



City of Aurora

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Legistar History Report

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File Name: Fox River House LLC / Galena Hotel / 116 W. Galena Boulevard / CUPD

Final Action:

Title: An Ordinance Establishing a Conditional Use Planned Development and Approving the Galena Hotel Plan Description for the property located at 116 W. Galena Boulevard (Fox River House LLC - 25-0004 / AU22/3-24.509 - CUPD - JM - Ward 6) (PUBLIC HEARING)

Notes:

Sponsors:

Enactment Date:

Attachments: Exhibit "A" Legal Description - 2025-01-02 - 2024.509, Exhibit "B" Plan Description - 2024-12-26 - 2024.509, Presentation - 2025-01-06 - 2024.509, CUPD Findings of Fact Sheet - 2025-01-02 - 2024.509, Land Use Petition and Supporting Documents - 2024-11-13 - 2024.509, Plat of Survey - 2024-11-13 - 2024.509, Floor Plans & Elevations - 2024-12-26 - 2024.509, Parking Memo - 2024-12-26 - 2024.509, Information on Micro Units - 2024-12-26 - 2024.509

Enactment Number:

Planning Case #: AU22/3-24.509 - CUPD

Hearing Date:

Drafter: JMorgan@aurora-il.org

Effective Date:

History of Legislative File

Ver- sion:	Acting Body:	Date:	Action:	Sent To:	Due Date:	Return Date:	Result:
1	Planning and Zoning Commission	01/08/2025	Forwarded	Building, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee	01/15/2025		Pass
Action Text: A motion was made by Mr. Chambers, seconded by Mrs. Martinez, that this agenda item be Forwarded to the Building, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee, on the agenda for 1/15/2025. The motion carried.							
Notes: Mrs. Morgan said good afternoon, Jill Morgan, Senior Planner. Let me just bring up the presentation. The Petitioner, Fox River House LLC, is requesting establishment of a Conditional Use Planned Development which includes a Plan Description to allow for the development of 21 micro units. The Subject Property is currently vacant with a Downtown Core zoning district. The details of the request							

include a Plan Description to allow residential on the first floor and to permit small units with a minimum of 220 square feet. The project includes redeveloping the historic Galena Hotel. The building was opened as the Fox River House in 1862 and was also known as the Huntoon House after its original builder and operator, E. D. Huntoon. The building has operated as other various hotels from 1862 until present day.

The current plan is to redevelop the building into 21 micro units ranging in size from 260 square feet to 550 square feet. The image shown here is the rendering of the front façade. I will also show you the drawing of the rear elevation.

The first floor will have 5 units including converting the existing lobby into a new apartment. The second and third floors will contain 7 units each, and then 2 larger units on the fourth floor. The only major change to the building is this rear elevation. It's a rear brick elevator addition and new rear stairwell. The developers worked with the City and the State Historic Preservation Office because they are using Historic Preservation tax credits for the project to position these changes to have the least impact on the historic building. And the changes to the exteriors were just approved by the Design Review Committee at the earlier meeting at 6 o'clock.

The new metal enclosure...there will be a new metal enclosure around the HVAC and mechanical units and that will match the other metal enclosures you see throughout the downtown. The interior will be mostly reconfigured but the center stairwell corridors, one of the building's most...only really significant interior feature will be retained and restored.

Staff worked with the developers early on in the process to better understand micro units. Micro units provide...they are small units, as the name suggests...they provide affordability for residents desiring to live in urban areas providing convenient access to jobs, public transportation, amenities, and entertainment. Typically, they also have...they've been shown with some of articles and information the developer provided, to have occupancy rates higher than other rental apartment types. They also have premiums of 25% to 100% per square foot compared to the larger units, they're sustainable, and they are kind of a new housing type for Aurora so the developers feel that it's something that will be unique bringing to Aurora.

The Petitioners have a presentation. Is there any questions for Staff before I bring them up?

Chairman Pilmer said questions of Staff?

Mr. Pickens said I have one.

Chairman Pilmer said go ahead.

Mr. Pickens said the historic...it's registered as a historical building...

Mrs. Morgan said yes.

