

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021
6:30 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Barton called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

II. ROLL CALL

COMMISSION

Elaine Barton, Commission Chair

Patrick Blees, Commissioner

Erik Brenna, Commissioner **EXCUSED ABSENT**

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

Planning Secretary Lisa Ritchie

III. ADOPT AGENDA

Motion to adopt agenda by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Monge, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adopt the April 1, 2021 Agenda.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion to approve Minutes by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Blees, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to approve the March 4, 2021 regular meeting minutes as submitted.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

John Schmahl, 2750 Chisholm Avenue, stated CivicPlus notes that there are previous versions of tonight's meeting agenda. He added he has suggested to the City Council that any agenda update should be noted and highlighted, to make it easier to find. He noted the City Council has adopted that practice, and agenda changes are mentioned on CivicPlus. He suggested strongly that the Planning Commission should do the same. He noted he would prefer it changes were made in red.

Chair Barton asked whether that change can be made. Planning Secretary Lisa Ritchie confirmed this.

VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. ZCU-21-2 Conditional Use Permit to Construct a Security Entrance and Addition for Administrative Offices at Cowern Elementary School at 2131 Margaret Street N.

City Planner Eric Zweber reviewed a Conditional Use Permit Request for Cowern Elementary School to amend the existing CUP which was approved in 2004. The proposal is for a 1,750 square foot addition to the east side of the building. Proposed conditions of approval include a more secure vestibule addition; location of the principal's office and nurse's office to the front of the building; and an exterior window in the reception area. The current office location will be remodeled into working space for teachers. The proposal meets all R-1 building standards, and no setback reductions are proposed. City Staff have requested that two trees will be relocated.

Mr. Zweber stated parking will be addressed as part of the proposed project, as the three parking lots that serve the school are in various conditions. The south Avenue parking lot is deficient, and the school-owned property on Margaret Street, previously a house and driveway, has paved areas and gravel. City Staff are proposing that the property be improved and striped.

Mr. Zweber stated a variance is not necessary as the property is an existing legal nonconforming use. The number of classrooms will not be increased, and no changes to site lighting is proposed. Conditions of approval include submission of plans; relocation of 2 trees; parking improvements; permits; information regarding water usage for potential SAC charges; and comments in the engineer's memo to be addressed.

Commissioner Blees stated there appears to be a new sanitary sewer connection. Mr. Zweber stated there is a storm sewer connection to the building that will be relocated.

Chair Barton asked who uses the South Avenue parking lot. Mr. Zweber stated that lot is used for staff parking, general public parking, and bus drop off and pick up.

Chair Barton asked what whether the South Avenue lot is striped. Mr. Zweber stated it will be necessary to restripe the parking lot. He added the intention is for a total of 60 parking spaces in all three locations.

Sal Bagley, Wold Architects, introduced herself and her colleague, Sean Kelly, as well as Mike Boland from the School District. Ms. Bagley stated there are approximately 55 parking spaces, counting footage in the gravel area. She added they are working with City Staff to reach the target of 60 parking spaces. She noted the northernmost lot might be able to hold more cars if it were striped differently.

Chair Barton opened public hearing at 6:55 p.m.

There were no comments.

Close public hearing at 6:56 p.m.

Chair Barton requested that the staff report for the City Council meeting packet should reflect site changes. Mr. Zweber confirmed this.

Motion by Commissioner Monge, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to recommend conditional City Council approval of an amendment to the existing Conditional Use Permit to Construct a Security Entrance and Addition for Administrative Offices at Cowern Elementary School at 2131 Margaret Street N., with 6 conditions as listed in the Staff Report.

B. ZCU-21-1 and ZVA-21-1 Conditional Use Permit and Height Variance to Construct a Three-Story and Eleven Classroom Addition to North High School at 2416 11th Avenue E.

Mr. Zweber reviewed a Conditional Use Permit amendment and building height variance for proposed construction at North High School. The proposed project includes a 27,000 square-foot, 11-classroom addition on three levels on the west side of the building, as well as exterior building improvements and main entrance security upgrades. Along with interior renovations, the exterior parking areas will be completely reconstructed. The proposed addition will require a height variance due to grading on 11th Avenue.

Mr. Zweber stated the lot size and width setbacks meet requirements, but the proposed height due to the existing grade requires a variance request. A decrease in the amount of parking is proposed due to improvements in access and circulation. There are currently 250 parking stalls for school staff, proposed to be reduced to 180 stalls; and 180 parking stalls for students, proposed to be reduced to 140 stalls. Total parking on the property would go from 427 spaces to 325 spaces, for a reduction of 102 spaces. There is an easement at St. Mark's Church across the street for 102 spaces.

