1 of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance to show a PR zoning classification where a PCA zoning classification is currently shown for the land commonly referred to as 1801 West Jefferson Ave.

In an effort to reinforce the proposal to redevelop West Riverfront Park, the Riverfront Conservancy seeks to rezone the subject property to the PR zoning classification described as follows: ¹“the intent of the Parks and Recreation District is to retain, insofar as is practicable and desirable, publicly owned lands in excess of four (4) acres in size already improved for or intended to be improved for recreational uses and/or to be preserved as open space. The restrictions of this classification are intended to encourage preservation of these lands and to permit development in keeping with the natural amenities of these areas.” The Conservancy is seeking to ensure the longevity of the subject space as a park by establishing a more suitable zoning district to protect this space as a park/open space for years to come.

‘Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park’ is planned as the new name of West Riverfront Park, a 22-acre site along the Detroit riverfront. The redeveloped park is part of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy’s overall vision to develop five-and-a-half miles of riverfront from the Ambassador Bridge on the west to Gabriel Richard Park, just east of the MacArthur Bridge leading to Belle Isle.

The major activities and spaces that will be included in this park are a beach/cove area, a play

¹ Per the zoning ordinance zoning classification description.

garden, sports canopy, picnic area and pavilion for food and beverages. 300 angled parking spaces along West Jefferson are proposed to support the park along with additional on and off-street parking in the surrounding area that the Conservancy has identified.



BACKGROUND

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park

²In October of 2018 the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation announced a \$200 million investment in parks and trails in Southeast Michigan and Western New York.

The gift was for the purpose of honoring the Foundation’s namesake, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr, on the 100th anniversary of his birth and celebrating his legacy in the communities he was most devoted to. The funds were split evenly, dedicating \$100 million to each region to help develop signature legacy parks, advance the vision of completed regional trail systems, and support the sustainability of the public spaces that were selected. Ralph C. Wilson was originally from Detroit, and he eventually ‘adopted’ the hometown of Buffalo, where he founded and owned the Buffalo Bills.

The Foundation provided support to the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy to lead a community-driven international design competition for the west riverfront. The Conservancy launched a

² As described on the Riverfront Conservancy website.

competitive selection process to identify the best design team of architects, engineers and specialty consultants. The process culminated with a design competition in which four finalist design teams comprised of national, international and local professionals created transformational design proposals for the park.

In February 2018, the four finalist design teams presented their work to the Conservancy and its jury. As a result of the international design competition, Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates (MVVA), a New York-based landscape architecture firm, was selected as the winning firm of the competition. Since this selection, the project team conducted a process to develop the park concept with input from the community through 2018 and 2019. The Conservancy has held more than 20 public meetings and created a Community Advisory Team of Detroiters who visited New York, Chicago and Philadelphia to bring back ideas for the future park.

The park will serve as an anchor to a larger, more extensive and regional greenway system, connecting to other parks and neighborhoods, encouraging access for all. The Foundation is also committing \$40 million for construction activity and \$10 million to support the broader efforts for long-term sustainability. Additionally, to help achieve the vision of a completed and connected regional trail system in both communities, the Foundation will invest \$50 million in trails in both Southeast Michigan and Western New York. For each, \$40 million will be allocated toward yet-to-be determined projects that close physical gaps in each region's trail systems and \$10 million will be designated toward helping operate and maintain the trails.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use

The zoning classification and land uses surrounding the full project subject area are as follows:

North: M4; Post Office and the Salvation Army
South: N/A; Detroit River
East: PCA; green space
West: M4; railroad property

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC HEARING RESULTS

The project team has listed numerous organizations that have been involved throughout this effort as well as public meetings that have been held. CPC staff members have attended a number of the public engagement meetings over the project term and have observed that this plan has been generally well accepted amongst the community, seemingly because the input from citizens has been incorporated into the design.

The entities that have been listed as having participated through this process along with the general public include:

Larchmont Community Association
Riverfront Towers Community Association
Cass Tech High School
Western High School
Cristo Rey High School
Buildings Sustainable Communities Coalition
The Salvation Army
U.S. Post Office

Canadian Pacific Railroad
Detroit Economic Growth Corporation
Bedrock

During the May 2, 2019 City Planning Commission public hearing, there were no speakers in reference to this matter.

