

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2021
6:30 P.M.**

North St. Paul City Hall – Council Chambers
2400 Margaret Street

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Barton called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

COMMISSION

Elaine Barton, Commission Chair
Patrick Blees, Commissioner
Erik Brenna, Commissioner
Rick Gelbmann, Commissioner
John Monge, Commission Vice Chair
Lisa Wong, Commission City Council Liaison
Andrew Wise, Commissioner EXCUSED ABSENT
Allan Worm, Commissioner

STAFF

Eric Zweber, Planning Consultant
Planning Secretary, Lisa Ritchie

III. ADOPT AGENDA

Motion to adopt agenda by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adopt the September 16, 2021 Agenda.

Chair Barton requested that Communications Staff Kari Erpenbach be moved to the first agenda item, as she has a 5-minute presentation on the City's new online system for agendas and packets.

There was a consensus of the Planning Commission to move Ms. Erpenbach's CivicClerk presentation to Agenda Item V.A.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion to approve Minutes by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Monge, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to approve the August 5, 2021, regular meeting minutes as submitted.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Tom Sonnek, 2539 16th Avenue E, stated he represents the City's new Arts & Culture Commission. He added the Commission has held 2 meetings so far, to define what is the purpose of the Commission, and what are key elements to ensure successful delivery. He noted collaboration with intergovernmental units, including the Planning Commission, will be extremely helpful, and he looks forward to working with the Planning Commission to review signage impacts.

Mr. Sonnek stated he is excited to be able a part of bringing art to the City, as an expression of the people who live there. He noted the Arts & Culture Commission will come before the Planning Commission in the coming months to introduce themselves.

A. Update from Ms. Erpenbach

Communications Staff Kari Erpenbach reviewed changes to CivicClerk, the City's new meeting management software. She added there have been a few bumps in the road, but City Staff is confident that everything is in place. She stressed the importance of ensuring that the Commissioners have timely access to packets and agendas, and she provided a cheat sheet for adjusting settings to receive the appropriate documents as they are published.

Ms. Erpenbach stated the Commissioners are set up as Board Members and will receive an email when a packet is published, with a link to the agenda and packet. She added Commissioners can also access the documents on the City website in PDF form, or have the packet emailed directly to them by City Staff.

Ms. Erpenbach stated the Commissioners can use the "Board Portal" function, which allows them to log in and view agendas, take notes, highlight text and do prep work.

Ms. Erpenbach stated CivicClerk has the capability of adding hash tags and search terms within documents for easier searching. She added City Staff have not taken advantage of that feature yet. She noted City Staff hopes to onboard the Planning Commission with these instructions.

Ms. Ritchie stated she can forward meeting documents however the Commission prefers.

Chair Barton asked whether all the Commissioners received an email with links to the packet materials.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated he received an email with a link, but the meeting agenda and packet did not upload. Ms. Erpenbach stated she believes there is an error in Commissioner Gelbmann's account, which was one of the first accounts to be opened. She added City Staff can look into this further, and if necessary, contact CivicClerk support.

Ms. Ritchie stated she gets an intermittent bounce back on Commissioner Wise's email. Ms. Erpenbach agreed to log in and take a look or contact CivicClerk support. She added the important thing is to make sure that Commissioners have the materials they need.

Chair Barton stated the software should get to the point where it is working. Ms. Erpenbach agreed it is concerning if Commissioners cannot access the links.

VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Century Avenue Collision Center Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage

City Planner Eric Zweber reviewed a request for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) from Century Avenue Collision Center (CACC) located at 2501 Division Street N to expand the existing outdoor storage area from 4800 square feet to 9,600 square feet. The site is currently zoned MU-3. The applicant plans to replace the existing asphalt and replace the fence to increase the storage area. It is hoped that the fence will help mitigate theft that has been occurring on the property.

Mr. Zweber stated CACC operates an autobody repair shop, with an accessory outdoor vehicle storage area. Setback requirements and building height requirements would stay the same. The business operates without a CUP, which is fairly common in the community. The applicant is requested the CUP for the additional outdoor storage.