Mr. Zweber stated a total of 325 student parking spaces are required, with 1 parking stall per classroom and 1 parking stall for every 7 students. Access improvements will be an important element of the renovation of the parking lots, including a designated parent drop-off area of 11 spaces.

Mr. Zweber stated, with regard to the 11th Avenue façade, City Staff are requesting the addition of windows or other elements, as required by City Code. No landscaping is proposed near the addition due to the excessive slope that will be created due to necessary grading. A retaining wall is recommended to accommodate the grade change.

Mr. Zweber stated the proposed lighting plan exceeds candle limitations, and a revised photometric plan is requested. No rooftop equipment is proposed on the addition as mechanicals will be enclosed within the building's main level.

Mr. Zweber stated City Staff are requesting Planning Commission consideration of two separate motions: 12 Conditions of Approval as listed in the Staff Report, and a variance for building height with a condition that the building height not exceed 3 stories or 41 feet.

Commissioner Monge asked why there are no windows on the 11th Avenue façade. Mr. Zweber stated the Code limits the number of windows, but not where they can be located.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated he is surprised by 325 parking spaces. He added there are always many cars parked on the street during school hours. He noted he supports the modification that allows parent access and staff parking combined, while student parking would be moved, as that seems like a good way to address traffic issues. He expressed concern about where students can park and what it will do to the neighborhood.

Mr. Zweber stated the applicant is proposing a balance of parking, but parking standards should be reviewed in the future, as they are the same for all schools.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether the Code is based on the current number of students, and why they are adding classrooms. Mr. Zweber confirmed that the addition will be able to accommodate the projected number of students.

Commissioner Monge stated he would recommend signage on 11th Avenue to indicate that there is a sharp curve and decline, with a stop sign. He added that will continue to be a very dangerous spot, especially if students are crossing from St. Marks.

Sal Bagley, project architect, stated the end capacity will be 1809 students when the building is complete. She added the building Code does not indicate which side windows must face, but new State legislation requires any school building with capacity of over 50 occupants to be fully engineered to survive a F-4 tornado. She noted windows must have internal hurricane-rated shutters.

Ms. Bagley stated the north façade faces the street, and the addition of a window or two is possible. She added windows are focused on classroom exterior walls, but a material change of that sort would be compliant with City Code and Ordinances.

Sean Kelly, project architect, stated the west parking lot functions as a dedicated parent drop-off area, but it was not designed for that purpose.

Commissioner Blees asked whether the paved area on the steep slope along the north façade of the building is proposed to create an accessible egress.

Nate from Larson Engineering stated the egress from the building on the north side requires a 6-foot-wide sidewalk, which is unable to be graded to soften that slope.

Mike Boland, School District Operations Supervisor and Construction Manager, stressed the importance of keeping in mind that over 300 students will no longer be required to leave the high school every hour to attend classes in the District Education Center. He added the school population is not going to increase.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated students may be amenable to riding bikes to school, as people become more aware of environmental issues. He added bike access to the trails and streets surrounding the school will be important links for students to get to school. He noted the trail over

Highway 36 always seems to be jammed there. He asked what is planned to increase ease of bike-ability.

Mr. Zweber stated City Staff and the School District have discussed the trail and its entrance, as well as flow of traffic. He presented a pdf depiction showing improvements.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated this redesign project is an important opportunity to integrate the City's transportation goals, creating better accessibility for bikes and pedestrians.

Mr. Zweber stated there was concern from the Fire Chief regarding bus access, and the new plans are more efficient access for emergency services. He added City Staff are waiting for written recommendations from the Fire Chief.

Commissioner Gelbmann requested clarification regarding security changes at the main entrance. He asked what security measures are proposed at the athletic entrance.

Mr. Boland stated the main entrance is locked during the day, except when students are entering or exiting the building in a large capacity.

Mr. Kelly stated this is consistent with how the majority of School District facilities are operated. He added all perimeter doors are locked during the day, and the main entrance is the only access point. He noted this was a factor that was considered in moving the student parking lot.

Commissioner Wise echoed Commissioner Gelbmann's comments regarding the trail connection. He added this will be a nice improvement to what is currently there, even with a change in bus direction. He noted pedestrian and bike access to the school and neighborhoods will be greatly improved.

Commissioner Wise stated the rendering shows a school logo on the northeast corner of the building facade. He added that is a great visual opportunity as that corner is a gateway to the school. He asked whether a similar design could be added to the northwest corner, which is also a gateway area and could be presented as a more formal approach.

Ms. Bagley agreed, stating the logo at the main entrance is a placeholder, and the architects are working with the School District communications staff on branding with consistency and equity across all buildings. She added, however, the proposal for additional signage on the northwest side is a great idea. She noted the City's sign Ordinance can be reviewed to determine whether a variance would be required.

Commissioner Wise stated the proposal calls for many improvements and will be a great addition to the school building.

Commissioner Monge asked whether adding more windows would be a major expense. Ms. Bagley agreed, stating the windows are expensive due to the required hurricane shutters. Mr. Kelly stated requirements for specific amount of continuous structure must be met. He added there would also be design considerations.

City Council Liaison Lisa Wong stated the City Council will have many questions regarding design and parking, as well as consideration for pedestrian access and other City goals embedded in the Comprehensive Plan. She added parking may be a sticking point, but the design is much improved.

Ms. Bagley requested clarification from the Planning Commission regarding how to proceed with Condition #9.

Chair Barton stated that can be addressed after the public hearing.

Chair Barton opened the public hearing at 7:46 p.m.

There were no comments.

Chair Barton closed the public hearing at 7:47 p.m.

Chair Barton expressed agreement that the proposal aligns with the City's goals related to increased bike and pedestrian access that does not create traffic conflicts.

Chair Barton requested clarification regarding the parking lot circulation.

Mr. Zweber stated parking lot access from 2nd Street will stay essentially the same. He added the intention is that parents can enter the drop off area which will have space for 11 cars and a passing lane and exit into 2-way traffic.

Chair Barton asked how pedestrians will cross from St. Mark's parking lot, if buses are still parked on 11th Avenue. She added there is a lot of street parking on 11th Avenue. She noted the proposal does not fix any of those issues.

Mr. Zweber stated closing the third parking lot entrance is a benefit. Chair Barton agreed.

Chair Barton stated Ms. Bagley had a question about Condition #9. Mr. Zweber stated that is addressed in the staff report as Condition #8, because Condition #6 was divided into two separate conditions.

Chair Barton stated she would support a review of how increasing the use of bikes will reduce traffic and demand for parking. She added the proposed amount of parking meets requirements but is not sufficient. She noted she would like the City's goals of walkability and bike-ability to be incorporated into these plans.

Chair Barton stated the plans do not include any bike racks. She added that seems like something the School District would be interested in pursuing.

Commissioner Gelbmann agreed, adding that would make it more inviting for students and staff to bike to school.

Mr. Zweber stated, with regard to Condition #8 in the staff report, City Staff met with the architects, engineers and School District to discuss potential changes in the public right of way on 2nd Street and possibly 11th Avenue to encourage pick-up and drop off by parents. He added it may be possible within the existing curb line and would be beneficial in terms of traffic flow. He noted this condition will allow the City to review other potential improvements and address the Fire Chief's comments.

Mr. Zweber stated City Staff is uncomfortable with expanding on that condition and moving this forward to the City Council until the appropriate improvements have been identified. He added he recommends a separate condition requiring the School District to prepare a plan to address parking demands, and to work with students to decrease parking requirements. The Planning Commission agreed.

Commissioner Blees stated he would recommend improving the crosswalk across the bus lane to make it more visible and obvious, as well as accessible, for bikers and walkers. He added the pavement could be raised or changed to make it more intentional as a pedestrian link.

Commissioner Worm stated Condition #4, should be changed to state "windows and/or logo on the north side".

Mr. Zweber reviewed new and amended Conditions of Approval as referenced in the Staff Report:

- Amendment to Condition #4 - to add logo or branding that could be an architectural element
- New Condition #11 – report from School District on implementation of parking and multi-modal plans
- New Condition #12 – implementation of a signage and wayfinding plan to assist drivers and improve one-way traffic
- New Condition #13 - continue to work with City Staff on improvements to bicycle and pedestrian crossings, including bike trail access through the parking lot

Commissioner Monge stated he would like to see improved signage at the stop sign on 11th Avenue. He added a flashing pedestrian sign may be appropriate.

Chair Barton stated that would be a City consideration.

Mr. Zweber stated that can be referenced in Condition #8.

Chair Barton requested clarification regarding the time frame.

Mr. Zweber stated the project is a multi-year phase. He added November 1, 2021 would be a reasonable anticipated approval date.

Mr. