

Meeting Minutes

City Plan Commission

Monday, August 4, 2008

PRESENT: Chm. Mayor Halverson; Ald. Jerry Moore; Karen Aldinger; Lois Feldman; Tony Patton; Fred Steffen

ALSO PRESENT: Comm. Dev. Dir. John Gardner; Ald. Myers, Hanson, Heart, Slowinski, Trzebiatowski, Molski and Brooks; Reid Rocheleau; Carl Rasmussen; Chris Fish; Henry Korger; Mary Ann Laszewski; Peter Gerrard; Paul Gerrard; Jim Pankratz; Bob Woehr; Cathy Dugan; Karen Johnson; Daryl Kurtenbach; Alan Hetzel; Gene Kemmeter, Po. Co. Gazette; Meredith Thorn, Stevens Point Journal

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5. Create Overlay Zoning Business Tax Increment District 5 with Lesser Setbacks
6. Conditional Use - Multiple Family Development - 200 Isadore St.

Chm. Halverson announced that long-time commissioner and employee of the city, as well as a great community advocate, Ann Shannon has resigned from the Plan Commission to pursue other things. She has been a great asset to this board and the community as whole. We wish her well and thank her very much for her service.

1. Approval of the June 12, 2008 and July 7, 2008 Plan Commission Minutes

Tony Patton moved, seconded by Lois Feldman, to recommend approval of the June 12 and July 7, 2008 Plan Commission minutes. Ayes all; Nays none; Motion carried.

2. Sign Variance - 2000 Polk St. - Ben Franklin High School

John Gardner stated the proposed sign is 4.5' x 23' (103 sq. ft.) which is larger than the 20 sq. ft. allowed. However, we have the ability to approve a larger sign in the case of a school being further back from the right of way. It is very similar to the wall sign approved for SPASH some years ago. The sign would face Water St. which is commercial in nature and fits in with the commercial district.

Alan Hetzel, Dir. Of Bldgs. & Grounds for the School District, stated they get a lot of complaints from outside sports teams that do not recognize the building. We need the size proposed to be able to see the sign from a distance.

Fred Steffen moved, seconded by Karen Aldinger, to recommend approval of the sign variance request as presented for Ben Franklin High School based on compliance with sign criteria. Ayes all; Nays none; Motion carried.

3. Storage in Front Yard - 701 Mason St.

John Gardner stated the original request was to move Tony's Landscaping business to this site. That request expired in May of 2008. We viewed the property in May and found that Tony's business was not there, but it was leased to a masonry contractor who stored things in the front yard. The ordinance says that in industrial areas, storage in the front yard is not allowed closer than the setback of the district, or the front of the building, whichever is closer.

The owner is now requesting permission to store masonry materials in the front yard with a mound and lilacs and blue spruce trees around the front of the site. Screening is difficult because the land goes up and requires a taller berm. If approved, he suggests a deadline be placed on the screening so that it is in place by November 1.

Reid Rocheleau, 408 Cedar St., stated he is disappointed that the commission did not meet at the site because you would have seen what it looked like and it wouldn't be necessary for him to speak. Tony's Landscaping has a sign for his business on the site and has materials in the back. He read a letter from the neighbor across the street from the site, Marjorie Sommers, indicating her opposition to the mess across the street. This request should be denied and the operation shut down.

Karen Aldinger doesn't feel lilacs are good screening because they don't always have foliage.

Lois Feldman noted the site is a mess and suggested a solid wooden fence.

John Gardner responded a fence could be appropriate however the ordinance requires a solid fence be moved back from the property line.

Fred Steffen suggested a 6' berm with an evergreen or cedar hedge.

Mary Ann Laszewski, 1209 Wisconsin St., noted the current berm looks like piles of dirt with weeds growing out of it. She appreciates Tony's personal and business challenges, but it is difficult to support the new conditions when the existing ones have been violated. He is storing things in the front yard before he has gotten permission. We need to document and record what fines are appropriate even if you don't enforce them at this time.

