



Saint Paul Planning Commission

Notice to Commissioners and the public:

The chair of the Planning Commission has determined that it is not practical nor prudent for the Planning Commission and its Committees to meet in-person or pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Section 13D.02. In light of the COVID-19 health pandemic, it is not feasible for any member of Planning Commission to be present at the regular location, and all members of the Planning Commission will attend this meeting by telephone or other electronic means.

It is also not feasible for members of the public to attend the meeting at its regular location due to the health pandemic and emergency. Accordingly, no meeting will be held in City Hall Conference Center Room 40 at 15 W. Kellogg Boulevard.

Minutes July 23, 2021

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, July 23, 2021, at 8:30 a.m. remotely or by telephone.

Commissioners Present: Mmes. Anderson, DeJoy, Kantner, and Messrs. Baker, Hood, Holst, Moore, Rangel Morales, Reilly, Syed, and Taghioff.

Commissioners Absent: Mmes: *Grill, Mitchell, *Presley, Thomas, *Underwood, and Messrs. *McMurtrey, *Risberg, and Yang.

*Excused

Also Present: Luis Pereira, Planning Director; Yaya Diatta, Tia Anderson, Department of Safety and Inspections, Emma Siegworth, Addison Vang, Menaka Mohan, Allan Torstenson, Tony Johnson, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Chair's Announcements

Chair Rangel Morales had no announcements.

II. Planning Director's Announcements

Luis Pereira would like to recognize one of the members of his team, Addison Vang. Addison has been with the City since 2019, he is a City Planning Technician. However, he will be leaving the city to begin a new career opportunity at the UW Extension, in a position focused on food systems and

broadband access. While at Planning and Economic Development he really has done a great job working on subdivision, plat review and especially on HUD environmental review. He has worked closely with a variety of different city staff, PED, and other departments in his role as well as some of the city's community development organizations. Mr. Pereira appreciates all of the work Addison has done and will personally miss him.

Next, they finally have a date on the calendar with the Mayor, City Council President, Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair on August 5, 2021 to discuss the Commission's request for an Inclusionary Zoning Study.

III. PUBLIC HEARING: Amendments to Open Space Lot Specific Standards for the Ford Site Public Realm Master Plan -Item from the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee. (*Menaka Mohan, 651/266-6093*)

Menaka Mohan, PED staff gave a full presentation at the June 11, 2021 Planning Commission meeting. Ms. Mohan as well as Tia Anderson, Department of Safety and Inspections, and Melanie McMahon, Mayor's Office are available to answer any questions the commissioners may have.

Chair Rangel Morales read the rules of procedure for the public hearing. Notice of the public hearing was published in the Legal Ledger on Monday, July 12, 2021 and mailed to the citywide Early Notification System list of recipients and other interested parties.

The following people spoke:

1. Kate Hunt, 2081 Highland Parkway, St. Paul, MN. Ms. Hunt asks the Planning Commission to reject the proposed resolution amending definitions of open space and building lot coverage at Highland Bridge. She would like to know how the residents of Highland Park benefit from this resolution. The developer, Ryan Companies, they benefit. The answers are clear as the 32 pages of baffling justification for this resolution. A simple idea: shouldn't open space just be the lot space where the building isn't located?
2. Howard Miller, 2081 Highland Parkway, St. Paul, MN. Mr. Miller said that they are being told that other measures are in place to protect the soft edges of the development that the floor area ratio will limit having too much building mass. If the definition of open space ostensibly is the portion of the lot where the building is not, at that is eliminated, how is the FAR to be measured? As the area increases the proportion of lot space used for landscaping parking etc. goes to the height of the building. That is what we're talking about, this allows for unbridled development.
3. Kathy McGuire 2203 Fairmont, St. Paul, MN. Ms. McGuire said that the revered Ford Master Plan is very clear about the priority and definition of open space at the Ford site. She quoted from the Ford Master Plan several pages: 9 open space, PG13 and the genesis of the plan was community engagement. Page 27 the unique characteristics, page 28 Ford site will be developed over time to become a vibrant, mixed use urban neighborhood. Ms. McGuire opposes this resolution.
4. Julie Kaupa, 1763 Juliet, St. Paul, MN. Ms. Kaupa has concerns about having so many years of discussion and planning and then making changes at the last minute to forfeit an open space is a big concern to her.