ANALYSIS

According to Sec. 61-3-80 of the Zoning Ordinance, certain criteria must be met to facilitate the requested petition. The following are considered for a map amendment petition:

- (1) *Whether the proposed amendment corrects an error or meets the challenge of some changing condition, trend or fact;*

The proposed amendment does address a changing condition. The current site has existed as open space for some time, but has gone underutilized and not been maintained to the level that prime real estate along the Detroit riverfront is deserving of. Due to the level of investment that is now being concentrated into this property and the amount of community input that has been captured and included into the design and programming of the proposed park, it seems appropriate that this park should now be zoned to match its coming function, to ensure its long term success.

- (2) *Whether the proposed amendment is consistent with the Master Plan and the stated purposes of this Zoning Ordinance;*

The subject site is located within the Central Business District area of Neighborhood Cluster 4 of the Detroit Master Plan of Policies (MP). The Future Land Use map for this area shows Recreation (PRC) and Mixed-Residential Commercial (MRC) for the subject property. According to the Master Plan of Policies:

Recreation areas are typically over 10 acres in size and serve both active and passive recreational functions (e.g. playfields, special parks, picnic grounds). Recreation area status may also apply to certain waterfront areas (e.g. public wharfs) suited to marine- oriented or general recreational facilities.

Mixed Residential-Commercial areas consist predominantly of medium-to-high density housing developed compatibly with commercial and/or institutional uses. This classification is well suited to areas proximal to existing centers of major commercial activity, major thoroughfares, transportation nodes, or gateways into the city.

The Planning and Development Department has submitted a Master Plan (MP) Interpretation. The MP interpretation letter states the following:

“The proposed development and rezoning does not conform to the Future General Land Use designation for the majority of the site. The proposed use and zoning does follow two of the policies of the Master Plan. The rezoning is consistent with the Master Plan designation for approximately one third of the site, and we acknowledge that the vision has evolved for the remainder of the site. A Master Plan amendment is anticipated for the site, but does not appear necessary prior to the proposed rezoning.”

To summarize, a MP amendment is necessary for a portion of the subject site that currently has a MRC MP designation. The remaining swath of the subject property is already designated as Recreation. However, the proposed rezoning is not dependent on the MP determination preceding. The CPC and PDD are preparing to bring forth multiple MP amendments to this Honorable Body to update the MP based on changing conditions in several areas. A revision for the subject site will be one of those subsequent amendment requests.

(3) Whether the proposed amendment will protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public;

The proposed PR zoning district is “intended to be improved for recreational uses and/or to be preserved as open space. The restrictions of this classification are intended to encourage preservation of these lands and to permit development in keeping with the natural amenities of these areas.” For this reason, it is staff’s opinion that the zoning classification being proposed will help to ensure that this land remains parkland long term.

(4) Whether the City and other service providers will be able to provide adequate public facilities and services to the subject property, while maintaining adequate levels of service to existing development;

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy stated during the public hearing that it will maintain the park once developed from a variety of funding sources including an endowment, from fundraising and from regional government sources. The Conservancy currently maintains other riverfront assets and will budget to maintain this asset as the others it has maintained.

(5) Whether the proposed rezoning will have significant adverse impacts on the natural environment, including air, water, soil, wildlife, and vegetation and with respect to anticipated changes in noise and regarding stormwater management;

The subject proposal, is anticipated to have a positive impact on the surrounding environment by providing a world class park and access to the Detroit riverfront for the public.

(6) Whether the proposed amendment will have significant adverse impacts on other property that is in the vicinity of the subject tract;

It is expected that the proposed amendment will only serve to enhance the properties that surround it. The Conservancy has had discussions with the U.S. Post Office and other nearby stakeholders to ensure that they are all on one accord. To this point, CPC has not heard of any negative response.

(7) The suitability of the subject property for the existing zoning classification and proposed zoning classification; and

The proposed zoning classification would be considered more suitable for the property as CPC and the City, in general, are analyzing new opportunities to preserve open space to protect against development pressures.

(8) Whether the proposed rezoning will create an illegal “spot zone.”

The rezoning will not create an illegal spot zone as it is in itself 22 acres of land and appropriate for the proposed zoning classification.

RECOMMENDATION

The City Planning Commission, based upon the above review and analysis, voted to recommend **approval** of the subject map amendment request at its regular June 6, 2019 meeting.

Respectfully submitted,



Marcell R. Todd, Jr., Director
Kimani Jeffrey, City Planner

Attachment:
Ordinance
Plans

Cc: Katy Trudeau, Deputy Director, PDD
Karen Gage, Director of Zoning Innovation, PDD
David Bell, Director, BSEED
Lawrence T. Garcia, Corp. Counsel
Arthur Jemison, Chief of Infrastructure and Services
DRFC