

Memorandum

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Izaak Peterson , Associate Planner
DATE: September 23, 2025
SUBJECT: 3470 Lexington Ave N- Site Plan Review, and Variance - BJ Baas Builders
ITEM NUMBER: 7.C
SECTION: NEW BUSINESS

REQUESTED MOTION

To approve resolution no. 25-70 for a reduced landscaping buffer along Harriet Ave for the property located at 3470 Lexington Ave N, and recommend city council approval of the submitted site and building plan application subject to the following conditions:

1. The project must be completed in accordance with the plans submitted with the variance application, and conditions set forth through this approval. Any significant changes to these plans, as determined by the Community Development Department, will require review and approval by the Planning Commission.
2. The proposed landscaping buffer setback shall be reduced to a minimum distance of 2 feet adjacent Harriet Ave right-of-way for the parking facilities, as proposed.
3. The applicant shall construct a stormwater BMP on the site within 12 months of permit issuance. The BMP installation shall be subject to the review and approval conditions of the city engineer.
4. The approvals will expire after one year if a permit has not been issued and work has not begun on the project.
5. This variance approval is subject to a five day appeal period. Once the appeal period expires, a permit may be issued for the proposed project. A land disturbance permit must be obtained before any construction activity begins.

These actions are based on the following findings of fact:

1. Practical difficulty is present as stated in Resolution 25-70.
2. The proposed front yard setback reduction is a reasonable use of the property in a reasonable manner that is allowed in the C1, Retail Service Zoning District.
3. The character of the neighborhood will not be adversely altered by the reduced landscaping yard reduction.

INTRODUCTION

BJ Baas Builders, on behalf of the property owner Bjork Ostrom, have submitted a site and building plan review application for the proposed expansion of a parking lot serving the Lexington Downs multi-tenant commercial building located at 3470 Lexington Ave N. The property has received feedback from his tenants indicating there is a lack of onsite parking which is negatively impacting the buildings located at Lexington Downs building. The

proposed parking lot expansion necessitates consideration of the following applications:

1. Site and Building Plan Review - Proposing new parking lot facilities on the property.
2. Variance - Proposing reduction of the required 20 foot landscaping setback for driveways and parking facilities adjacent right-of-way specified in [Sec 109-92\(b\)\(2\)](#), along Harriet Ave.

DISCUSSION

Site Description

The property is .59 acres in size, and contains frontage along two roadways - the abutted by Lexington Ave N to the west and Harriet Ave to the north. The property is zoned C1 - Retail Service District, and adjacent to C1 property to the south, and residentially zoned property within Arden Hills is located to the west (across Lexington Ave N).

The property is currently developed with the Lexington Downs multi-tenant commercial building which was constructed in 1986. The building is 5,169 sf in size, and contains five commercial tenant spaces. The site currently contains 24 onsite parking spaces, and 4 parking spaces granted by easement on the MAPE building property located immediately to the east at 3460 Lexington Ave N. The existing lot coverage of the property is 69.5 percent of the total lot area.

DEVELOPMENT CODE REQUIREMENTS

Comprehensive Plan & Zoning

The Comprehensive Plan designates this property for commercial use within the [future land use map](#). This designation is intended for a variety of service, office, restaurant, and retail uses ranging in intensity from those that serve the immediate neighborhood to those whose patrons come from outside of the community. The site is currently zoned within the C1 Commercial District, which is consistent with future land use guidance.

Development code [Sec 109-92\(b\)\(2\)](#) necessitates that driveways and parking areas be buffered with a landscaped with a buffer area of 20 feet from any street right-of-way. With respect to parking, [Sec 109-93\(1\)\(a\)](#) requires C1 zoned properties to provide a ratio of 5.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet of net floor area.

Variance Review Criteria

Per [Sec 103-163](#), when considering a variance request, the commission must determine whether the ordinance causes the property owner practical difficulty and find that granting the variances is in keeping with the spirit and intent of the ordinance. Practical difficulty is defined as:

1. *Reasonable manner*. The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the city development regulations.
2. *Unique circumstances*. The plight of the property owner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the property owner.
3. *Character of neighborhood*. The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.

STAFF REVIEW

Site & Building Plan

Setbacks

The six proposed parking lots and associated driveway to access the spaces is located within the 20-foot landscaping setback required by [Sec 109-92\(b\)\(2\)](#) , as measured from the Harriet Ave right-of-way to the north. The parking spaces are proposed 2 feet from the Harriet Ave right-of-way. As a result, variance consideration required.