Ald. Trzebiatowski expressed concern with erosion of the dirt berm and more sediment draining toward the wetlands. He recommends the berm be grassed over and then planted.

Fred Steffen moved, seconded by Chm. Halverson, to recommend approval of an 8' high berm that is properly sloped to avoid erosion, grassed and mowed at all times, covered with blue spruce or other vegetation of an evergreen variety that maintain their integrity throughout the winter, with a deadline of November 1, 2008 for completion and to be reviewed again in May of 2009.

Lois Feldman questioned the distance of the street yard setback.

John Gardner responded originally, Tony had proposed a 40' setback which was the setback for heavy industrial. This request does not have a specific setback, it puts the berm at or close to the front property line with the exception of the clear vision triangles of the driveway. Based on the size of the berm, we are probably looking at a 20' setback.

Ayes all; Nays none; Motion carried.

4. Building Permit History & New Housing Demand

John Gardner noted the next three items all relate to each other and we will talk about them interchangeably.

He reviewed the history of new housing demand in the community and provided charts showing permits for single/two family units and multiple family units from 1993 to 2007, owner vs. renter occupancy in Stevens Point and surrounding communities, and comparisons of housing occupancy from 1980 to 2000 from the Comprehensive Plan. Between 1993 and 2007, the city issued permits for 993 single-and-two-family living units while issuing 690 permits for multifamily living units (e.g. a 16 unit apartment building would count as 16 living units). Between 1980 and 2000 the number of living units reported by the Census increased by 1746 while the population only increased by 1581 even though vacancy rates remained steady. But the number of people per household decreased from 3.04 to 2.64. This is a part of the explanation of how housing units can increase faster than population growth. Population increase is not the only factor in demand for new housing. The number of people per household is projected to continue to decrease into the future.

The percentage of owner-occupied units is less in Point than in Plover or other central Wisconsin communities. However, other University towns such as Whitewater (36% owner occupied), Menomonie (44% owner occupied), and River Falls (51% owner occupied) exhibit lower-than-average rates of owner occupancy as well.

The restriction of additional units is not controlled by the city alone. Even if we did stop building multiple family units, it will not necessarily result in better housing conditions. Increased competition encourages improvement in properties. If there is no competition, there is less incentive to fix the property and property conditions might decrease.

In response to comments made about creating incentives for people converting units from rentals to owner-occupied, the city has helped 198 people become first time home buyers, 255 homes were remodeled from the CDA program, and 357 homes were assisted by CAP Services, the city, and CDA which represents 5% of the homes in the city. Ann Shannon was instrumental in securing funds for these programs.

5. Create Overlay Zoning Business Tax Increment District 5 with Lesser Setbacks

John Gardner noted this item is applying an existing district to a different area of town. We have a CBD Transition District that requires a 5' street setback allowing buildings to be close to the street. We propose to apply this district to the Division St. area and determine what setbacks we are looking at and whether the setbacks should be mandatory or optional. He presented slides showing existing buildings that were built close to the property line and buildings with parking in front. He doesn't know if we are at a point where we would require everyone to be out to the street, but feels we are at the point of saying we should move toward allowing a smaller setback as an option.

Fred Steffen noted many of the buildings along Isadore St. are up to the sidewalk. He would prefer a 5' mandatory setback (build to line) along Isadore St. with optional setbacks on Division St.

John Gardner noted the next item has a presentation with a 10' setback and suggested the commission evaluate that and then come back to this item.

Chm. Halverson moved, seconded by Jerry Moore, to allow a delay on Item #5 after the presentation on the multiple family development at 200 Isadore St. which is contained in Item #6. Any action item relating to the potential of Items #5 and #6 will be handled together. Ayes all; Nays none; Motion carried.

6. Conditional Use - Multiple Family Development - 200 Isadore St.

John Gardner reviewed the site plan and materials of the proposed building.

Peter Gerrard, developer, thanked everyone for the opportunity to present to you tonight.

Paul Gerrard, developer, provided a slide presentation and reviewed the history of the family company. They build, develop, and manage housing of all types and feel that long term management is the key to success.

