

**BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
STAFF REPORT****Date: September 14, 2020****CASE NUMBER**

6347/6335/6243/5603

APPLICANT NAME

The Fernbank Apartments, LLC

LOCATION1400 Church Street
(Northwest corner of Church Street and Everett Street)**VARIANCE REQUEST****SURFACING VARIANCE:** Surfacing Variance to allow gravel surfacing for a parking lot in an R-1, Single-Family Residential District.**ZONING ORDINANCE
REQUIREMENT****SURFACING VARIANCE:** The Zoning Ordinance requires all parking to be paved with asphalt, concrete, asphaltic concrete, or an approved alternative paving surface for parking lots in an R-1 Single Family Residential District.**ZONING**

R-1, Single-Family Residential

AREA OF PROPERTY

0.19± Acre

**CITY COUNCIL
DISTRICT**

District 2

**ENGINEERING
COMMENTS**

If the aggregate surfacing is approved for use the applicant will need to have the following conditions met:

1. Submit and receive a Land Disturbance Permit through Central Permitting for the proposed site development.
2. Aggregate surfacing will NOT be allowed within the public ROW.
3. Designated handicapped accessible spaces and routes must be paved (i.e. concrete, asphalt).

**TRAFFIC ENGINEERING
COMMENTS**

If gravel surface is an acceptable use for this site, the gravel should not extend into the right of way. Required on-site parking, including ADA handicap spaces, should meet the minimum standards as defined in Section 64-6 of the City's Zoning Ordinance.

**URBAN FORESTRY
COMMENTS**

Property to be developed in compliance with state and local laws that pertain to tree preservation and protection on both city and private properties (State Act

2015-116 and City Code Chapters 57 and 64). Private removal of trees in the right-of-way will require approval of the Mobile Tree Commission. Removal of heritage trees from a commercial site will require a tree removal permit.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

COMMENTS

All projects within the City Limits of Mobile shall comply with the requirements of the City of Mobile Fire Code Ordinance. (2012 International Fire Code).

ANALYSIS

The applicant is requesting a Surfacing Variance to allow gravel surfacing for a parking lot in an R-1, Single-Family Residential District; the Zoning Ordinance requires all parking to be paved with asphalt, concrete, asphaltic concrete, or an approved alternative paving surface for parking lots in an R-1 Single Family Residential District.

The site has been given a Mixed Density Residential (MxDR) land use designation, per the Future Land Use Plan and Map, adopted on May 18, 2017 by the Planning Commission. The Future Land Use Plan and Map complements and provides additional detail to the Development Framework Maps in the Map for Mobile, adopted by the Planning Commission at its November 5, 2015 meeting.

This designation applies mostly to residential areas located between Downtown and the Beltline, where the predominant character is that of a traditional neighborhood laid out on an urban street grid.

These residential areas should offer a mix of single-family homes, townhouses, 2- to 4- residential unit buildings, accessory dwellings, and low- and mid-rise multifamily apartment buildings. The density varies between 6 and 10 dwelling units per acre, depending on the mix, types, and locations of the housing as specified by zoning.

Like Low Density Residential areas, Mixed Density Residential areas may incorporate compatibly scaled and sited complementary uses such as neighborhood retail and office uses, schools, playgrounds and parks, and churches and other amenities that create a complete neighborhood fabric and provide safe and convenient access to daily necessities.

It should be noted that the Future Land Use Plan and Map components of the Map for Mobile Plan are meant to serve as a general guide, not a detailed lot and district plan. In many cases the designation on the new Future Land Use Map may match the existing use of land, but in others the designated land use may differ from what is on the ground today. As such, the Future Land Use Plan and Map allows the Planning Commission and City Council to consider individual cases based on additional information such as the classification request, the surrounding development, the timing of the request, and the appropriateness and compatibility of the proposed use and, where applicable, the zoning classification.

The Zoning Ordinance states that no variance shall be granted where economics are the basis for the application; and, unless the Board is presented with sufficient evidence to find that the variance will not be contrary to the public interest, and that special conditions exist such that a literal enforcement of the Ordinance will result in an unnecessary hardship. The Ordinance also states

that a variance should not be approved unless the spirit and intent of the Ordinance is observed and substantial justice done to the applicant and the surrounding neighborhood.

Variances are not intended to be granted frequently. The applicant must clearly show the Board that the request is due to very unusual characteristics of the property and that it satisfies the variance standards. What constitutes unnecessary hardship and substantial justice is a matter to be determined from the facts and circumstances of each application.

The site was most recently before the Board at its August 3, 2020 meeting, where the Board approved a Use Variance to allow the use of six apartments on the subject site.

The property appears to have been originally developed as a ten-unit, two-story apartment building. Non-conforming use history on file allowed a Zoning Clearance to be issued in 2005 for apartments, but that legal nonconforming allowance expired after a period of more than two years of vacancy after that time. In 2010, Use, Parking Ratio, and Tree/Landscaping Variances were requested for the subject site. The Use and Parking Variances were granted, and the Landscaping Variance was not required. Permits were obtained for interior renovations, but work was never completed and the Variances expired.

Sometime after 2010 the subject property changed ownership and on May 6, 2019 the applicant, and current owner, requested Use and Parking Ratio Variances to re-establish the use as apartments. The May 6, 2019 Variances were approved, with a six-month extension granted at the November 4, 2019 meeting. As permits were never obtained for associated work following the approval, the Variances expired. On August 3, 2020 a new Use Variance was approved by the Board to allow the use of apartments on the subject site.

In regard to the current application, the applicant is requesting a Surfacing Variance to allow the use of gravel surfacing on-site as opposed to the asphalt, concrete, or asphaltic concrete required by the Zoning Ordinance.

The applicant states:

The property is proposed to be fully renovated and restored to its historic use as an apartment building. Originally built as the Fernbank Apartments in the early 1900's, the plan is to re-open the property with 6 well-appointed units, including 2 studio units, 2 1BR/1BA units and 2 2BR/1BA units. There will be no on-site employees or machinery noise of any kind. Only tenants and their guests will be at the property. The gross square footage of the building will remain unchanged, and there will be 9 parking spaces (1.5 spaces per unit).

Gravel parking use is not allowed when constructing a new Multi-family facility, so a Use Variance is required. The property has operated as an apartment building for nearly 100 years but has been un-operational for the past 20+ years. This site was constructed with gravel parking in the early 1900's and is the owner's intent to preserve the historic aesthetics of the property.

This property is not different from surrounding properties, as multi-family uses are located on several properties directly across the street. Allowing this use variance will improve the neighborhood by allowing the owner to move forward with the plans to renovate and restore this property to its former glory and use. The owner's investment into this property should increase the value of surrounding properties and others throughout the neighborhood.

The applicant is currently requesting a Surfacing Variance to allow the use of gravel surfacing on-site as opposed to the asphalt, concrete, or asphaltic concrete required by the Zoning Ordinance. The proposed parking area for the site is currently unimproved. It is important to note that the site is located in the Leinkauf Historic District. Architectural Review Board (ARB) approval was granted in May 2020, for the proposed improvements to the site which did not include gravel surfacing at the time. If the current variance request is granted, the applicant will still need to obtain ARB approval prior to the issuance of permits.

The Design Guidelines for Mobile's Historic Districts states that the visual impact of parking should be minimized. Acceptable paving materials noted in the guidelines include gravel or crushed stone, shell, brick, cobblestone, and grasspave or grasscrete. According to Historic Development staff, the ARB prefers to see materials such as these for walkways, other paved areas, and especially for large areas used for parking, as would be the case at 1400 Church Street, where the visual impact could be significant.

While the applicant has not illustrated the existence of a hardship that would necessitate the requested Variance, based on the Design Guidelines for Mobile's Historic Districts a variance to allow the use of gravel surfacing may be appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends to the Board the following findings of facts for Approval of the Surfacing Variance request:

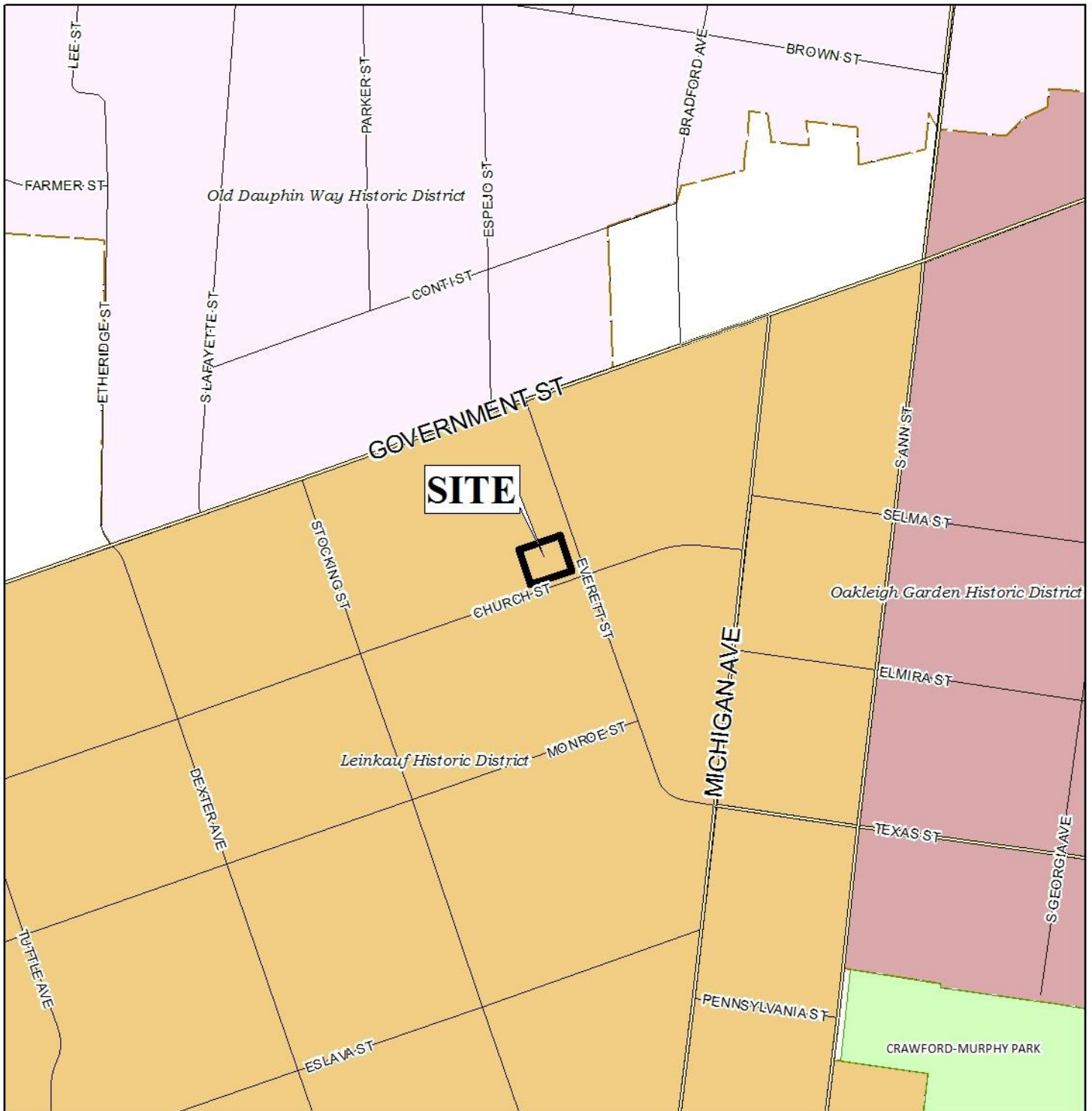
- 1) Approving the variance will not be contrary to the public interest in that the use would be consistent with the original architectural aesthetics of the property;
- 2) Special conditions were illustrated such that the literal enforcement of the provisions of the chapter will result in an unnecessary hardship; and
- 3) The spirit of the chapter shall be observed and substantial justice shall be done to the surrounding neighborhood by granting the variance because the use would be compatible to the site's original development.

The approval is subject to the following conditions:

- 1) completion of the Architectural Review Board review process with regards to the proposed gravel surfacing;
- 2) compliance with Engineering comments (*If the aggregate surfacing is approved for use the applicant will need to have the following conditions met: 1. Submit and receive a Land Disturbance Permit through Central Permitting for the proposed site development. 2. Aggregate surfacing will NOT be allowed within the public ROW. 3. Designated handicapped accessible spaces and routes must be paved (i.e. concrete, asphalt).;*)

- 3) compliance with Traffic Engineering comments (*If gravel surface is an acceptable use for this site, the gravel should not extend into the right of way. Required on-site parking, including ADA handicap spaces, should meet the minimum standards as defined in Section 64-6 of the City's Zoning Ordinance.*); and
- 4) full compliance with all municipal codes and ordinances.