MOTION: *Commissioner Holst moved to close the public hearing, and to refer the matter to its Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee, Planning Staff will hold the record open for additional written testimony until 4:30p.m. Monday, July 26, 2021. Commissioner Syed seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.*

IV. Zoning Committee

SITE PLAN REVIEW –

NEW BUSINESS

#21-269-061 695 Grand CUP with variances – Conditional use permit for 59’ 10” building height. Variances for front setback from Grand Avenue (10’ maximum, 18’ proposed for middle section of the building), building footprint (25,000 sq. ft. maximum, 30,500 sq. ft. proposed), total building size above ground, including parking (75,000 sq. ft. maximum, 124,000 sq. ft. proposed), and building height (three stories and 36’ maximum, five stories and 59’ 10” proposed). 695 Grand Avenue, NW corner at St. Albans Street. (*Emma Siegworth, 651/266-6657*)

Emma Siegworth gave a presentation that can be viewed on the web page at: <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-and-economic-development/planning/planning-commission>

In response to Commissioner Moore, Ms. Siegworth said that there are no side setback requirements at the east property line, so the building could be built right along the property line. However, the building is proposed to be set back 3’ or greater, so it more than meets the requirements.

In response to Commissioner Holst, Ms. Siegworth said that the zoning code is written to allow conditional use permits for certain uses and heights. Variances deal more with the specifics of the site and hardships that are made because of a unique circumstance on the site.

Chair Rangel Morales said he finds it confusing that they’re saying that the purpose of a variance is supposed to be tied to the property and the zoning for this property is so restrictive that they’re going to use that zoning in and of itself to justify the variance. He said at the discussion of the rezoning case, it seemed like the developer commented that they could go smaller. It seemed like this was a completely economic consideration that there’s nothing necessarily impractical with the land itself other than they just want to build as big as they do.

Commissioner Baker said at the last Zoning Committee meeting he asked the applicant if he could build smaller. The response was there were many items taken into consideration and changed based on the community’s feedback and that it was not just a financial matter there were other elements that they explained that went into play in being able to not with a smaller building.

Ms. Siegworth added that in a letter to the Summit Hill Association, it was discussed that if the applicant were to do a shorter building at four stories, it may not be able to achieve the positive benefits to the community and might result in residential units replacing the retail space on the ground floor, partially enclosed parking, reduced setbacks that could reduce the transition to the surrounding buildings, reduced building material quality, removal of the public plaza and outdoor seating, and reduce the number of larger units, which the Summit Hill Association wants to allow for people in the neighborhood to stay as they age and want to downsize from their Victorian houses.

Commissioner Taghioff said there are four things that are relevant for constituting practical difficulties: the sheer size of the lot, the fact that it is a corner lot and the lot slopes in grade, and the economic considerations, which can be taken into account. This lot is 240 feet long and the problem with that is the overlay district imposes a fixed lot size limit of 25,000 square feet, which would not affect most lots in the neighborhood and would not prevent a comparable T2 or T3 zoned building from covering the entire lot, aside from an atypical, oversized lot. The corner lot also creates practical difficulties, like complying with the design standards and the lot slopes from west to east down 6 feet and that changes the measurement for heights and puts certain restrictions on the site planning in terms of where the parking entrances are located.

Commissioner Reilly said he is struggling with the concept of using the zoning code itself as a justification for practical difficulty and the practical difficulty associated with the large size of the site. He said that the applicant keeps mentioning that the goals of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan require that they could construct a building that contains a mix of uses, but that is false. All four T districts state in the zoning code, a compatible mix of commercial and residential uses within buildings, but also within sites and blocks, and Grand Avenue is inherently a mixed-use corridor. He voted to deny the rezoning to T3 and said that it feels like they're squishing something in that doesn't fit and changing the rules so that it can fit.

Commissioner Hood said that this is a tough project and it's a tough area to get development. The developer has done a fantastic job engaging with Summit Hill Association and they have gained the support from them, which is not always an easy thing to do. He said he trusts the staff report and the Summit Hill Association and would support moving this forward.