They propose to re-establish the boulevards between sidewalks and the curb. They plan to re-direct the sewer and water for the neighboring property owner and work out a swap for additional parking. They propose 10' landscaped setbacks for Isadore and Maria Streets. There are no trees proposed on Maria Dr. because of the power lines. They provide security cameras for the building and security patrol of the parking lots with parking stickers for all cars. If approved, this project will begin this fall with occupancy for June of 2009.

Jim Pankratz, Architect, stated they propose a 3-story, 18-unit building (8, 3-bedroom units, 4, 4-bedroom units, and 6, 2-bedroom units) with 52 beds and 53 parking spaces. We also have 4 parking stalls in negotiation with the neighboring property owner. Each floor has six units with two stair towers. Each unit has their own laundry, furnace/ac, and internal storage for bikes, golf clubs, etc. The exterior garbage area will be a totally enclosed building with a roof. They will provide built-in picnic tables and bike racks.

Chm. Halverson felt this plan by far demonstrates the most thought and uniqueness as far as design and theory.

Reid Rocheleau expressed concern with a 3-story residential development being out of character with the surrounding single story commercial, small setbacks, using TIF money for this project, out of town developers and builders and not keeping money in town, and these tenants having to go across the street to throw frisbees on the taxpayers university property. We have to protect the university. We are over saturated with multiple family development. This conditional use cannot be built without approval and you should give it a lot of thought.

Cathy Dugan, 615 Sommers St., noted she is relatively pleased with the plan and feels it is an example of new urbanist design. She expressed concern with lack of green space and feels the building would be more appropriate in another area. Possibly, they could provide parking under the first floor to eliminate the parking lot gaps on Maria and Isadore and allow more open space for the students. She feels the commission should have more time to review this.

Ald. Trzebiatowski noted he likes the 10' setbacks and vision triangle, but expressed concern with only about 5% of the area for green space and snow accumulation/storage.

Bob Woehr, 727 Second St., noted many of the slides showing stores with lesser or zero setbacks have parking in front of their stores. If we were to reduce the setbacks down to zero along Division St., driveways exiting onto Division St. would have vision problems. He expressed concern with parking lot screening and snow storage and removal for this development.

Jim Hayne, former common council member/university professor, reminded commissioners that the city has the tradition of approving projects with

tight parking. He is concerned with lack of parking when tenants have parties or guests and snow storage.

Karen Johnson, owner of 210 Isadore St., stated she is in favor of improving the property at 200 Division St. but has a huge concern with the parking. If approved, she would appreciate it if a privacy fence could be built between their property and hers.

Henry Korger, 3200 Water St., noted he has rented to students for many years. There are many concerns about this project. He doesn't feel the building fits in there. If commissioners have only had this plan for a week, they need more time to make a decision.

Carl Rasmussen, 3136 Dan's Dr., speaking as a citizen and not a representative of the University noted he is very familiar with this intersection and feels the 10' setbacks on Maria and Isadore are too small for the many walkers and bicyclists.

Ald. Heart noted this is a great opportunity to set the direction for the Division St. urban core. A mandatory build-to line would help us stay consistent with potential developments.

Daryl Kurtenbach, 5282 Airport Rd., congratulated the Gerrards for a very nice building and noted we should be in favor of quality housing. He has concerns with adding to an already serious traffic problem and the issue of snow removal. It's a beautiful building, but he doesn't know that a 3-story building fits in that area. He recommends more time for review.

Mary Ann Laszewski stated it doesn't seem like responsible planning if we continuously ignore the consequences of adding apartments if you do not have a plan for those that are going to be left empty behind. She expressed concern with using TIF money for residential apartments and allowing outside contractors to siphon off the rental income that we have. Our city will have to face the ire of the many apartment owners who have shouldered, on their own, all the costs of buying and managing their businesses. If existing student rentals are not being taken care of, we need to do some inspections and remove licenses if they aren't in compliance. She requested the commission not consider this plan. She read a letter from Rich Sommer, an apartment owner who was unable to attend this meeting, opposing additional TIFs being approved for apartment complexes and doesn't feel Stevens Point taxpayers should be subsidizing the private law office of the city attorney or apartment buildings. He knows of no market study done for the need of apartments in Stevens Point.