Mr. Pickens said there is a whole new set of rules when that happens, right? Where the building has to pretty well match the original intent of the building. By adding the screens around the air conditioners; that is acceptable? And the elevator in the back, the enclosure; would that probably would need to be match the existing building, at least the brick?

Mrs. Morgan said yeah, so it will...you are correct. This is on the National Register; this is also locally within the FoxWalk Historic District. So, the Design Review Committee has approved it for our local regulations on historic buildings in the downtown. And since it's on the National Register and they're using Preservation Tax Credits, they have to go through the State Historic Preservation Office for all these changes. So, the State already has approved initially...they're still working through the details...but the initial concept. So, it will have to be brick to kind of match the historic building. They worked...the developer has worked really closely with the State Preservation Office and the Department that deals with ADA compliance...I can't think of what the name is...on the height of that rear addition. Originally, it was going to be a little taller, but they were able to work with the State Office to make it shorter, so it doesn't impact the visibility.

Mr. Pickens said and then I got a question regarding the fire escapes. I understand the one on the... I guess you would call it the east elevation, the existing one...that's not part of the registration or the certified registered...from what I read somewhere, and I hate outside fire escapes. I'll get that out right now. So, if that's a fact that it's not part of the register, I'd like to see it disappear and along with the one that they're adding in the back and put an enclosed stairway with the matching brick instead. They've already got the foundation for the stair that enters into the basement, so extend that foundation a little bit more, work it into the elevator, and you got you know your elevator and stair enclosure.

Mrs. Morgan said I think the developer can probably answer some more details on that. From my understanding, yes, the existing stair fire escape is not considered a contributing feature to the building because it predates it. It is existing. I think we tried to also work a way with not having it, but because of ingress and egress and all those code requirements, it had to be retained. And as far as the exterior, actually the SHPA will often, from my understanding with them, likes exterior staircases maybe better than adding a full enclosure because it provides...it's less of an impact to the historic building. You're not enclosing the whole kind of rear portion. You can still kind of see the historic building better. And it kind of looks like a historic...I mean, historic balconies and fire escapes are historic, and they sort of kind of reflects that more than a new build addition would. So, I would assume the SHPA would not want that enclosed.

Mr. Pickens said okay.

Chairman Pilmer said I just had a question on parking. So, I saw where it's not required but they'll have access to City lots and the City parking requirements are in the package.

Mrs. Morgan said correct. So, being the Downtown Core, there is no parking requirement. We do ask for a parking plan. So, there is the outline kind of all the existing parking lots. There is also, once the Casino moves out, there will be an additional parking garage. And I'm...they can work with the City will be owner of that and work with the City on using that as well.

Chairman Pilmer said any other questions of Staff? If the Petitioner would like to come forward, I'll swear you in and I think you've got a brief presentation. Good evening. If you could just raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Mr. Barrera said I do.

Chairman Pilmer said thank you. If you'll just state your name and address for the record.

Mr. Barrera said yeah, Fernando Barrera, 1180 Trask Street, Aurora, Illinois.

So, I'm the developer redeveloping 116 West Galena commonly known as the old Galena Hotel. I do have a presentation, however...I have a small presentation, but I think...do you mind going back to your...to my presentation? Sorry.

So, the first slide shows a rendering of the after look, right after the renovation. The plan is to keep the staircase, you know, refurbish the exterior staircase on the west side of the building. And the goal would be to transform the building. It was known as a hotel, but some consider it a lodging house and so forth and the purpose would be to redevelop it into 21 micro units, each unit having its own kitchen, its own bathroom, but still keeping the historic integrity of the building with the trim, with the windows, with the corridors, and with the staircase.

Another before and after pic.

Here's a rendering and concept of the rear elevation of the building. So, we did have to put in an elevator. Originally, the plan was to put it inside however just the numbers did not work. We would lose a lot of units, making the interior elevator. SHPA did let us put an exterior elevator so we figured this would be the best plan. Originally, the elevator was going to go on the east side of the building however SHPA did not allow us to put the elevator on the east side of the building. So, we figure the rear elevation would be the best side to put it.

Mr. Pickens said does that elevator have access to the basement as well?

Mr. Barrera said it will not access the basement. And another key point to that; it will only go to the third floor.