LOCATOR MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER 6347 DATE September 14, 2020

APPLICANT The Fernbank Apartments, LLC

REQUEST Surfacing Variance



LOCATOR ZONING MAP



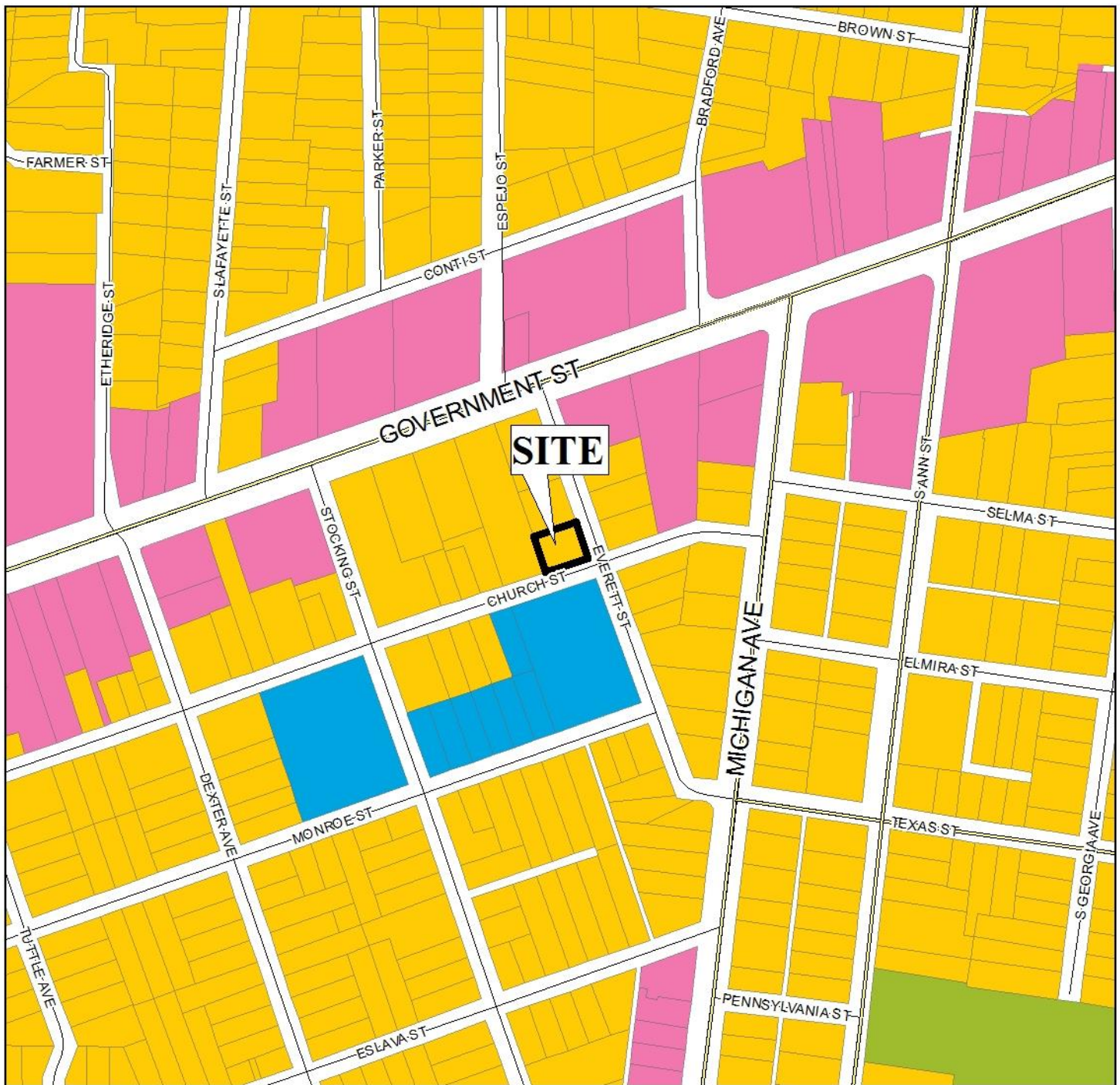
APPLICATION NUMBER 6347 DATE September 14, 2020

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FLUM LOCATOR MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER 6347 DATE September 14, 2020

