

Developers of N. Lamar site getting ready to go

Zoning to pave way for retail, apartments when market turns

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A Houston developer is planning a five-acre project on North Lamar Boulevard that will include nearly 300 apartments and 13,000 square feet of ground-floor retail.

Camden Property Trust is first seeking to rezone the property at the northwest quadrant of North Lamar and West North Loop boulevards for vertical mixed-use, which requires at least two stories of residential units topping ground-floor commercial and a variety of pedestrian-oriented amenities. The project would redevelop a strip mall and some retail and warehouse space adjacent to single-family homes.

Houston-based Meeks and Partners has been tapped as the architect.

The company hasn't filed for site development permits and a construction time line is unknown, Camden's attorney Steve Metcalfe says, citing the uncertainty of the capital markets and the Austin apartment market.

But, he adds, "we want to go ahead and be proactive and position ourselves. If the capital markets change in the next six months, [the developer] may want to react."

Metcalfe says the developer began talking to the Brentwood neighborhood more than two years ago about potentially redeveloping the aging site. Camden waited until leases expired or some existing tenants could be relocated. It also drummed up significant neighborhood support, Metcalfe says.

Camden (NYSE: CPT) is one of the largest multifamily real estate investment trusts in the country, owning interests in and operating 179 properties with 62,421 apartments in 13 states. The company has 10 properties in Austin under development, operation or construction.

The Austin City Council is scheduled to consider the rezoning Nov. 20.

The city adopted vertical mixed-use zoning, or VMU, last year to encourage dense development in predominantly single-family neighborhoods. While about 30 neighborhoods have adopted an optional VMU zoning overlay for its core transit corridors — roughly 50 miles of highly trafficked arteries — and other in-fill areas, they've been slow to foster new development.

Because proposed VMU projects are often in the middle of single-family neighborhoods, they are sometimes quick to succumb to neighborhood opposition.

“There are a whole host of issues that we’re grappling with for [VMU] projects,” says George Adams, a city of Austin principal planner. Neighborhood sentiment “is a factor that can affect the viability of a project.”

Earlier this year a development team led by Capital City Partners’ Joe Lamy withdrew its request to rezone the Village Shopping Center in North Austin for VMU after residents expressed concern over rising traffic.

Also earlier this year, neighborhood concerns over compatibility — height restrictions within single-family neighborhoods — derailed plans for a VMU project with 250 apartments on the former Howard Nursery site on East Koenig Lane. Lacking widespread support from the North Loop community, Endeavor Real Estate Group dropped plans for the project.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin