

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 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 6:34 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

COMMISSION

Elaine Barton, Commission Chair

John Monge, Vice Chair EXCUSED ABSENT

Patrick Bles, Commissioner

Eric Brenna, Commissioner

Rick Gelbmann, Commissioner

Andrew Wise, Commissioner

Allan Worm, Commissioner

Lisa Wong, City Council Liaison EXCUSED ABSENT

STAFF

Brandy Howe, City Planner

Erik Zweber, City Planner

Morgan Dawley, City Engineer

Lisa Ritchie, Planning Secretary

III. ADOPT AGENDA

Motion to adopt agenda by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Worm, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adopt the November 2, 2021 Agenda.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Meeting Minutes 10/7/2021

Commissioner Gelbmann requested the following correction:

-Page 3, paragraph 3, line 1, remove “to adopt agenda”

Motion to approve Minutes by Commissioner Wise, and seconded by Commissioner Brenna, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to approve the October 7, 2021 regular meeting minutes as submitted.

b. Meeting Minutes 10/21/2021 (Joint Meeting)

Commissioner Wise requested the following corrections:

-Page 3, paragraphs 5 and 6 – replace “Council Member Wise” with “Commissioner Wise”

Motion to approve Minutes by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Blees, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to approve the October 21, 2021 joint meeting minutes as submitted.

Commissioner Worm stated this will be his last Planning Commission meeting.

Chair Barton presented a plaque to Commissioner Worm in recognition and appreciation of his many years of service to the Planning Commission.

Ms. Ritchie stated it is hoped that Commissioner Worm can attend an upcoming City Council meeting as a Guest of Honor.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

There were no comments.

VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Consideration of a Preliminary and Final Plat for the Berwald Addition

City Planner Brandy Howe reviewed a City-initiated request for preliminary and final plat for the Berwald Addition, the purpose of which is to clarify ownership of the property. The platting process will establish the right of way for Centennial Drive, and no subdivision is proposed as part of this plat. The property in question has 8 existing structures, some of which have nonconformities, but variances will not be required.

Ms. Howe stated notifications were sent to property owners within 350 feet of plat, and a public hearing notice was published in the newspaper. City Staff notified Ramsey County, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and did not receive any comments. City Staff recommends Planning Commission recommendation of City Council approval of the Berwald Addition preliminary and final plat.

Chair Barton opened the public hearing at 6:40 p.m.

There were no comments.

Chair Barton closed the public hearing at 6:41 p.m.

Commissioner Blees asked whether existing drainage and utility easements would remain in place. Ms. Howe stated this request will not release any existing easements.

City Planner Eric Zweber stated all drainage and utility easements that will remain are shown on the final plat.

Commissioner Blees requested clarification regarding an easement that runs diagonally through Lot 2. Mr. Zweber stated that easement will remain in place. He added the shape indicates that it is a utility. He noted all parties that will be required to sign on the request have reviewed and agreed to the plat.

Motion by Commissioner Brenna, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to approve Planning Commission recommendation of City Council approval of Preliminary and Final Plat for the Berwald Addition.

VII. COMMISSION BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Sign Ordinance Update

Ms. Howe stated this agenda item is intended to be discussion-based. She added the purpose of the Sign Ordinance update is to ensure that it complies with the 2015 Supreme Court decision, Reed v. Town of Gilbert, as well as consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. She noted City Staff hopes to simplify the Ordinance for clarity purposes and administrative purposes.

Ms. Howe stated the table of contents represents the overall goals of the updated Sign Code, including an approved purpose statement; Applicability; Definitions; Exemptions to the Sign Ordinance; and Prohibited Signs. She added the intention is to move forward and build upon the draft document.

Ms. Howe stated, with regard to “Applicability”, new signs must conform to the Sign Ordinance with the exception of political signs which are allowed by State Statute to remain 46 days prior to an election until 10 days following an election.

Commissioner Blees stated the Commission talked about flags and banners which are not mentioned in the Definition Option 1 but are included in the current definition. He added he supports Option 1. Ms. Howe stated flags could be considered a sign if they are intended to sell something and have product language on them. She added flags are exempt.

Chair Barton stated flags would fall under the definition of Option 1 because they are a means of communicating. Commissioner Blees stated the regulations are related to the purpose of the flag.

Chair Barton stated flags can communicate a non-commercial message which is also a sign. She added the word “flag” does not need to be included in the definition. Commissioner Blees agreed.

Ms. Howe stated the Planning Commission can review this issue again at a later date, as the Ordinance unfolds.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated flags are required to have a maximum size of 4x6 feet. He asked whether people can have flags that are larger than that. He asked what constitutes a flag. Chair Barton that will be in the regulation piece of it.

Commissioner Blees the point is that a flag can be a sign or not a sign, depending upon what is on the flag. He added the definition in Option 1 is good because it is not specific to the shape or device.

Chair Barton asked whether flashing signs are a type of illumination. Ms. Howe definitions in the Ordinance will not be limited to sign types.

Chair Barton asked whether all yard signs are temporary, and whether yard sign is defined in the current Ordinance. Commissioner Worm stated all yard signs are temporary. Chair Barton stated there is a specific type of sign called a yard. She added the Ordinance defines free-standing sign, which is the same thing as a yard sign.

Ms. Howe stated a yard sign could include other signs of a temporary nature that are not intended to be permanent. She stressed the importance of being as specific as possible under Definitions. She added the purpose of the yard sign definition is to clarify that yard signs are exempt from the Ordinance, and a permit would not be required.

Chair Barton stated there should be a definition of the word “temporary”, which indicates a specific period of time.

Commissioner Blees stated he would like to see definitions that relate to the sign manufacturing industry. He added “free standing” would not be an industry definition. He noted more generic definitions may be appropriate, but they should be considered as they prove helpful for builders and developers.

Ms. Howe stated she could provide a red-lined copy of current definitions if that would be helpful. Chair Barton agreed.

Commissioner Blees stated internally or externally lit signs should be addressed.

Ms. Howe stated, with regard to exempt signs, some text has been simplified and regulatory language removed.

Commissioner Wise requested clarification regarding Item 6.

Ms. Howe stated the goal is to put everything in the list that doesn’t require a permit, but this might not be the best place for it as it is not a sign type. She added another section could address sign types that do not require a permit.

Chair Barton stated yard signs may or may not be included in that category, depending upon the definition.

Ms. Howe stated she is unsure whether Maintenance, as well as Statues and Decorations, should be included. Chair Barton they belong in the “Artistic” category, which can also be messages.

Ms. Howe stated a permit is not required for a flag if it is not a sign.

Chair Barton stated yard signs are really temporary signs. Commissioner Blees stated there might be temporary signs that should require a permit.

Ms. Howe stated she has included a definition for yard signs.

Commissioner Blees stated, under Item 1, it might become too complicated to create a process for Planning Commission review on a case-by-case basis. He added this could set precedent. Chair Barton agreed.

Chair Barton asked, with regard to internally illuminated signs, whether they should be prohibited.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated he is fine with internally illuminated signs. He added regulations will be added for the size of signs, how bright they are, flashing lights, and hours of operation, as well as location.

Chair Barton stated motion flashing and flashing signs fall under Regulatory Standards and should be addressed there.

Ms. Howe stated “flashing” is listed as prohibited in the definition, which states “any illuminated sign that emits intermittent or flashing light or creates the illusion of intermittent or flashing light by means of animation.”

Commissioner Gelbmann stated a definition is required for “flashing” and “intensity”.

Chair Barton stated she does not see any reason to prohibit internally illuminated signs as they are already allowed.

Commissioner Blees stated illuminated signs can be allowed as long as they are regulated. He added lighting sources have changed dramatically. He stressed the importance of being generic enough to address all variations.

Commissioner Worm stated the definition of “downtown” needs to be revisited. Chair Barton that definition is in the downtown Design Manual.

Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission agrees internally illuminated signs will not be prohibited. She added flashing, animation and motion need to be addressed. Ms. Howe agreed, adding electric signs will need to be addressed.

Chair Barton stated, under Item 3, related to advertising or business signs on mobile equipment, should be changed to “signs attached to mobile equipment”. She added a vehicle should not be used solely as a sign. Ms. Howe agreed.

Mr. Zweber stated signage on commercial vehicles can include licensure information as well as commercial advertising.

Chair Barton stated, with regard to signs on utility posts, trees, and fences, the sign itself is not being regulated but rather where it can be placed.

Mr. Zweber stated the City Council would have to develop a right-of-way encroachment policy, which is different than an Ordinance. He added there is a setback requirement of 10 feet from the property line.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated the exception would be political signs during election season. Chair Barton stated location can be regulated.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated it is not realistic to try to regulate political signs in the right of way.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether there is a definition for billboards. He added he appreciates that billboards are prohibited as they do not add value to the City. Commissioner Bles stated “billboard” should be defined if it is prohibited.

Chair Barton stated a billboard is essentially an off-premises sign, regardless of size.

There was a general consensus to prohibit off-premises signs.

Commissioner Wise stated he would support a review of types of signs that are currently prohibited. he added he understands how precedent could be set, but there should be a review process.

Ms. Howe stated a special exception process could be considered for signs that are prohibited.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated billboards are rental property. He added there may be a way of regulating billboards.

Chair Barton stated Item 9 addresses signs that swing or noticeably move from wind pressure. She added that covers a lot of different signs, banners and flags. She asked whether there is a better way to address this, as it is a regulatory issue rather than a sign issue.

Ms. Howe stated, with regard to Permitting, City Staff is recommending removal of the section that requires an applicant to enter into an agreement with the City to remove and dispose of signs that are not maintained or have valid permits. She added “Suspension or Revocation” allows City Staff ability the to revoke a permit if it was issued in error or goes against another Ordinance.

Commissioner Bles stated the section on Permitting gives a lot of opportunity to set precedent because there may be conditions. He added “subject to conditions” could be used to establish something unique.

Chair Barton asked who would establish the conditions. Ms. Howe stated it would be inappropriate for City Staff to provide conditions. She added a separate process would be necessary to determine whether a permit is allowed.

Commissioner Worm requested that Sign Codes from the neighboring communities of Oakdale and Maplewood be reviewed to see if they have experienced any hang-ups.

Chair Barton stated the Sign Code should be reviewed by the Business Association for feedback and comment.

b. 7th Avenue Improvements (2022) – 1st Street to Helen Street On-Street Parking Configuration

City Engineer Morgan Dawley reviewed the proposed 2022 7th Avenue Improvements, including portions of 7th Avenue between 1st Street and east of Helen Street, and corridor streetscape improvements on 7th Avenue. He reviewed two options for parking configurations including 60-degree diagonal parking east of Helen Street in conformance with pre-existing conditions for on-street parking. The transitionary block to the west of Helen Street is proposed to have parallel parking. In 2020, parking configuration changes were considered, and the difference between diagonal and parallel parking was not significant.

Mr. Dawley stated other factors for consideration are additional costs to redo recent irrigation work, streetscape and trees that were planted in 2011-12, as well as reduction of green space. Expansion of pavement would be costly, and would leave a fairly narrow grass strip, not big enough for boulevard trees, which would change the character of the block significantly.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated he strongly favors Option 1, 60-degree parallel parking, which allows for a nice transition from the residential area to the west into the downtown area. He added the loss of bus stops is less desirable, especially with bus stops near Polar Ridge.

Commissioner Blees agreed that he supports Option 1.

Commissioner Worm asked whether input was received from the business community. Chair Barton stated that was undertaken by the downtown revitalization task force. Mr. Dawley confirmed there were several meetings in 2017 with the business community and general public.

Commissioner Wise stated he agrees that Option 1 is the best option. He added he was intrigued by the 2nd option, due to the elimination of curb cuts. He noted, in his opinion, if the City is going to add parking, it should be done like this rather than taking property to make additional parking lots.

Chair Barton agreed, adding it is a transition area between residential and downtown, and it is more pedestrian and bike friendly. She added it changes the feel of the whole area to add impervious surface and green space.

Mr. Dawley stated the City Council recently discussed improvements on 7th Avenue which stop short of the “5 Corners” intersection which has been contemplated for a roundabout in the past, as a gateway to the downtown area. City Staff have met with the County regarding a possible roundabout, but nothing has been finalized. A tax-forfeit, unbuildable property near the intersection was available to Ramsey County, and the City was asked whether they would be

interested in acquiring the parcel due to the potential roundabout concept. This could be an opportunity for future roundabout improvements.

Commissioner Brenna asked whether there is room at that intersection for a full-sized roundabout, even though 4 parcels would be impacted.

