



**Planning Commission  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
November 2, 2023  
6:30 PM**

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

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Patrick Blees called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

**II. ROLL CALL**

COMMISSION

Patrick Blees, Chair

Andrew Wise, Vice-Chair

Absent

Erik Brenna, Commissioner

Cameron Muhic, Commissioner

Arrived at 6:32 PM

Jim Rathe, Commissioner

Jason Nordby, City Council Liaison

STAFF

Brandy Howe, Community Development Director

Chris Cherne, Planning Commission Secretary

**III. ADOPT AGENDA**

Blees requested to move Section VI. Item A Site Plan Review at 2371 McKnight Road after Section V.

Blees asked for a motion to adopt the November 2, 2023 meeting agenda as amended.

M/Rathe, S/Brenna.

Motion carried 3-0.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. Approval of September 7, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Blees asked for a motion to approve the September 7, 2023 meeting minutes.

M/Brenna, S/Rathe.

Motion carried 4-0.

**V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

There were no public comments.

**VI. COMMISSION BUSINESS, ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

A. Site plan review at 2371 McKnight Road

Howe presented the site plan review at 2371 McKnight Road to the Planning Commission. The applicant proposes to demolish the former automobile service building and rebuild the site as a drive-thru restaurant. In response to questions from the Planning Commission, Howe clarified that there would be a

sidewalk connection from the restaurant site to the sidewalk on McKnight Road and that vehicle access would be via 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and McKnight Road through the existing entrances to Target.

Zach Zelickson with Marvin Development V was available to answer questions from the Planning Commission. Zelickson clarified the utility easements on the site and stated they have recently received approval from the watershed. Zelickson described that the sidewalk from McKnight Road to the restaurant site will be ADA compliant. The Planning Commission discussed the pedestrian route from where the sidewalk ends at the parking lot to the front door. Blees stated that a painted striped crossing could be reasonable and Muhic inquired whether an island in the parking lot can be modified to include a pedestrian path. Zelickson stated that the developer will work on striping plans. Howe and Muhic discussed the possibility of removing two parking stalls to accommodate a safe pedestrian route from the proposed McKnight sidewalk to the front door.

Blees asked for a motion to approve the site plan review at 2371 McKnight Road with the listed conditions in addition to the elimination of two parking stalls and the inclusion of striping for a pedestrian route to be reviewed and approved by the Community Development Director.

M/Muhic, S/Rathe.

Motion carried 4-0.

## **VII. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### **A. Sign variance at 2678 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue E**

Howe presented the Planning Commission with a variance request by the American Legion for a wall-mounted electronic message center (EMC) at 2678 7<sup>th</sup> Ave E.

The Planning Commission asked applicants Archie Vickerman and Dan Bronk to state their case. Archie Vickerman thanked the Planning Commission and stated that submitted a variance request because the property between their building and 7<sup>th</sup> avenue is City property and that the sign could either be placed on the building or on a shared bituminous parking lot. Vickerman explained that it would be of great cost to put up a freestanding EMC in the parking lot due to trenching and electrical wiring. In addition, a freestanding EMC in the parking lot would be in the way of snowplowing and would take away parking spaces. Dan Bronk explained the involvement of the American Legion in the community and stated that all the money generated by the American Legion goes back into the community. Bronk stated that there are safety concerns with the current changeable-copy signs on the building. Vickerman explained that the letters blow away in the summer or freeze in the winter and are not feasible for future advertising. Bronk stated that the proposed EMC would advertise blood drives, food drives, and other community events.

Muhic asked the applicants why they decided to propose an EMC on the west wall facing the parking lot. Vickerman stated they were initially looking at two EMCs, one on the west and one on the north, however due to budgetary issues they settled on the west sign. If the Planning Commission would be willing to approve both, they would work on getting both. Brenna asked if the EMC would meet the requirements of the sign ordinance. The applicant clarified that all regulations in the code besides the freestanding sign requirement would be met.

Blees opened the public hearing at 7:11 PM.

There were no comments.

Blees closed the public hearing at 7:12 PM.



Nordby stated a conflict of interest as his significant other regularly changes the sign letters. Muhic stated he is of the mindset of approving the request as well as a conditional variance for a second sign. Brenna stated he is inclined to only consider the one sign that has been applied for. Blees stated that the sign could be placed elsewhere on the site, yet there are cost implications and other complexities to do so. Blees reminded the Commission that per statutory requirements, a variance cannot be approved solely because of economic reasons.

The Planning Commission discussed their uncertainty as to why wall mounted EMCs are not permitted. Blees stated it would be difficult to grant the variance, however, he appreciates the idea of looking at a text amendment change to allow a wall mounted EMC. Muhic and Brenna agreed. The Planning Commission reviewed the sign ordinance requirements for EMCs and directed staff to begin looking at a text amendment to permit wall mounted EMCs.

Brenna made a motion to recommend to City Council denial of the variance request at 2678 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue E. due to economic hardship not being rationale for a variance.

M/Brenna, S/Muhic.

Motion carried 4-0.

## **VIII. COMMISSION BUSINESS, ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **B. Capital Improvement Plan Review**

Howe reported on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Blees stated he did not see anything he would question.

Blees asked for a motion to recommend to City Council approval of the Capital Improvement Plan as it complies with the Comprehensive Plan.

M/Rathe, S/Brenna.

Motion carried 4-0.

## **IX. REPORTS**

Howe stated that the sign ordinance will come to the next meeting and stated that the zoning ordinance amendment process may be taken in pieces at first with the ultimate goal of compiling all at the end. There has also been consideration in reducing the number of commissioners from seven to five and asked the Commission for their reaction. Blees stated he does not feel strongly either way. Muhic stated he prefers seven commissioners as there would be the opportunity to have more voices in the group.

Brenna stated that his term expires at the end of 2023, and he will not be seeking reappointment. Members of the Planning Commission thanked Brenna for his years of service to the Commission.

Nordby stated that there will be an open house regarding a Hwy 120 reconstruction project on Thursday, November 9, 2023 at 5:00 PM at the Washington County Wildwood Library.

Blees encouraged everyone to attend the Veterans Day Commemoration at Veterans Park on November 11, 2023 at 11:00 AM.

## **X. ADJOURNMENT**

Blees asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 PM.

M/Muhic, S/Rathe.

Motion carried 4-0.



**The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission Meeting is Thursday, December 7, 2023 at 6:30 PM.**

Members, please notify any planned absences to:

Chris Cherne  
Planning Commission Secretary  
651-747-2440  
[chris.cherne@northstpaul.org](mailto:chris.cherne@northstpaul.org)