Mr. Zweber stated the applicant does not intend to expand the use. The accessory structure to the principal use, which is the outdoor storage, is the subject of the request. Outdoor storage is allowed in the MU-3 district with the following conditions: the use shall be outside of the front yard; completely screened from adjacent ~~streets~~^{screened streets}, walkways, parks; and separated from abutting residential uses with a wall, solid fencing, evergreen hedge or equivalent material. The proposed fence will be similar to the existing fence, which is a 6-foot cyclone fence with vinyl privacy slats. The appearance of the fence is compatible with adjacent properties and meets all standards for the Conditional Use Permit.

Mr. Zweber stated the subject property is located in the Commerce Park Redevelopment District as identified in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, and improvements to the building are allowed in this district.

Mr. Zweber stated City Staff recommends Planning Commission recommendation of City Council approval of the Conditional Use Permit with the following conditions: 1. Response for all permits that may be required; and 2. The screening fence shall be 6 feet in height with vinyl slats that are inspected annually, and damaged slats replaced within 30 days.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether the applicant intends to pave the additional fenced area. Mr. Zweber stated the applicant is present to answer questions.

Councilmember Blees asked whether the slats will be inspected annually by an outside source. Mr. Zweber stated an outside inspection is not required.

Jim Cihon, the applicant and one of the owners of Century Avenue Collision Center, stated they are on schedule to have the black top replaced by Schifsky's, who recommend regrading as well. He added the intent is to black top the entire fenced-in area.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether the south fenced area is paved. Mr. Cihon stated it is gravel.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether the applicant has contacted the Watershed District regarding potential restrictions. He added this is a significant area that is proposed to become impervious, and the City must be sensitive to that. Mr. Cihon stated he did not know that was recommended until tonight. He added he does not believe the new surface will cause adverse drainage. He noted the proposed fence will be the same as the existing fence with vinyl slats for privacy, which were installed in 1997 and have held up well.

Commissioner Gelbmann recommended that the applicant contact the Ramsey-Washington Watershed District. Mr. Zweber stated that process would begin with City Staff, and the application has been reviewed by City Engineer Morgan Dawley.

Chair Barton stated the proposed paving may not have been reviewed by the City Engineer. Mr. Zweber stated this request is for a CUP for outdoor storage, and replacement of pavement is a separate permit to be submitted by Schifsky's, which will be reviewed by Mr. Dawley under a separate case.

Chair Barton asked what will be stored in the enclosed area. Mr. Cihon stated snowplows and related equipment are kept in the storage area as well as stored vehicles that are being worked on or waiting for parts. He added they have experienced a huge increase in theft, and a larger storage area is necessary to deter thieves.

Chair Barton requested that Mr. Zweber confirm whether the applicant needs to contact the Watershed District. Mr. Zweber stated Mr. Dawley has been involved in this review, which pertains to the expansion of the storage area.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated it is nice to see the business being expanded in North St. Paul.

Chair Barton opened the public hearing at 7:09 p.m.

There were no comments.

Chair Barton closed the public hearing at 7:09 p.m.

Chair Barton stated if this was simply an additional parking area, there would be no issue. She added she is trying to understand what else would be stored there as it would relate to vehicle repair. Mr. Zweber stated the City has requirements for license and operability of vehicles, but those issues do not need to be addressed if the area is viewed as storage and not parking. He added, by granting a CUP for outdoor storage, the City expresses an understanding that the vehicles might not be the same as a vehicle that is parked in a parking lot.

Chair Barton stressed the importance of a level of security for this type of business.

Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission has discussed the style and appearance of fences in other cases. She added this property is in the Redevelopment Master Plan and abuts up to the new

Suite Living development. She stressed the importance of ensuring that the product fits with and enhances the area.

Mr. Zweber stated the applicant has requested in writing that the existing fence be replaced with a 6-foot chain link fence with plastic slats.

Commissioner Monge asked whether the applicant has plans to increase lighting since the space will be bigger. Mr. Cihon stated the current lighting is sufficient.

Chair Barton stated a proposed fence was reviewed by the Planning Commission recently, as fences are required to be decorative in nature in the M-U district. She stressed the importance of aesthetics, and what would look appropriate.

Mr. Cihon stated he can see how that would be an issue if the fence were on a bike trail and visible to the public, like Schifsky's fence. He added the proposed fence will be satisfactory to the development behind them, as the same type of fence was there before they built the development, and they did not have a problem with it. He noted the type of fence that Chair Barton is referring to would represent a 25% increase in costs, excluding the vinyl slats.

Chair Barton stressed the importance of maintaining a certain look to the area as improvements continue.

Mr. Zweber stated he discussed this issue with the City Attorney, who indicated that when two sections of City Code are in conflict with each other, the City is obligated to go with the more restrictive solution. He added, in this case, the conflict is between decorative wrought iron fencing and solid fencing. He noted it would be impossible to meet both section requirements.

Chair Barton stated, for clarification purposes, this appears to be an improvement to the site, and essentially an expansion of storage. Mr. Zweber stated City Staff can conduct an internal administrative view if the application does not meet the threshold of a site plan.

Chair Barton stated it is only applicable when there is an improvement.

Mr. Zweber stated a site plan review would require a landscape plan, but this request falls below that threshold.

Barton requested the following amendments to the conditions of approval:

- the addition of "2501 Century Avenue"
- replace "slatting" with "fencing and slatting"

Blees requested that "slating" be replaced with "slatting".

Motion by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to recommend City Council approval of a Conditional Use Permit for Century Avenue Collision Center with the following amendments to the conditions of approval:

- the addition of "2501 Century Avenue"

- replace “slatting” with “fencing and slatting”
- replace “slating” with “slatting”

Mr. Zweber stated this application will be reviewed by the City Council at their September 21, 2021 meeting.

VII. COMMISSION BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

-None.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Sign Code Update

Mr. Zweber stated the Sign Code materials not available for review due to technical difficulties with the City’s new software program. He apologized for the inconvenience.

It was agreed that the Sign Code Update would be postponed to the Planning Commission’s next meeting on October 7, 2021.

Mr. Zweber stated the Planning Commission had discussed election signs, which are prohibited by State statute to be displayed from 46 days before an election to 10 days after an election. He added City Staff will reduce enforcement of non-commercial signs during that time. He noted additional information is available for signs with text that would still count as signage.

City Council Liaison Wong stated the new Arts & Culture Commission discussed how the Sign Ordinance will affect public art. She added several local businesses have indicated an interest in public art on their buildings which could be construed as advertising. She noted, as part of the Sign Code review, the Planning Commission could consider how this issue might be addressed by the Arts & Culture Commission.

B. Review/Finalize Redevelopment Task Force – 2 Volunteers Needed – Monday evenings at 6:30 p.m.

Ms. Ritchie stated the Task Force meetings will be held on Mondays at 6:30 p.m., which the recommended day and time of the EDA and City Council.

Commissioners Gelbmann and Monge agreed to represent the Planning Commission on the Redevelopment Master Plan Task Force.

IX. REPORTS FROM STAFF

Mr. Zweber introduced Brandi Howe, WSB, who will serve as the consultant for the Redevelopment Master Plan Task Force. He stated Ms. Howe has a lot of experience and will be a great resource for the Task Force.

Ms. Howe stated she started working at WSB on Monday, and she has years of planning experience in Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa. She added she is excited to work with the City of North St. Paul.

X. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL LIAISON

City Council Liaison Wong stated she and Council Member Thorsen will serve as the City Council representatives on the Redevelopment Master Plan Task force.

Mr. Zweber stated the City and School District contributed 50% each to a traffic study which concluded that parking is adequate at North High School, as long as the St. Mark's parking agreement continues. He added a request for Conditional Use Permit and variance will be reviewed by the City Council at their September 21, 2021 meeting.

City Council Liaison Wong stated the City Council is finalizing the budget right now. She added there was discussion about parking concerns in the downtown area, and the addition of construction of a parking lot into the Capital Improvement Project to be located behind K&J, which would have electric charging stations.

XI. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Brenna stated the Minnesota Water Resource Virtual Conference will be held October 19-20, 2021. He added he helps plan the event as a representative of MnDOT. He noted the conference fee will be \$95 before September 24, 2021, and the conference will feature 2 days of presentations.

Commissioner Worm stated his wife, Norma Worm, will be a Grand Marshal in the Fall Round-up Parade on September 23, 2021. He added Ms. Erpenbach did a nice write-up in the North St. Paul newsletter.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated Silver Lake Fall Clean-up event is scheduled from September 18-25, 2021. Bags and gloves will be available, and residents can choose a time and sign up to help out.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion to adjourn by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Monge, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission Meeting is Thursday, October 7, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

Members, please notify any planned absences to: Lisa Ritchie
Planning Commission Secretary
lisa.ritchie@northstpaul.org
651-747-2400