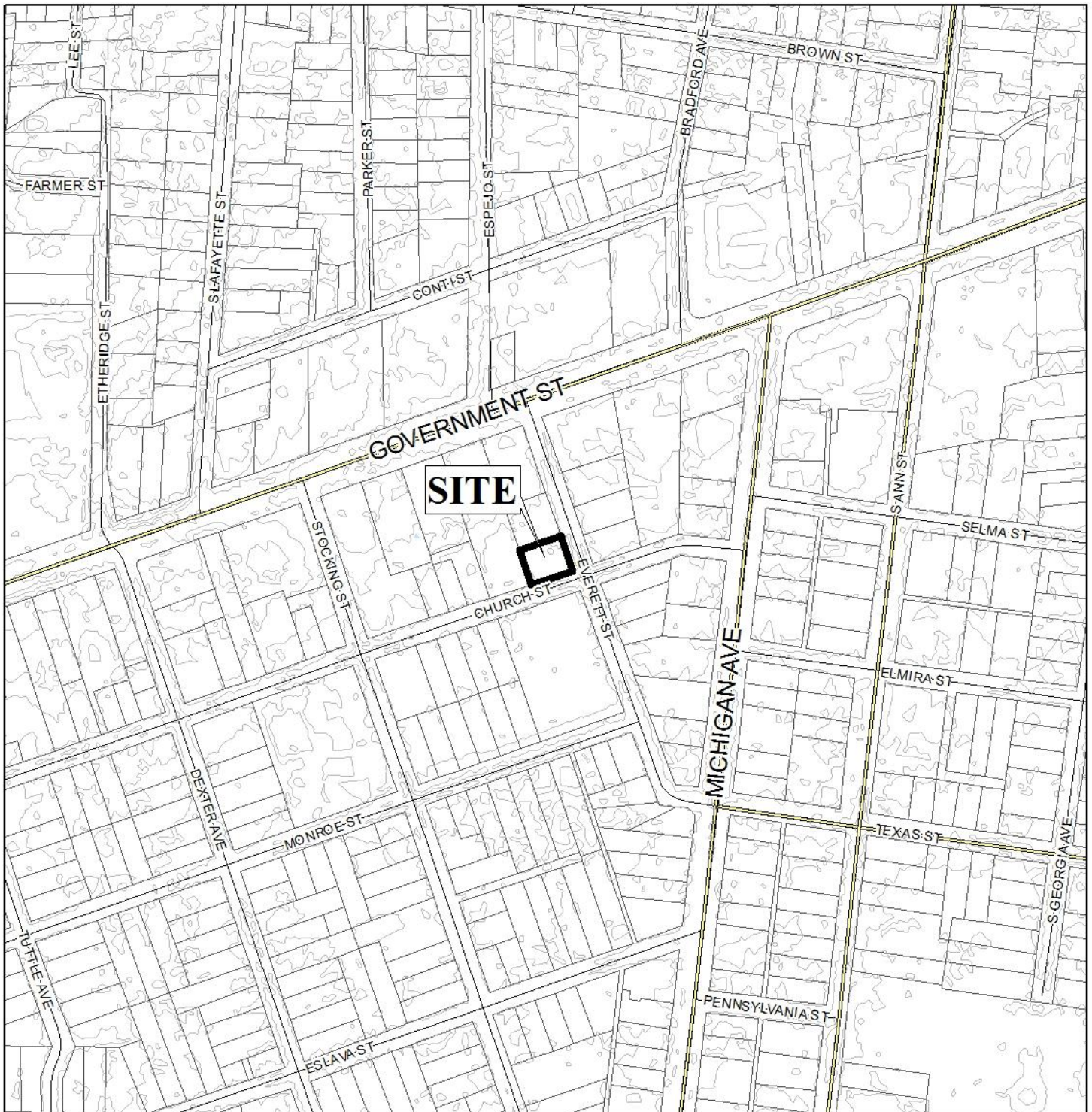
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REQUEST Surfacing Variance

Low Density Residential	Neighborhood Center - Traditional	Downtown Waterfront	Parks & Open Space
Mixed Density Residential	Neighborhood Center - Suburban	Light Industry	Water Dependent
Downtown	Traditional Corridor	Heavy Industry	
District Center	Mixed Commercial Corridor	Institutional	



ENVIRONMENTAL LOCATOR MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER 6347 DATE September 14, 2020

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BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT VICINITY MAP - EXISTING ZONING



The site is surrounded by residential units to the south and commercial units to the north.