So, before and after pics: this would be a room prior to my ownership that would be rented out. So, I took over the building in 2023 and here I have a good rendering of...this rendering is 260 square feet so you will see a before and after of how it will look. Here you see it with the sofa. Each micro unit will have a Murphy bed that will be built in and very accessible for tenants.

Here's a good bird's eye view on layout of open concept feel of the micro unit. It's a small footprint but I feel like the open concept feel and the high ceilings will kind of make up for it and make it look more spacious. It will have built in storage which may include wall-mounted shelving, under-bed storage, and building closets to make up for a lot of space.

So, here you see the bed pulled out, you see the Murphy bed that's pulled out. And then, here this next rendering you see it pulled in.

So, same layout. This is one of the smaller sizes so there will be 8 units that are 260 square feet. The rest will be...I like to consider them as regular studios as they will be a little bit more in line with what the studios are in Aurora or in the downtown Aurora.

Here's a great layout. So, the first floor will have 5 units. The first 2 entering the building will be the ADA units, roughly around 520 square feet. The second and third floors have the same layout, 7 units on each floor, identical layouts, and as you can see the smaller units are up front. I purposely did that because I think that would be the best view for the building, so I figured you go a little bit smaller but it kind of makes up for it with the view.

The third floor, same layout.

This is the fourth floor. So, the fourth floor will have 2 units. There will be an electric chair that goes from the third to the fourth floor for accessibility reasons. Since we couldn't get the elevator, we had to make it up somewhere, so we ended up getting approval for having an electric chair go from the third to the fourth floor.

This is my development team. So, I purchased the building in 2023. It took me a year and a half to kind of gather the right team, assemble the right team to get the best and highest use for the building. So, together we have over 90 years of real estate construction and design experience.

A little bit about myself: so, I'm a Benedictine undergrad. I went to Aurora Central Catholic, graduated with accounting and finance degree. I worked in 2 years in corporate accounting. After 2 years, I started my own real estate company buying income producing property. Currently...I currently probably own somewhere around 200 to 220 residential units in the Fox Valley area. I ended up taking on the task of doing my first development, which is the Galena Hotel.

With it being my first development, besides putting on a great team, assembling a great team, you know, I'm new to the historic tax credit world so I ended up getting a great consultant to help me with that aspect of things, educating not only myself but my team. So, I got John Kramer onboard, a part of my team. He has done multiple, multiple projects including one of the biggest ones here in Aurora, which would be Bloomhaven Campus.

Jeff Dowe would be the person helping me with accounting and tax aspect of things. Helped me with my capital stack, with the tax credit investor, and my loan and so forth.

Torres Construction would be the person helping me, would be the GC of the project. Multiple projects under their belt as well. A lot of real estate experience, a lot of commercial experience, and definitely the right fit for the team.

Thank you. Any questions or comments?

Chairman Pilmer said any questions for the Petitioner?

Mr. Lee said just compliments on making the building accessible. Does the chair to the fourth floor really need to be called "the electric chair?"

(LAUGHING)

Chairman Pilmer said thank you.

Mr. Pickens said what marker are you going after, salary-wise, wage-wise for the occupants?

Mr. Barrera said yeah, the so target is working professionals.

Mr. Pickens said okay. And I also have a question regarding...what the intent on heating and ventilating this building? Is that and utilities...would the utilities all be inclusive in their rent? Or are there gonna be individual meters hanging on the outside of this wall?

Mr. Barrera said correct. So, no, there will be only one main meter for the whole building and each unit will have splits.

Mr. Pickens said okay.

Mrs. Owusu-Safo said so, how much would a micro unit go for that you are targeting?

Mr. Barrera said so, the starting base rent would be \$1,050.

Mrs. Owusu-Safo said okay.

Mr. Barrera said we have actually started...we started our demo work already and we've had...just by folks always inquiring, like, when are we opening up? They saw what's coming to downtown and definitely excited and they're already asking if there is a website to apply or so forth, so I think we'll be leased up before we even finish construction.

Mr. Roberts said so what is the answer to that question? When's it going to be ready if you get

approval?

Mr. Barrera said end of the year.

Mr. Pickens said is the building fully sprinkled? Fire protected?