Chm. Halverson stated he understands the concerns of the local apartment owners. He asks if that is the case, where are the interesting projects like this one that take care of a site that has been nothing but an underage drinking problem since it opened in 1964. This happens to be a legitimate project that will change the focus of how we develop in this area and how we focus on multifamily in the entire community. This particular development will require \$450,000 additional dollars of investment to place on this site as opposed to buying a vacant piece of property at the extremity of the city. If that is not warranted for city intervention to be a prime example of urban infill, then he doesn't know what is.

Gardner said the proposed setback changes provide options. The university plan talks to trading land along Division St. so we have useable size pieces. Starbucks and Stone Cold Creamery haul their snow and that is what will have to happen here. He doesn't think we are bending any rules. This is residential development on a commercial site. The occupancy of each unit is the same as any other multifamily in town. He feels there will be less circulating traffic because residents will park once and walk. The request meets the city standards and reviewed the staff conditions to be placed on any approval.

Peter Gerrard responded to some concerns by indicating their rents will be a little higher, they will haul the snow away, we will create jobs by bidding out much of the work locally, the agent will live in town, and we will use local vendors for cleaning, painting, and grounds. We can provide rain gardens and capture most of the roof water.

Fred Steffen stated the university is "our" university and these tenants are entitled to use that space the same as we are. This is not something new that was just dropped on us. He has no problem with this project.

Motion on Item #5:

Chm. Halverson moved, seconded by Jerry Moore, to recommend creation of an overlay zoning business in tax increment district 5 as presented in the staff report with lesser setbacks as proposed with a 10' street setback throughout the entire overlay district with the exception of any properties that directly abut residential lots. A 20' street setback be allowed for any area in the overlay district that abuts a residentially zoned property. Ayes all; Nays none; Motion carried.

Chairman Halverson noted before we vote on Item #6, he would entertain the possibility of a fence requested by the adjacent property at 210 Isadore St. for roughly 25% of the southernmost property line proceeding from the setback due west approximately 50 feet.

Fred Steffen noted with regard to the height of this proposed building, the motel is 2-story and the dormitories are 4-story.

Motion on Item #6:

Lois Feldman moved, seconded by Karen Aldinger, to recommend approval of the conditional use request for multiple family development at 200 Isadore Street based on compliance with the conditional use standards and to include a fence for roughly 25% of the southernmost property line proceeding from the setback due west approximately 50 feet, rain gardens for the majority of the roof runoff, a friendly suggestion of additional picnic tables, and include the following staff conditions: 1) adoption of an ordinance that would allow the lesser setback, 2) landscaping, fencing or other controls be added to limit pedestrian traffic across setback in the following areas: northwest corner of building, northeast corner of building, and southwest corner of building; 3) no grills, bicycles, chairs, or other tenant-related property be stored in the setback area between the building and Isadore St. right of way of Maria Dr. right of way; 4) the concrete pavement be removed between the sidewalk and the curb of both Isadore St. and Maria Dr. and that four trees, at least 2 inch caliper at the time of planting, be planted along Isadore St. and two trees, at least 2 inch caliper at the time of planting, be planted Maria Dr. All Trees are to be selected from the recommended tree list compiled by the City Forester and the trees along Maria Dr. be selected to grow under the overhead wires; 5) the proposed parking spaces be 9 ft. wide. Some of the spaces will be converted to compact spaces to meet the city standard; 6) wheel stops are proposed to be installed to protect the turf area. This or another technique will be required. 7) occupancy be limited to 53 occupants. If 4 more parking spaces are acquired, the occupancy could be increased to 57 occupants. Ayes all; Nays none; Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 4:25 p.m. The meeting minutes reproduced on this website are derived from the computer files used to produce the official minutes for the City of Stevens Point, but are unofficial. The minutes on this web site cannot be certified under s. 889.08, Wis. Stats.,

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