Commissioner Taghioff said in reading the 2006 District 16 Neighborhood Plan, it was clear to him that there were mixed and sometimes conflicting priorities for Grand Avenue. The vision statements and the policies show there was a lot of concern for preserving local ownership and businesses, restricting formula businesses, enhancing the streetscape, ensuring active, vibrant street level uses, making sure that the street didn't look auto-centric, design guidelines, and neighborhood uses. He said that he thought that it was felt that the fixed guidelines were really about stopping big box stores along Grand Avenue and that the proposed building encapsulates everything the neighborhood said they wanted back in 2006, is in keeping with the neighborhood plan, and maintains the rhythm and historic nature of the avenue.

Chair Rangel Morales said that it looks like a great building, but he's wondering if the correct way to proceed is to redo the overlay district to determine what type of building the community wants. He is not saying that the building does not belong there, but he feels like they have jumped a few steps if the process is to be respected. He said that there are a lot of other buildings or lot sizes that meet this within the overlay district, such as the Chipotle building, the building in front of the Chipotle building, or the CVS property that are large in size that still didn't go as high and as big as this.

MOTION: Commissioner Baker moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit and variance subject to additional conditions. The motion carried 9-1 (Reilly) on a roll call vote.

#21-275-968 402 Front Supportive Housing CUP – Conditional use permit for supportive housing facility for up to 17 residents with modification of the required distance from other congregate living facilities (1320 ft. required, 950 ft. proposed). 402 Front Avenue, between Western Avenue North and Arundel Street. (Menaka Mohan, 651/266-6093)

Commissioner Baker reported that the applicant is proposing to construct the two-story supportive housing facility for up to 17 residents on Front Avenue. The site plan that there are six guestrooms provided living and dining areas, bathrooms, laundry facilities and a garage. Staff found that all conditions were met for the conditional use permit, except for one which states the facility shall be a minimum distance of 1,320 feet from any of the other following congregate living facilities with more than six adult residents. There were two people who spoke in favor of the application and no one spoke in opposition of the application during the public hearing. There were no letters of support and one letter in opposition of the application. The District Council recommended approval of the project. The Zoning Committee voted 6-0 to approve staff's recommendation for the conditional use permit for supportive housing facility.

MOTION: Commissioner Baker moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit subject to an additional condition. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

#21-277-255 1945 Rome Lot Split Appeal - Appeal of lot split approval by the planning administrator. 1945 Rome Avenue, between Howell and Wilder. (*Kady Dadlez, 651/266-6619*)

Commissioner Baker announced that this case has been laid over to the July 29, 2021 Zoning Committee meeting.

Commissioner Baker announced that this is his last Planning Commission meeting. He is transitioning off because he is moving outside of the city limits. Mr. Baker said that he appreciated the work. He loves the Zoning Committee the cases, dialogue between our colleagues and the back and forth. He has learned so much since being on the Planning Commission. He thanked everyone and said he appreciates the opportunity to have been on the Planning Commission.

IV. Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner Holst said that at their last meeting they had a presentation from staff about requesting an Industrial Zoning Study throughout the City of Saint Paul. Also, they selected two Vice Chairs, Commissioner Presley, and Commissioner Holst.

Chair Rangel Morales noted that based on Commissioner Grill's comments that she would be stepping down as chair and eventually either Commissioner Holst or Presley will be Chair and Vice Chair. Commissioner Holst said correct.

V. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Syed announced that their next meeting on Monday, July 26, 2021 is canceled.

VI. Communications-Nominations Committee

No report.

VII. Task Force/Liaison Reports

Commissioner DeJoy reported that the Hillcrest Community Advisory Committee did not meet in the month of July and their next scheduled meeting is August 17th.

VIII. Old Business

None.

IX. New Business

Chair Rangel Morales commented about Commissioner Baker, saying that his friendship and guidance throughout his time in the Commission has been invaluable. He has at numerous times stepped up to help better navigate the role of chair and better serve as the chair. Chair Rangel Morales is very thankful for Commissioner Baker and is going to deeply miss him and his contributions. This is a huge loss and he wishes him the best.

Chair Rangel Morales asked if anyone else would like to say any comments and he see's that a lot of people have already commented on the chat.

X. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by:
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary
Planning and Economic Development Department,
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,



Luis Pereira
Planning Director

Approved _____
(Date)

Wendy Underwood
Secretary of the Planning Commission