

ST. PAUL

Single-family houses are back in the mix for St. Paul's Ford site

Council vote shows split over riverfront homes.

By James Walsh (<http://www.startribune.com/james-walsh/10646161/>) Star Tribune |

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Single-family houses along Mississippi River Boulevard could be allowed at the Ford site after a divided City Council agreed Wednesday to the developer's requests to alter the site's master zoning plan.

Ryan Cos., the site's developer, wants to build 35 single-family houses along the river, some of the nearly 3,800 units of housing it intends to build.

The city's planning commission, while agreeing with most of the changes Ryan wants, earlier this month [rejected the request to allow single-family houses](http://www.startribune.com/st-paul-planners-reject-single-family-homes-in-ford-project/506882272/) (<http://www.startribune.com/st-paul-planners-reject-single-family-homes-in-ford-project/506882272/>) in the interest of housing more people on that land. Council Member Chris Tolbert, who represents Highland Park, introduced the amendment that puts single-family houses back on the table.

"Overall, I think the changes they want are very reasonable and fit within framework of what we want," he said.

Tolbert was joined by Council President Amy Brendmoen and Council Members Kassim Busuri and Jane Prince in voting for the amendment. Council members Rebecca Noecker and Mitra Jalali Nelson voted against it, saying they support the master plan's goal of increasing residential access to the river at the Ford site.

The council's action Wednesday wasn't the final vote. A public hearing on the amended zoning plan is scheduled for April 3, with the City Council likely to vote on it a week or two later.

Still to come for the City Council will be deciding what financial commitment it plans to make to the development. Ryan is asking for more than \$107 million in public financing, money that would go toward infrastructure, green space and 760 units of affordable housing.

The city's master plan for the Ford site, approved in September 2017, envisions a modern urban, mixed-use development. It lays out a street grid and zoning rules that determine where housing and commercial space can be built. The master plan currently calls for multifamily housing along that stretch of Mississippi River Boulevard.

For years, city officials worked under the assumption that Ford did not want single-family houses to be part of any redevelopment. But that changed after Ford chose Ryan as the developer.

While Ryan's proposal hews closely to the master plan, and single-family houses are just a sliver of the nearly 3,800 units of housing Ryan said it will build, those river-view houses make up an important element. Ryan will probably build them first and sell them fast, and they'd spur additional interest in the rest of the site, company officials have said.

Ryan proposed 32 amendments in all, including a small increase in commercial parking and building row houses on the west side of a [restored stream that's expected to be a centerpiece](http://www.startribune.com/restored-stream-to-be-central-feature-of-ford-redevelopment/499507121/) (<http://www.startribune.com/restored-stream-to-be-central-feature-of-ford-redevelopment/499507121/>) of the 122-acre development.

James Walsh is a reporter covering St. Paul and its neighborhoods. He has had myriad assignments in nearly 30 years at the Star Tribune, including federal courts and St. Paul schools.

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RYAN COS.

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