

Density issue holds up Mather plans

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Mather LifeWays officials inched forward Tuesday night in their bid for zoning changes to allow the building of two new facilities for older adults.

But several members of the City Council's Planning and Development Committee, while indicating they appreciated aspects of the plan, joined neighbors in voicing concerns about the density of the development and the placement of the proposed 10-story buildings so close to Davis Street. The buildings would replace the existing Mather Gardens, 1615 Hinman Ave., and Georgian, 422 Davis St.

"I think if we are trying to avoid the canyon effect, we need to have some setback on the Davis side," said Alderman Lionel Jean-Baptiste, Second Ward, in council members' opening discussion of the issue after extensive testimony.

Alderman Steven J. Bernstein, Fourth Ward, said aldermen must look at the project as a whole.

"I'm very concerned what I perceive as extensive walls along Davis Street," he said.

Alderman Melissa A. Wynne, Third Ward, raised the example of the Dubin project on South Boulevard, in her ward, where the buildings set right up to the street "and that's a three-story building," she said. "We don't have anywhere in the city where two 10-story buildings are so close together.

Concerned about Davis

"I'm very concerned about keeping Davis Street more open than it is," she said.

Mather officials indicated they would look at their plans and see whether any revisions could be made that would affect the setbacks, and also density, which also concerns some aldermen.

Mather is proposing to build 309 units in all, compared to the 172 that current zoning allows. The not-for-profit organization is seeking 17 zoning variations, including changes in height, setback and lot coverage.

Committee members agreed to place the full Mather plan, except for areas of concern, on the council's Feb. 13, moving forward the long-standing issue. Aldermen also are to resume discussion of the issues at Feb. 13 Planning and Development Committee meeting that precedes the City Council session.