

MINUTES OF THE ZONING COMMITTEE
Thursday, August 28, 2014 - 3:30 p.m.
City Council Chambers, 3rd Floor
City Hall and Court House
15 West Kellogg Boulevard

PRESENT: Edgerton, Merrigan, Nelson, Padilla, Reveal, Wencil, and Wickiser
EXCUSED: Makarios
STAFF: Bill Dermody, Samantha Langer, Jake Reilly, and Peter Warner

The meeting was chaired by Commissioner Nelson.

Premier Storage - 14-319-416 - Nonconforming use permit (reestablishment and change) for an indoor rental storage facility, 543 James Ave, NW intersection at Duke

Commissioner Wickiser recused himself from the case.

Bill Dermody presented the staff report with a recommendation of approval with conditions for the reestablishment and change of nonconforming use permit. He stated District 9 recommended denial, and there were no letters in support, 7 letters in opposition, and 1 letter with property maintenance concerns regardless of outcome.

Upon inquiry from the Commissioners, Mr. Dermody explained that the Zoning Code allows for limited production and processing, including warehousing and storage, of 15,000 sq. ft. or less to be in a T3 District. He added that a brewery would be considered small scale production as long as it is less than 15,000 sq. ft.

Bill Griffith, 107 Virginia Street, Saint Paul, representative of the applicant of Premier Storage, explained the concept of internalized community storage. The storage facility will be fully enclosed and climate controlled with secured access and staff on site most of the day. There will be one drive that runs through the building from James Avenue on the South and it will exit to the north on Palace Drive. The trip generation is lower than most commercial uses and many residential uses. The neighbors were very supportive of this use because of the lack of impact on the surrounding area. The applicant has similar storage facilities in the metropolitan area. They are very clean and well lit facilities. The applicant is a pioneer in this type of storage facility and it is an adaptive reuse in a building such as this. Mr. Griffith explained that this is a neighborhood use. Its primary market is one mile around the site and the secondary market is about three miles around the site. A majority of the customers that use this facility will be within a mile. It is also an opportunity for small businesses from the area to have storage. The site is difficult to develop for retail or commercial uses. It is well off of West Seventh Street, and tucked back behind the brewery complex, making it difficult to access. It is not a viable retail complex on its own, but they propose to maintain the front portion of the building for a T3 use. There will be a significant investment by the applicant to update the building and landscaping. It will be an immediate benefit to the surrounding area.

Phil Gagne, 2935 Hadley Avenue N., Oakdale, MN, spoke in support. He worked at the brewery since 1979 and was the last head brew master. Currently he manages the Well House on West Seventh Street and is the warehouse building manager. The building is old and needs a new roof. Over the last five years the owners have tried to lease out space and to sell it, but

no one has been interested. The Artist Loft residents he has spoken to are very supportive of this project. He thinks this would be a really good project for the area.

Todd Jones, 206 N. Chestnut, Chaska, MN, President and founder of Premier Storage, explained that he started his business in 2002. He stated this would be their tenth storage center project in the Twin Cities. This project is much different than the earlier generation of self-storage product. The principal difference is that it is internalized and climate controlled. They cater to small businesses and residents. He anticipates that up to 25% of the storage facility would be rented by small businesses. He runs a very tight ship and is a hands-on owner of all of his storage facilities. They do not require any funding and use very few City services. This is a very low intensity use and will generate low traffic. When he spoke to neighbors they appreciated the low intensity use. The property owner has tried to find a buyer or a user for this building for approximately five years. It is not a good retail or office location. It is a difficult building to redevelop; it's a warehouse building with limited access points. The storage facility use would take a difficult part of the building and put a viable use in there, and that will allow for some of the future T3 uses. Mr. Jones stated that they did meet the petition requirements. If this application is approved they will close in October and immediately proceed with replacing the roof. They hope to be open by April 1, 2015.

Upon inquiry from the Commissioners, Mr. Jones stated that there will be approximately 600 storage units and it will be used for personal property for businesses or residents. They will not be storing vehicles or boats.

Shawn Devine, 501 Mount Curve Blvd. Saint Paul, President of West 7th / Fort Road Federation spoke in opposition. Mr. Devine referred to a letter submitted (see attached).

At questions from the Commissioners, Mr. Devine explained that they find it inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan because they do not view it as part of the larger Schmidt Brewing campus as the staff report does. If it was the owner of the development they could view it as the entire campus, but it will have a separate owner and be a separate entity. They don't find any other way to view it other than in isolation, and therefore not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Devine stated that the railroad tracks behind the property are still in operation and there are maybe one to two trips per week.

Upon questions from the Commissioners, Mr. Dermody explained that any changes to the exterior of the building will require at least Heritage Preservation staff review. In regards to the proposed use there are changes to the entrances that will require staff approval. Other more drastic changes to the exterior including demolition and reconstruction would require Heritage Preservation Commission approval. Demolition is not expressly prohibited as a possibility.

Mr. Griffith responded to testimony. This site can't be viewed in isolation because of its history and its proposed use. It is part of the brewery complex and was part of the operation. Recently, it was even used as a support site during renovation of the brewery. It is a use that is supportive of what is envisioned for the neighborhood. If you envision a vibrant commercial district and growing residential communities you need to include supportive uses such as storage facilities. A community needs a mix of uses to be a viable community.

The public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Padilla commented on the staff report (Finding 4d and 5d) and doesn't think the Committee should view anything in isolation when talking about the Comprehensive Plan. She agrees with Mr. Griffith's point of this being part of the brewery complex. It should be viewed in a larger community context rather than an isolated site.

Commissioner Reveal stated she does not agree that it has been demonstrated that there is no economic potential or economic viability to the site. The point of the planning around this site was to stimulate not only commercial and retail, but also residential of a variety of different types. The Artist Lofts are the first significant part of the site and have only been opened for a year. Not enough time has been given for future economic uses to be considered. There is significant amount of community support for mixed uses of a different character than this type of service. This is an area adjacent to the Mississippi River that has potential for exciting development. There are plenty of other opportunities in other areas of Saint Paul for a storage facility. She is not convinced that this use is conforming to the Comprehensive Plan or the intent of the Jacob Schmidt Brewery site.

Commissioner Elizabeth Reveal moved denial of the reestablishment and change of nonconforming use permit based on Findings 4(a) and 4(d) not being met. Commissioner Barb Wencil seconded the motion.

After discussion pertaining to the Findings 4(a) and 4(d), the motion failed by a vote of 2-4-1.

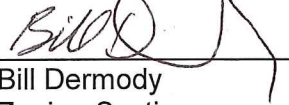
Commissioner Paula Merrigan moved approval with conditions of the reestablishment and change of nonconforming use permit. Commissioner Dan Edgerton seconded the motion.

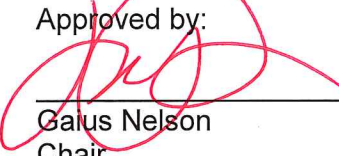
The motion passed by a vote of 4-2-1.

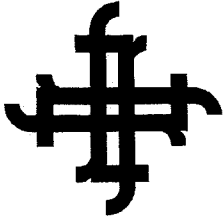
Adopted Yeas - 4 Nays - 2 (Reveal, Wencil) Abstained - 1 (Wickiser)

Drafted by:

Samantha Langer
Recording Secretary

Submitted by:

Bill Dermody
Zoning Section

Approved by:

Galus Nelson
Chair



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August 28, 2014

Dear Zoning Committee:

The West 7th/Fort Road Federation District Council has voted unanimously to **oppose** the application for reestablishment and change of nonconforming use for an indoor rental storage facility at **543 James Avenue**.

Reasons for opposition:

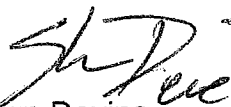
Section 62.109(e) Staff report states that "warehousing and storage are part of the area's existing development character". The Schmidt Artist Lofts have been open for less than a year and are no longer a warehouse or storage facility but rather a residential development.

Section 62.109(c) Staff report states that "proposed use is consistent with the comprehensive plan". The comp plan designates the site as both a Neighborhood Center and Mixed Use Corridor. The proposed use does not meet the aims of either designation.

Section 62.109(e) "The proposed use will not be detrimental to the existing character of development in the immediate neighborhood or endanger the public health, safety, or general welfare". The Great River Passage Master Plan encourages better connection with the river from the adjacent neighborhoods and redevelopment along Randolph Avenue. The proposed storage facility is detrimental to the existing character of the neighborhood and the newly redeveloped Schmidt Brewery.

The Federation worked from 2004 to 2008 to change zoning from I2 General Industrial District to the T3 Traditional Neighborhood classification. The Federation supported the T3 rezoning because it was future orientated. We feel it is extremely short sighted to reverse the zoning just as the neighborhood is beginning to see the positive influence of the Schmidt rehabilitation.

Respectfully Submitted,


Shawn Devine
President
West 7th/Fort Road Federation