Mr. Dawley stated flexible approaches to creating a roundabout would need to be considered due to the constrained size. A dual roundabout has been considered, with 2 small circles. Xcel Energy installed facilities at this location in the right of way and indicated that they would remove the utilities in the future, if necessary, at their cost.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated he believes it is a good forward-focused direction to go in, to get some flexibility for the intersection.

Commissioner Wise stated these plans would make the intersection increase pedestrian safety. Mr. Dawley thanked the Commissioners for their comments and support. He added there is no guarantee that the County or City will be successful with this effort, but it seems worth pursuing.

Chair Barton stated, speaking of the County, additional bus service on McKnight Road should be pursued due to the growing size of the community. Mr. Dawley stated City Staff have been in touch with Metro Transit in the past, and they are generally centered around ridership at existing stops, which has resulted in fewer transit stop locations, buses removed from their routes. He added ridership was at an historic all time low in 2020, so they do not have good data for evaluating routes. He agreed to speak with City Staff about contacting Metro Transit.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

a. Downtown Seating Furnishings Status/Follow-up (added to agenda 12/1/21)

Chair Barton requested an update on downtown outdoor seating furniture. She added, at a recent Joint Planning Commission/Economic Development Authority meeting, Mayor Terry Furlong indicated he thought the Planning Commission should take the lead on that effort.

Ms. Ritchie stated she does not have any information to pass on. Some proposed permanent furniture was removed from the 2022 budget, but not restaurant seating.

Ms. Ritchie stated City Staff can do some research and get information on costs and design for outdoor restaurant seating.

Chair Barton stated this issue can be discussed at the Planning Commission's January 6, 2022 meeting.

b. RMP Task Force Representative Update (added to agenda 12/1/21)

Commissioner Gelbmann stated the Redevelopment Master Plan Task Force has met twice and has been considering appropriate levels of detail for the Master Plan review. He added the Task Force has been reviewing new development that has occurred in the City since the last document

was approved, and what properties are likely to be redeveloped. He noted the business community is an important stakeholder in the process.

IX. REPORTS FROM STAFF

-None.

X. REPORT FROM COUNCIL LIAISON

-None.

XI. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Brenna asked whether there is a plan for the mulch in landscaped areas in downtown. Ms. Ritchie stated proposed landscaping was cut from the 2022 budget. Chair Barton stated she believes funding will be added so the work will be completed next year. Ms. Ritchie agreed to provide additional information.

Commissioner Wise stated he recently attended Minnesota Green Step Cities' "New Approaches to Parking Management" seminar, information on which was forwarded to the Planning Commission by Ms. Ritchie. He added information was presented on the City of St. Paul's elimination of parking minimums, as well as the high cost and environmental impacts of parking and importance of bicycle infrastructure. He noted another topic was the concept of uncoupling project parking costs with actual residential construction, which allows rents to be affordable, and people can pay for parking if they need it.

Commissioner Wise stated a recording of the seminar is available if any Commissioners are interested.

Commissioner Worm stated this is his last meeting, and he would like to recommend that the Planning Commission replace him with someone from the business community.

Chair Barton stated the Holiday Hop is this coming Saturday.

Chair Barton encouraged everyone to support Brothers Bistro, which recently got some social media attention.

Chair Barton wished everyone a Merry Christmas. She added she hopes Commissioner Worm enjoys his retirement.

Ms. Ritchie stated she received an email from City Council Liaison Lisa Wong, with the following updates:

-John Stark has been selected as the new City Manager. Mr. Stark comes has a Planning background at the City of Richfield in Community Development. He will be an incredible addition, and she hopes the Commission can build a strong relationship.

-City Engineer Morgan Dawley is investigating a pedestrian friendly solution to Ariel Street. Since it is not slated for full reconstruction, an alternative to a sidewalk may be reviewed.

-The Redevelopment Master Plan Task Force has met and reviewed guiding principles; discussed who the primary audience is; and internal alignment of the City Council, Economic Development Authority and Planning Commission.

-The Arts and Culture Commission met with the Veterans Park Commission, and there may be additional discussion about trail access to a potential monument project consisting of a rock and gazebo.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion to adjourn by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 p.m.

The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission Meeting is Thursday, January 6, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

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