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DJJC

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Sam Tenney/DJC
Jack Menashe, president of Ruben J. Menashe Inc., is hoping to break ground this summer on a 76-unit multifamily apartment building on North Williams Avenue. Plans for the project have been revised more than once after members of the Boise Neighborhood Association voiced concerns about the building's size.

North Williams project tries to find middle ground

Jack Menashe is ready to break ground on multifamily building, but some neighbors concerned about size

BY LEE FEHRENBACHER
lee.fehrenbacher@djcOregon.com

Growing up is hard to do, especially when it comes to neighborhoods and development.

Ruben J. Menashe Inc. wants to break ground in June on a 76-unit, 78,000-square-foot multifamily apartment on

North Williams Avenue. The developer is striving for a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design gold rating, and plans to include 108 bike parking spaces as well as an automated car-stacking system able to accommodate 62 vehicles.

But even though the company and neighborhood residents have spent the

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Williams: Original project called for 97 units

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past year trying to compromise on aspects of the project, some people remain concerned that the building won't fit in with the single-family profile of the area.

Ted Buehler the land use and planning committee chairman for the Boise Neighborhood Association, said in an email that the developer has made changes to the project since it was introduced a year ago, but residents are still not pleased due to major quality-of-life impacts that result from a multistory building overlooking single-family homes.

At the heart of the disagreement is an apparent disconnect between what residents want and what the neighborhood's zoning will allow. Much of the North Williams corridor is zoned EX(d), which is intended to promote employment for industrial- and service-oriented businesses in centralized locations. It also allows for large, multifamily projects next door to single-family homes.

Eden Dabbs, spokesperson for the city's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, said the Ex(d) zone comes from the Lower Albina Plan, which was adopted some 20 years ago. The zoning was intended to be flexible to enable employment but also allow housing. She said the market, however, has been responding with 100 percent residential development, which was not originally anticipated.

Eric Engstrom, principal planner for the BPS, said while housing is an important component for promoting employment in the central city, planners need to revisit height restrictions adjacent to single-family residential properties. He said planners will likely decouple height maps from zoning in order to tailor heights more carefully in the future.

"Where are the places where it makes sense to have greater height and bulk, and where are the places where you want to step down into



Courtesy of
LRS Architects
The 78,000-
square-foot
Mason-Williams
will have 45 one-
bedroom, 27 two-
bedroom and four
studio apartments.

the community?" Engstrom said. "It makes sense right now to take a look at what's happening on mixed-use corridors in general, and especially some of the inner corridors that are experiencing a lot of development."

Jack Menashe, president of Ruben J. Menashe, said his company has revised and downgraded its plans more than once based on neighborhood comments.

The original project called for a four-story, 97-unit building. Neighbors expressed concern about the mass of the building, which stretched more than 300 feet along North Williams. So, Menashe had the project's designer, LRS Architects, break the building up into two, five-story facades with 84 units.

When neighbors took issue with the resulting increase in height, Menashe says his company took the building back down to four stories with 76 units, and then tried to stair-step the building at the corners that were closest to the street.

But the neighbors still weren't satisfied, Buehler said. They decided to appeal the project to the city's Design Review Commission, but missed the deadline by a day due to a communication breakdown on the part of the association, according to Buehler.

Now, Menashe plans to file for a building permit in early March.

The Mason-Williams will fulfill the city's employment goal with approximately 6,900-square-feet of retail and commercial space on the ground floor. For Menashe, the building's automated car-stacking feature is one of the highlights of the project.

"It's extremely efficient without having to dig a big hole," he said. "It requires less construction, it's more environmentally friendly (and) it's an excellent solution to the parking woes ... You can leave your car there if you ride your bike to work or use transit. Lots of people still have cars, but they may not use them every day."

A recent survey by David Evans and Associates Inc., a Portland-based planning and consulting firm, revealed that approximately 72 percent of queried city renters owned cars, but only 8 percent used them to commute. That dynamic creates a significant demand for parking – a major source of contention in the Portland debate over new apartment projects that don't include it.

The technology Menashe will install uses a massive, vending-machine-like shelving system to stack the cars. He likes to think of it as an "auto" archive, and says it could be a viable option for small

infill projects that can't afford underground parking. The system will cost \$20,000 per parking space; underground parking costs typically run from \$35,000 to \$40,000 per space.

The Mason-Williams will be just one of a handful of projects in Portland to include an automated parking system in a zone that doesn't call for any parking at all. One is The Albert, a 72-unit apartment complex that Ruben J. Menashe recently built just two blocks south of the Mason-Williams site.

That project encountered many of the same objections from the neighborhood association.

According to Buehler, neighbors appreciate Menashe's concessions and the association is not opposed to development.

But Diana Moosman, a principal at Diana Moosman Architect, said she took issue with the lack of transitional zoning between high-density and residential designations. Moosman's offices are located across the street from the future development.

She also doesn't approve of the project's use of an exterior material she identified as HardiePlank because she believes it to be short-lived.

"I think the big piece is that these commercial buildings are going to be here for 50 years plus," Moos-

man said. "And they're large, and the quality you see in the Northwest or Southeast; I think the Northeast deserves that (as well)."

Moosman has development plans of her own, and is working to build a two-story office building nearby the Mason-Williams project. She intends to use a thermally modified wood siding, which is cooked at very high temperatures to remove the sugars that cause rotting. The project will not include parking.

Menashe said the Mason-Williams building will include high-quality materials. He said he is not using HardiePlank, but rather two materials called NichiPanel and Artisan Premier Lap Siding. Both of the latter materials, he said, are superior to HardiePlank. Also, the ground floor level will have a brick façade like many new projects in the Northwest and Southeast.

For those reasons, Menashe does not agree with Moosman's sentiments for his project, and thinks the time is right for it to move forward.

"As traffic continues to be a problem, people are focused much more on pedestrian friendly neighborhoods," he said. "And certainly Williams is one ... All the close-in neighborhoods are getting a huge resurgence because of that."