Parking

The sites building facility contains a net floor area of 5,169 square feet. Based on that square footage, [Sec 109-93\(1\)\(a\)](#) requires that 28 parking spaces be provided. The property currently contains 24 onsite parking spaces, with an additional four spaces available by easement on the abutting property to the east. The site plan proposes to construct six new parking spaces, losing one existing space to accommodate a drive aisle. The proposed site plan would bring the onsite parking into compliance with 29 total onsite parking spaces, and retain the four existing parking spaces granted by parking easement.

The proposed parking spaces are shown as 45 degree angled parking, 9 by 18 feet in size and a drive aisle width of 14 feet, which is compliant with the requirements of [Sec 109-92](#).

Impervious Lot Coverage

Within the C1 District impervious lot coverages up to 70 percent of the total lot area are permitted. Maximum lot coverage may be increased to 75 percent if best management practice (BMP) measures are taken to minimize negative effects on the environment as documented in the current editions of Minnesota Construction Site Erosion and Sediment Control Planning Handbook (MBWSR) and Protecting Water Quality in Urban Areas (MPCA). The proposed lot coverage of the site is 74.3 percent of the total lot area. As a result BMP implementation measures may be permitted, and are required.

Variance

Staff has reviewed the proposed landscaping buffer variance request in accordance with the variance criteria. Upon review, staff believes that a practical difficulty is present:

1. *Reasonable Manner*. The application proposes a variance request to construct driveway and parking facilities. Driveway and parking facilities to accommodate commercial uses are permitted uses of the property.
2. *Unique Circumstances*. The property was approved in 1986 allowing 24 onsite parking spaces, and 4 offsite parking spaces to fulfill the minimum parking requirements of the code. The site generally meets the minimum parking requirements of the city code for a commercially zoned property given the four offsite spaces, however, the onsite parking demand of the commercial businesses occupying the property currently exceeds the development condition previously approved by the city. In order to meet or exceed the 28 parking spaces required by the development code onsite given the approved commercial space, encroachment within the required 20 foot landscaping area would be necessary. Staff believes that these competing development code requirements constitute a unique circumstance, necessitating the proposed variance request.
3. *Character of Neighborhood*. Staff does not believe that the proposed encroachment of the parking facilities would adversely impact the character of the neighborhood. The commercial property immediately east of the site has a reduced landscape buffer setback of 6 feet along Harriet Ave. In addition, staff believe that onsite parking expansion on the site would benefit the character of the immediate residential neighborhood, and mitigate on-street parking for the commercial businesses which would otherwise be permitted.

Agency Comment

The proposed plans have been distributed within affected city department and government agency review. The City Engineer has indicated that an onsite rain garden constructed with the parking improvements, would be a viable means to satisfy BMP requirements given the sites proposed impervious coverage.

Ramsey County has indicated that any impacts proposed to the Lexington Ave N right-of-way will necessitate review and approval by the county. None are proposed through the application.

The Rice Creek Watershed District has indicated that, based on the size of the project, a Watershed District permit would not be required. The District is also coordinating with the applicant, to evaluate potential design and grant funding assistance in constructing a rain garden BMP on the site.

Public Comment

Notice of the proposed applications was mailed to affected property owners within 150 feet of the site. At the time of this report, no comments have been received.

RECOMMENDATION

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The site plan and variance applications have been reviewed in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan and Development Code. Staff believe the proposed parking lot expansion is consistent with the requirements of the Development Code, and associated variance review criteria. Staff is recommending the planning commission approve resolution no. 25-70, for the requested variance, and recommend city council approval of the submitted site plan application subject to the following conditions:

1. The project must be completed in accordance with the plans submitted with the variance application, and conditions set forth through this approval. Any significant changes to these plans, as determined by the Community Development Department, will require review and approval by the Planning Commission.
2. The proposed landscaping buffer setback shall be reduced to a minimum distance of 2 feet adjacent Harriet Ave right-of-way for the parking facilities, as proposed.
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These actions are based on the following findings of fact:

1. Practical difficulty is present as stated in Resolution 25-70.
2. The proposed front yard setback reduction is a reasonable use of the property in a reasonable manner that is allowed in the C1, Retail Service District.
3. The character of the neighborhood will not be adversely altered by the reduced landscaping yard reduction.

ATTACHMENTS

Location Map

Applicant Narrative

Proposed Site Plan

Draft Resolution No. 25-70