

Understanding Density, Traffic, and Property Values

“As author Julie Campoli noted in her 2007 book, *Visualizing Density*, people tend to overestimate the density of monotonous, amenity-poor developments and underestimate the density of well-designed, attractive projects, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes.”

--The Urbanist Magazine, May 2017

To follow is a brief presentation helping to understand the density numbers associated with some typical city developments, to better equip the Shelbyville Board of Zoning Appeals in making a decision they believe is best for the town. An examination of increasingly dense mixes of building types yields a quick proficiency with the various mixes, in units per acre, and what they can become. **The project's proposed density is 24 units per acre.**

5-7 units per acre



The adjacent properties to the west of the site represent a typical single-family block. The Board is already familiar with how these neighborhoods look and feel.

13 units per acre



18 units per acre



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22 units per acre



35 units per acre



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The key takeaway from this study is that desirable homes depend on design, not density.

Traffic

Some citizens seem concerned with traffic implications on McKay Rd after these homes are occupied. Frequent congestion at school dropoff and pickup times have frustrated local residents. For those so aggrieved, this project presents some relief. Because students who live here can easily walk to school, there will be fewer vehicles plugging up the roads, as those who previously lived elsewhere and drove to school no longer need to use a vehicle.

Additionally, the City has already graciously planned improvements to the intersection at State Rd 9 and McKay Rd, which will also greatly alleviate the existing burden.

If these two circumstances do not sufficiently satisfy any concerns over traffic impacts, the Owner is willing to conduct a traffic study and incorporate its findings into the final design.

Property Values and Crime

The presence of apartments is not as significant as other variables influencing property values, but the build quality in comparison to surrounding housing can impact property values nearby. Well-constructed apartments tend to produce a slightly positive trend for adjacent owners, while the inverse is true as well. However, the US Census Bureau did find that working communities with multifamily dwellings actually have higher property values than those without.

What really affects property values are crime rate, location, size, age and condition. These are all very individual and beyond the scope of the hearing before the BZA.

According to Colliers (*Sept 11, 2019*), other myths about apartment development have been repeatedly debunked, such as the false notion that apartments bring higher crime rates (they are usually no higher per household than their single-family neighbors), the belief they are a burden on schools (there are actually much fewer children per household in apartments), and are difficult to construct/finance/occupy (banks actually see multifamily as a safer investment than single-family).

What about MY backyard?

Concern was also expressed that 3-story buildings could feel oppressive or out of place in the neighborhood. The density will be a worthwhile improvement on the large vacant lot.

Here is a google maps image looking southeast from the point shown below:



And this is a basic rendering, showing potential massing and height, from roughly the same point if the re-zoning and variance petitions are approved.



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More to the point, it's important to note that most surrounding homes are 200 feet or more from any of the structures, with the closest being 140 feet away.

Here is a cross section to demonstrate how the remoteness of the buildings leaves plenty of breathing room:



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Flooding and Infrastructure

An unfortunate misconception held by some residents is that this project will contribute to the existing drainage problems or clog up the sewer pipes.

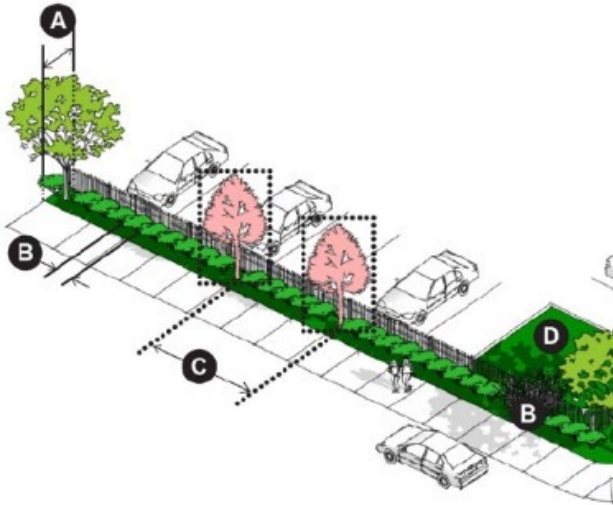
As the City Engineer can attest, this project will retain all of its own stormwater onsite, complete with approved quality treatment systems as required, thereby *diverting* some of the flow that would otherwise have burdened the existing ditch system.

It cannot solve the current flooding issues that plague some properties, but it will not aggravate them.

Visual Screening and Landscape Buffering

Many cities have developed standards for narrow landscape buffers because so much can be achieved even in a narrow dimension.

Here are some examples:



- A** The perimeter parking lot landscape area must be at least five feet in width with a minimum distance of two feet between the landscape area and any wheel stops.
- B** One shrub must be planted for every three linear feet, or a mix of shrubs, perennials, native grasses, and other planting types.
- C** A minimum of one shade tree must be provided every 50 linear feet. Two ornamental trees may be substituted for one shade tree.