Mr. Barrera said no, so, it will not be sprinkled but we did...we worked with the City of Aurora Building Department so there was a couple of other alternative routes that we did to minimize the gap, minimize the funding and so forth, so we'll be adding more like fireproofing building materials to kind of offset the sprinklers...to not do the sprinkler system. So, we did...it was like around \$30,000 to \$40,000 in cost savings going this route.

Mr. Pickens said I imagine the structure's wood inside, right? Everything's wood?

Mr. Barrera said correct. And it's real 2 x 4s, 2 x 6s, right? Not like your typical Menard's 2 x 4, right? (laughs)

Mr. Pickens said yeah, the hardwood type.

Chairman Pilmer said any other questions of the Petitioner? Thank you.

Mr. Barrera said thank you, appreciate everybody's time.

Chairman Pilmer said this is a Public Hearing, if anyone in the audience would like to address the Commission on this item. Note for the record that no one has come forward. We will close the Public Hearing and turn it back over to Staff. There are Findings of Fact.

Mrs. Morgan said Staff would...Staff has the following comments regarding the Findings of Facts:

1. The project will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals, comfort, or general welfare as the development will reuse a building that has historic significance to the community and provide diverse housing types to accommodate the needs of Aurora's population.
2. The conditional use will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity or diminish or impair property values as it will redevelop a building that was most recently used as an hourly boarding house with many property maintenance issues. The building is surrounded by other redeveloped residential buildings and will have a positive impact by adding additional affordable units to the downtown. The project will have a positive impact on property values as it will clean up what was once a blight on the area.
3. The development will not impede the normal and orderly development and improvement of surrounding properties for uses permitted in the district as the surrounding properties are developed with similar residential apartments.
4. There is currently adequate water and sewer capacity to serve the project.
5. The project does provide adequate ingress/egress. Access points to the site already exist along Galena Boulevard. The small units are envisioned to have less cars per unit than larger apartments. Currently there are several city parking lots in the vicinity with additional parking opening when the casino moves out of the downtown.
6. The Conditional Use in all other respects conforms to the applicable regulations of the various zoning districts.
7. For hotels: Not applicable.
8. The uses are necessary, desirable, and appropriate with respect to the primary purpose of the development as the use brings additional housing to the downtown, promoting the continued redevelopment and growth of the downtown.
9. The uses are of a nature and are so located as to not exercise an undue detrimental influence on the surrounding neighborhood as they are existing redeveloped buildings containing residential units in the neighborhood.

10. The exceptions so allowed are reflected by the appropriate zoning district symbols and are so recorded on the zoning district map.

Chairman Pilmer said does Staff have a recommendation?

Mrs. Morgan said Staff would recommend approval of an Ordinance establishing a Conditional Use Planned Development and approving the Galena Hotel Plan Description for the property located at 116 West Galena Boulevard.

Chairman Pilmer said you've heard Staff's recommendation. Is there a motion?

MOTION OF APPROVAL WAS MADE BY: Mr. Chambers

MOTION SECONDED BY: Mrs. Martinez

AYES: Chairman Pilmer, Mr. Chambers, Mr. Kuehl, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Martinez, Mrs. Owusu-Safo, Mr. Pickens, and Mr. Roberts.

NAYS: 0

Motion carried.

Chairman Pilmer said motion carries. Staff did read into the record the Findings of Fact. Are there any additions or corrections on those? Hearing none, is there a motion to accept the Findings of Fact as read into the record?

MOTION OF APPROVAL OF FINDINGS OF FACTS WAS MADE BY: Mrs. Martinez

MOTION SECONDED BY: Mr. Lee

AYES: Chairman Pilmer, Mr. Chambers, Mr. Kuehl, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Martinez, Mrs. Owusu-Safo, Mr. Pickens, and Mr. Roberts.

NAYS: 0

Chairman Pilmer said motion carries. If Staff will state where this will next be heard.

Mrs. Morgan said this will next be heard at the Building, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee meeting on January 15th at 4:00 pm in this room.

Chairman Pilmer said good luck. That concludes our agenda.

Aye: 8 Chairperson Pilmer, At Large Lee, At Large Chambers, At Large Owusu-Safo, At Large Pickens, At Large Roberts, At Large Martinez and At Large Kuehl

Text of Legislative File 25-0004