

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021**

I. CALL TO ORDER

(Audio started at 3:30 into the video)

ROLL CALL (there was no roll call)

EDA

Robert Dew, Chair

Terry Furlong, Mayor/Council Representative

Scott Thorsen, Council Representative - Excused

Rich McNamara, Commissioner ??

Tom Schifsky, Commissioner

Scott Duddeck, Executive Director

Don Jensen, Treasurer

Archie Vickerman, Commissioner

Brett Garry, Business Association Representative ??

PLANNING 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

Allan Worm, Commissioner

STAFF

Eric Zweber, Planning Consultant

Lisa Ritchie, Planning & EDA Secretary

INTRODUCTIONS

City Manager Scott Duddeck asked the meeting attendees to introduce themselves to the group.

Andrew Wise – no audio 3:36

Archie Vickerman – no audio 4:31

Kevin Fuller stated he is the owner of Reflex Medical and serves as the EDA Vice Chair. He added he hopes he can add positive contributions to the downtown area.

Lisa Ritchie stated she is the new Administrative Assistant with Community Services. She added she is happy to be on board and looks forward to working with everybody.

Rick Gelbmann stated he has served on the Planning Commission for over 7 years. He added he enjoys seeing what is going on in the City. He noted he is excited about the City's current development projects.

John Monge stated he is the Planning Commission Vice-Chair, and he has served on the Commission since 2020. He added he has lived in North St. Paul since 1996.

Robert Dew stated he is the EDA Chair and has served on the EDA since its inception over a decade ago. He added he owns the Keindels building on 7th Street and Charles Avenue and has been involved in many City initiatives over the past 15-18 years.

Planning Commissioner Al Worm stated he has lived in North St. Paul since 1972. He added he retired from 3M 20 years ago.

Planning Commissioner Patrick Blees stated he is an architect and has lived in North St. Paul for a total of 46 years. He added he loves to see the transformations going on in the City recently. He noted he has been on the Planning Commission since 2020 and served on the Design and Historic Review Commission.

Eric Zweber, Planning Consultant from WSB, stated he has been a City planner for about 21 years, and has worked for WSB for the last 6 years.

Planning Commissioner Eric Brenna stated he is a Civil Engineer for MnDOT's Bridge office. He added he has been on the Planning Commission since 2020. He noted he wanted to take part in the community and see what he can do to help.

City Council Member Lisa Wong stated she began her first term in January 2021. She added she has lived in North St. Paul for 5 years. She noted she is the City Council Liaison to the Planning Commission.

Tom Schifsky stated he has lived in North St. Paul his whole life and has had a local business for over 60 years. He added he has served on the EDA for the past 4 years.

Elaine Barton stated she has served on the Planning Commission for 12-14 years. She added she worked for AT&T before her retirement.

Mayor Furlong stated EDA member Don Jensen is unable to attend the meeting as he is in California. He added City Council Member Scott Thorsen was also unable to attend the meeting.

City Manager Duddeck stated there are many development activities going on in North St. Paul that are very exciting to see. He added many projects and activities are happening at one time, and during a pandemic, and it is phenomenal that we have been able to hold it all together and move forward.

II. ADOPT AGENDA

-None.

III. CONSENT AGENDA

-None.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

-None.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

-None.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING

-None.

VII. BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Update on EDA activities - ongoing and planned
- B. Discussion on how current development activity may change the look, feel and needs of the community. Will this possibly drive modification or higher flexibility in code/approval process?
- C. Discuss desire of aligning vision between Council/Planning/EDA. How do we get there? Revisit living documents, primarily Redevelopment Master Plan.
- D. How can each group support one another and communicate ongoing activities/concerns to maintain alignment?

EDA Chair Robert Dew stated ongoing and completed EDA projects in North St. Paul include the old Anchor Block site and the senior facility at Commerce Park. He added the EDA continues to drive projects to stabilization to ensure that they become good developments for the City of North St. Paul. He noted the EDA is actively working to identify the correct uses for several City-owned infill sites.

Mr. Dew stated the City of North St. Paul is in an enviable position, with new and existing residential development that will be full or at capacity by the end of 2022, putting a lot of people in the downtown area. He added the EDA is considering how to keep people engaged and utilizing services and keep them in North St. Paul, to take advantage of all that the City has to offer. He stressed the importance of determining what the demographics will look like, to anticipate demands and opportunities.

Mr. Dew stated the EDA recently issued their Annual Report to the City Council. He added the City's Redevelopment Master Plan, approved a few years ago, came up as part of the Annual Report review. He noted this important document has not been reviewed recently and would be a good place to start in terms of aligning the visions of the City Council, Planning Commission and EDA. He noted he feels this should be City Council-driven at some level.

Mr. Dew stated the community center site has been in flux for many years. He added the site is currently used as a private facility, as well as housing the library on a long-term lease. He added it will be important to move forward with a plan that may include community use of the building again.

Mr. Dew stated the EDA held a joint meeting with the Planning Commission a few years ago. He added it would be helpful to have regular communication between the two groups to share high level summaries, spread news, and raise awareness. He stressed the importance of rendering the best judgments to the City Council for decision-making.

E. Update on Planning Commission Activities

Planning Commission Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission's role is to guide City planning, including the Comprehensive Plan, Redevelopment Master Plan, Living Streets document and downtown revitalization. She added the Planning Commission has been reviewing the Zoning Code for several months to ensure that it aligns with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. She noted the Planning Commission is relatively limited in terms of what can be done with applications after they have been reviewed by City Staff. She expressed her agreement that coordination and communication matter.

Chair Barton stated the Redevelopment Master Plan should be reviewed, although any changes would potentially involve a Comprehensive Plan amendment, which is a lengthy process.

Mr. Dew stated EDA recommendations are made completely from an economic development standpoint, in terms of what is best for the City, and without regard for the Zoning Code, the Planning Commission or the City Council. He added the EDA attempts to provide the best recommendation possible.

Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission uses a table in the Zoning Code that designates Zoning districts and business categories. She added it is not possible to predict what type of business might arise for a specific parcel. She noted this makes the process easier and more cost-effective for applicants.

Mr. Dew stated the Planning Commission may recommend a type of use for a privately owned parcel that is acceptable under the Zoning Code but could potentially go against what the EDA is trying to accomplish. He stressed the importance of ensuring that both groups are aware of and understand each other's goals. He noted it may not be obvious what those needs are until projects stabilize, but they can be anticipated.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated there is a balance between allowing the marketplace to operate freely while restricting the kind of development that occurs. He added the role of the EDA is important in helping communicate information about potential development and how it fits with the needs of the community.

Commissioner Blees stated he agrees that the EDA should not be focused on the restrictions of the Planning Commission, but rather have a broad reach and be open to opportunities that could be good for the City. He added many residents have expressed a desire for a nice restaurant in

the downtown area. He noted the EDA may be working on another type of development, while residents are saying they want a restaurant. He noted it is a challenge bring these two things together.

Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission is not always aware of how long an applicant has been working with City Staff on a particular idea or concept. She asked whether City Staff consults with the EDA when development is proposed for an area marked for redevelopment. She asked whether this is a process issue that can be addressed.

Mr. Duddeck stated City Staff brings development proposals to the Planning Commission for recommendation to the City Council. He added sometimes the City only finds out with the intent to purchase, and the developer is already aware of zoning.

Mayor Furlong stated the Lillie Newspaper building is an example of a parcel that has a purchase agreement but over which the City has no control.

Chair Barton stated the EDA has made efforts to provide information about properties that are available across the City. She added the EDA can be proactive than the Planning Commission in this regard. She noted it is worth considering and discussing how to coordinate these efforts given the limitations. She noted the Planning Commission has made a recommendation that concept plans be provided to City Staff and the Planning Commission before an official application is submitted.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated outreach to property owners and buyers is valuable, so the City is aware of potential development plans.

Mr. Dew stated there have been City Staff over the years who provided support and assistance to the EDA, almost exclusively at times. He added the EDA might want to consider hiring someone who is fully dedicated to EDA activities.

Chair Barton asked whether the new CiviClerk online platform can be used to distribute agendas and documents. Mr. Duddeck confirmed this. Ms. Ritchie stated the platform will be collaborative, and easy for people to access.

Mr. Dew stated it would be helpful to have a short synopsis of EDA meetings provided to the Planning Commission for their review. Chair Barton agreed, adding it is important to make it as easy as possible to do business with the City.

Ms. Ritchie stated ongoing action items could be added to the end of the Planning Commission agenda. Chair Barton agreed that is a good idea.

Mr. Dew stated it would be helpful for the EDA to have action items recorded and communicated to the Planning Commission.

Chair Barton asked whether Planning Commission draft minutes could be posted on the City website. Mr. Duddeck agreed that can be done.

Ms. Ritchie asked Mr. Duddeck whether the contractor who does the City's minutes could help out with other meetings. She added it is difficult to get them completed in a timely manner. Mr. Duddeck agreed to look into that.

Commissioner Wise asked whether the EDA has any guiding documents that are analogous to the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Dew stated the Redevelopment Master Plan is the most significant document that the EDA uses to determine good vision alignment within the City. He added it has been used for many years and should be updated. He noted he presented the EDA Annual Report at a recent City Council meeting.

Chair Barton asked whether these documents are available on the EDA's webpage on the City website. Mr. Duddeck confirmed this.

Chair Barton asked whether the EDA has thought of creating plans for large undeveloped sites or areas. Mr. Dew stated some of that work has been done but it is difficult to draft a concept plan for property that the City does not own. He added the EDA recently agreed to commission concept plans for the 7th Avenue parcel.

Chair Barton stated there are more numerous types of uses farther away from the downtown area. She asked whether the EDA has given any thought to what uses would not be desirable.

Mr. Dew stated there were discussions at the EDA level over the past few years, but no concept plans have been developed.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated the City of Oakdale has a large development of 400-600 homes about .5 mile from North St. Paul's border. He added that may have an effect on the types of development the City will want to see near that intersection.

Mr. Dew stated he would support the formation of a collaborative group between the City Council, EDA and Planning Commission, to review the Redevelopment Master Plan. He added a study group could be formed for the community center building to consider options and provide recommendations to the City Council.

Mr. Duddeck stated City Staff are working on gathering information on options for the community center building, including use by civic groups, food shelf, library expansion, and a potential teen study center managed by the School District. He added all groups would be required to support the building financially. He noted there are many courses of action being considered.

Chair Barton stated the community center is public property, and purchase of the facility would require action by the City Council to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. She added the Redevelopment Master Plan encompasses the community center facility. She noted there has been no community input from residents.

Chair Barton stated there was also a vision for Seppala Boulevard, to create a pedestrian and bike-friendly boulevard. She added that concept should be reviewed since the roadway is now a 2-way street.

Mr. Duddeck stated he is open to hearing from all groups about the future of the community center building. He added the building was built as a long-term asset for the City and could be needed again with ongoing redevelopment and potential new residents. He noted the site provides a significant amount of downtown parking, which would cause problems if the building were to be sold.

Council Member Wong asked whether the City's new software can track applications and integrate notifications into communication to the Planning Commission or EDA when there is pertinent information to convey. Mr. Duddeck confirmed this.

Eric Zweber, WSB Planning Consultant, stated the Planning Commission is working to ensure that the City has the ability to develop different kinds of businesses and residential units than are currently allowed by City Code. He added there may be an opportunity to continue discussions with the EDA about how they can become involved in development. He noted, to Ms. Ritchie's point, locating grant funding or financial assistance would be very helpful for both groups so that other agencies or sources can provide development funding instead of depending upon North St. Paul residents.

Mayor Furlong expressed his appreciation to everyone for coming together to discuss these issues. He added there are positive changes ahead.

Kevin Fuller stated he believes it will be important to be patient and not move too quickly on development at 7th Avenue and Margaret Street. He added, at some point in the near future, there will be a really cool downtown area.

Mr. Duddeck there is potential for development at former Ground Round site as well as the out lots by Target. He added City Staff have received information from the DNR that there will be a potential flood map update, which could have an impact on redevelopment opportunities. He noted this issue will probably be reviewed by the EDA and Planning Commission in the near future.

Mr. Duddeck expressed his appreciation for the hard work of all the EDA and Planning Commissioners.

Chair Barton thanked the Planning Commissioners and EDA for attending multiple meetings every month for the past few months.

VIII. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL LIAISON

-None.

IX. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

-None.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Duddeck adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.