

## HEIRLOOM PROPERTIES – On Behalf of the Eilat Group LLC

Kaley Brown  
Whittier Alliance  
10 E 25th St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55404

May 23, 2022

Dear Kaley,

I appreciate your assistance over this past month to come before the Housing and Land Use Committee to present our project at 2542 Blaisdell Avenue. We are proposing a three-story 27-unit residential building on a currently vacant lot (which previous to 2019 held a duplex). The project consists of (7) one bedroom and (20) studio with bedroom alcove units. As residents of southwest Minneapolis, we are excited to provide additional, much needed, housing to this under-utilized lot.

### *About the Site and Surrounding Properties*

The lot at 2542 Blaisdell Avenue is approximately 78' x 165' and 12,866 square feet. The building will sit between two story office building at 2554 Blaisdell Avenue to the south and a four-story multifamily residential building to the north at 2530 Blaisdell Avenue. This building is set back from the street nearly 35' to accommodate a large, semi-circular vehicle driveway.

The site is zoned OR2 (Office Residential 2), which allows for a mix of office and residential uses, and is in the and is in the Interior 3 Built Form Overlay, which allows up to three and maximum of 42' feet. The required setbacks by code are 5' for the side and rear setbacks. The front setback standard by the Interior 3 zone is 20', but the actual allowed setback is determined by taking the average of the front setbacks of the immediately adjacent lots, which is approximately 25'. Due to the aforementioned deep setback of 2530 Blaisdell to support front vehicular access, in such a manner that is no longer encouraged or supported by the Minneapolis comprehensive plan, it pushes back the average front setback depth beyond what the current Interior 3 overlay district front setback guidance of 20'. Please see below for the variance we are requesting in relief of this incompatible site plan requirement. In addition, with the protected bicycle lane along the entire front face of the site, no on-street parking is allowed on the west side of Blaisdell Avenue.

### *About the Building*

The 27-unit plan includes one ground floor, ADA accessible unit, two studio units and an enclosed garage that contains 15 car parking spaces and 27 bicycle parking spaces. The second and third floors are of identical layout and include twelve units each. Outside of the building, along the alley, there is one loading parking space to allow for temporary parking by guests and delivery services due to the lack of on-street parking directly in front of the building because of the bike lanes.

The façade of the proposed building will brick along all stories of most of the front (east) elevation and the remaining elevations are largely composed of metal siding, with Nichiha porch area accents on the second and third floors. Metal shading devices both protect the south and west windows from summertime heat gain through the windows.

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The building has been pulled back from the alley on the west to allow for appropriate spacing from the overhead utility lines and for the aforementioned guest parking spaces on the ground level. Trash enclosures and the electrical transformer and its screening are combined together in the northwest corner of the site. Snow storage is allotted in the northwest and southwest corners of the site along the alley.

### *Land Use Application and Variance Request Summary*

The attached drawing set of the proposed three-story building complies with all of the current requirements of the OR2 zone and Interior 3 overlay, except for the front setback. We have proposed to utilize the Enclosed Parking FAR premium.

The front setback that would be nominally required by current zoning regulations is 25' and the Interior 3 standard is 20'. Following this would place the main massing of the building 33' from the sidewalk and only 13' from the alley. We are proposing a front setback of 20'-0" for the full three-story main massing of the building and 16' setback to the front of the one-story lobby. We have proposed this setback in consultation with adjacent property owners to maintain an appropriate rear offset from the alley. This will provide additional room for visiting and delivery vehicles who cannot park in the front on the front curb along Blaisdell Avenue due to the bicycle lane. This on-site access is crucial to allow space for vehicles to pull out of the alley and not block it for unauthorized temporary parking.

Feedback from the property owners also was overwhelmingly in favor of the parking provided in the building. While none is required in the project, vehicular parking space is at a premium on the block due to the lesser amounts of on-street parking (due to bike lanes). As we attempt to match the character of the neighborhood through a traditional brick and symmetrical front elevation, the adjacent property owners and Whittier Housing and Land Use committee have positively commented on support for the one-story lobby protrusion to enhance and center the front door of the building on the façade.

By keeping the main 3 story bulk of the massing at the Interior 3 Overlay setback of 20', the project meets the zone standard guidance while providing aesthetic enhancement to the front facade in a way that helps limit impact to neighboring properties at the rear/alley side of the building. The single story lobby that protrudes into the 20' overlay standard meets the allowed exception for such spaces, which is no greater than 75 SF. As such, the plan was designed as if the standard front setback was allowed as of right. Due to the additional 8' of right of way between the sidewalk and the front property line, there is considerable additional setback functionally provided beyond what is inside the property lines themselves. Thus, shifting the building forward is prudent, practical and more in line with the stated goals of the city.

The particular zoning language that stipulates the 25' averaged front setback requirement has not been updated since the adoption of the 2040 Minneapolis Comprehensive Plan and subsequent zoning ordinance amendments that followed to create the form overlay zone parameters. The stated policy goals of the Comprehensive Plan direct projects to prioritize the needs of humans and non-motorized vehicles over cars. As such, front curb cuts and on-site vehicular access is discouraged and/or no longer allowed. Therefore, existing conditions which perpetuate the previous car-oriented bias should not hold back new construction buildings which are attempting to meet current intent and ordinance

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requirements, as in the case of the proposed building. We have received verbal staff support for this variance request due to the conflicting nature of the current zoning ordinance language.

### *Proposed Schedule*

The Eilat Group LLC took ownership of the property in February 2022. We are submitting a land use application in May and anticipate that we will be before the Planning Commission in at the June 27 meeting. We anticipate a fall 2022 construction start and building opening in summer of 2023.

We look forward to returning to the Housing and Land Use Committee and Whittier Alliance Board in June to share more about the progress of this project.

Sincerely,

Jim Kumon  
Principal  
Heirloom Properties  
Managing Partner of Eilat Group LLC – Project Owner

### Attachments:

- Preliminary Site Plan, Floor and Elevation Package to Planning Commission
- Proposed Variance Justification Narrative