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Ardent has plans to redevelop apartments in Central Austin

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A plan to redevelop an aging apartment complex in North Central Austin is getting under way.

Ardent Residential wants to spend more than \$30 million to demolish the 140-unit Bull Creek Apartments built in 1968 and construct a new complex of up to 250 units.

The proposal for the 4-acre site bordered by Bull Creek Boulevard and 44th Street calls for four-story apartment buildings with an attached four or five-story garage.

The plan received preliminary approval from the city's Zoning and Platting Commission earlier this month and heads to the city council for a final decision on Aug. 31.

The increased density of the proposed project requires a zoning change. Ardent is asking the city to rezone the property from MF-4 to MF-6 with a conditional overlay that would increase the amount of space the company can build on the site. The measure passed the ZAP Commission by a vote of 6 to 3.

"We see this as an opportunity to take a dated product and redevelop that into a greater-density product in our urban core," says Brett Denton, principal with Ardent Residential. If approved, Denton anticipates a construction start on the 18-month project sometime next summer.

Bury + Partners is handling the civil engineering on the project. Ardent has not yet selected an architect.

Denton and partner Art Carpenter formed Ardent Residential last year.

The company is already teamed up with **Post Properties Inc.** on the 35-story Four Seasons Residences at San Jacinto Plaza. That long-awaited project is expected to break ground in the second quarter of 2007.

The proposal to redevelop the Bull Creek Apartments has met with questions from area residents, but Denton says Ardent has had a productive dialogue with neighborhood groups throughout the process.

"We've listened to the various concerns that the neighborhood has listed and we've tried to address the items that they conveyed to us as being important," he says.

Ardent has agreed to restrict the building height to 60 feet. That's the maximum under the current zoning but 30 feet less than the proposed change. At the request of area residents, the developer will also increase the buildings' street setbacks to 25 feet instead of 15 feet, and make the entrance to the complex on Bull Creek Road instead of 44th Street where there are more single-family homes.

Tom Whatley, president of the Oakmont Heights Neighborhood Association, says his group's top priority is to preserve the single-family residential character of the area. Although the association has reservations about increasing the density adjacent to 44th Street, Ardent has agreed to a set of conditions and shown a willingness to listen to neighborhood concerns, he says.

"Despite our reservations, we want to work with this developer and are not opposing the proposed zoning change," he says.

Denton says that while Ardent looks for urban infill opportunities in the heart of the city, such projects do pose challenges. Factors such as land cost, zoning challenges and construction costs can make it more difficult to find sites that are ripe for redevelopment, he says.

Regarding final approval from the city council, Denton says he's optimistic.

"We certainly don't take anything for granted. But we are hopeful that the council will see the merits of what we're proposing with this development," he says.

Councilman Brewster McCracken says the Bull Creek project is a good example of the type of development Austin needs as it grows.

"They are proposing more density within the existing building envelope, and we should encourage that," he says.

McCracken says recent zoning changes that make it easier to get approval for tall mixed-use projects near the city's core should be considered for multifamily projects as well.

"If we were applying the same standards to multifamily developments, we wouldn't have a zoning case here," he says. "We need to look at modernizing our zoning code."

amistretta@bizjournals.com | (512) 494-2519