APPLICATION NUMBER 6347 DATE September 14, 2020

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R-A	R-3	T-B	B-2	B-5	MUN	SD-WH	T5.1
R-1	R-B	B-1	B-3	I-1	OPEN	T3	T5.2
R-2	H-B	LB-2	B-4	I-2	SD	T4	T6



BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

VICINITY MAP - EXISTING AERIAL



The site is surrounded by residential units to the south and commercial units to the north.

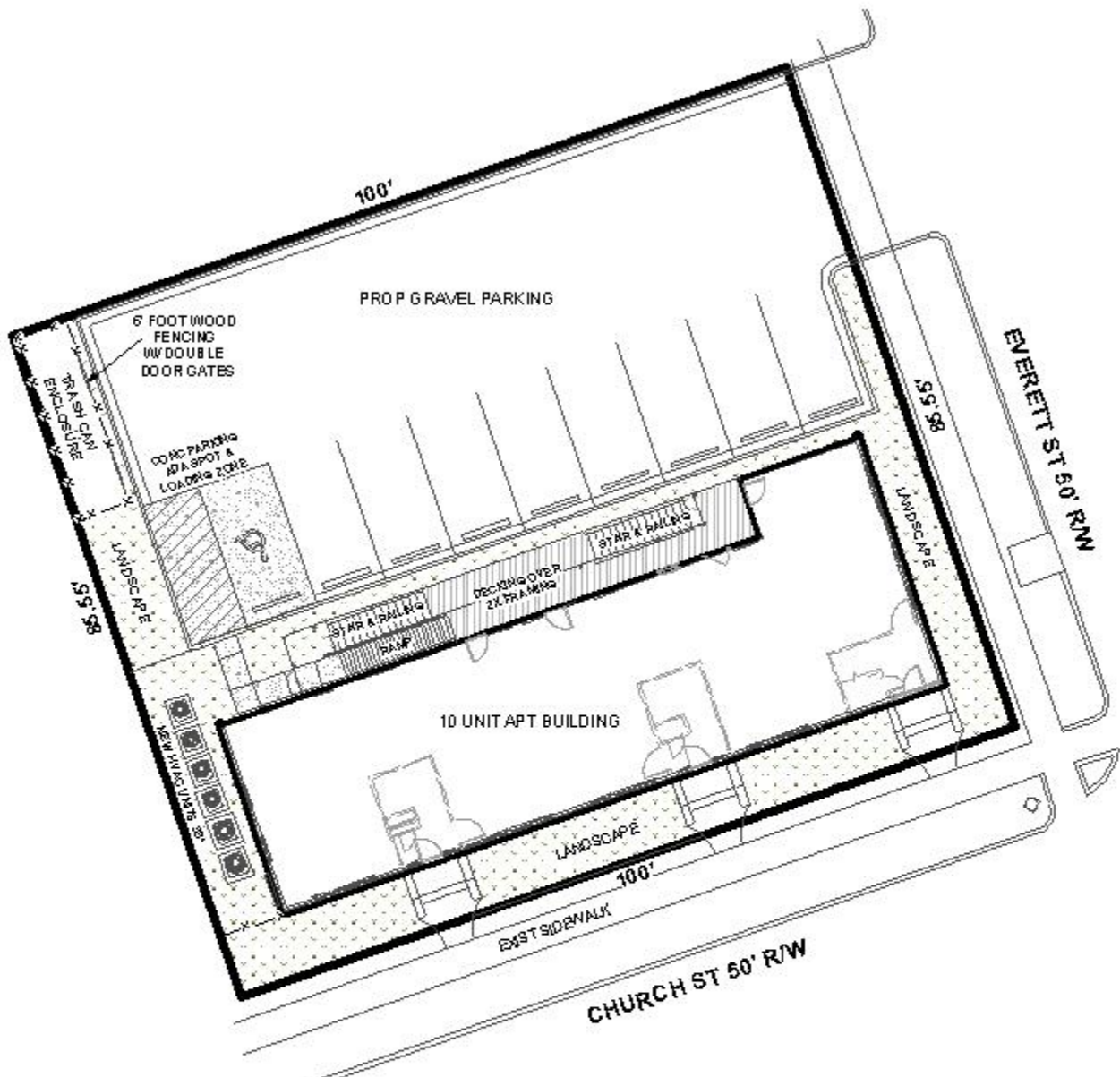
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SITE PLAN



The site plan illustrates the existing building, new AC units, landscaping, dumpster enclosure, and proposed gravel parking.

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