

DATE: April 5, 2012

TO: Chairman and Members,
Norman Planning Commission

FROM: Doug Koscinski, AICP
Manager, Current Planning Division

SUBJECT: Special Planning Area 9

BACKGROUND Elsey Partners, a potential applicant for a future rezoning request for a large student-oriented apartment project, has submitted a request to amend the Norman 2025 Land Use Plan and create a new Special Planning Area that would authorize the area to be used for a very high density residential development. Should the plan amendment be approved, they will proceed with filing a complete rezoning application for a Planned Unit Development that will detail the specifics of their proposed project. The location for this Special Planning Area is the entire block between Boyd Street and McCullough Street, from Monnett Avenue to the BNSF railroad right-of-way, although their current ownership only involves a majority of that block.

DISCUSSION Norman's current zoning ordinance does not have an existing category that allows extremely high residential densities with coverage factors that leave little private open space. This request is the fourth potential request that staff is aware of for a very high density development, which can only be accommodated either as a Mixed Use zoning, a Special Use within several commercial categories, or under the Planned Unit Development process. The applicant has provided some suggestions for criteria to be included within this Special Planning Area, which staff has amplified. Their proposed language and staff's draft of the criteria for a new Special Planning Area are attached. Special Planning Areas must be implemented by the PUD process, in conformance with the criteria outlined in the SPA.

As the University's enrollment continues to grow, the market has responded by trying to acquire sites that are convenient to the campus and large enough to develop projects that are efficient in size and financially viable. No new complexes have been constructed in the immediate vicinity of the main campus, but instead apartment complexes have been constructed in more suburban locations away from the campus, often near established single-family areas. Several of these recent initiatives have embraced what they interpret as "New Urbanist" principles, which call for much higher densities in close proximity to services or destinations that would encourage pedestrian movements or take advantage of the availability of mass transit, rather than a historic reliance on automobiles as the primary means of movement. Staff believes that the area east of the main campus is a logical possibility for such developments,

and carries forward the idea proposed by the 401 Loft project, immediately across the tracks east of this block.

The items outlined in staff's proposed language (Exhibit B attached) include the following criteria:

- Density of approximately 100 units per acre (the latest Elsey proposal that had a pre-development hearing requested 163 units per acre)
- Private open spaces that focus on courtyards and amenities rather than large park-like areas common in more suburban locations
- Six story buildings
- Adequate, but limited, parking to encourage walking rather than using automobiles
- Reduced setbacks that insist that new buildings come forward to the property line (to encourage a sense of "public place") but with pedestrian amenities
- High quality design, with the inclusion of human-scale elements such as awnings, balconies, and plazas, accompanied by much wider sidewalks with enhanced landscaping

RECOMMENDATION Norman's zoning ordinance reflects a suburban bias, as that has been our historic development pattern. While the 2025 Plan hints at encouraging infill development and redevelopment in core areas, it provides very little actual guidance on the specifics to make projects like this happen. One of the key questions is "how much density" is appropriate without the projects overwhelming the remaining neighbors, as well as the additional parameters that help mitigate that density (design, landscaping, amenities, parking, traffic improvements, etc.). Staff recommends that there be a broader discussion on the issue of high density to include the City Council, Planning Commission, and other public that need to be included in the discussion.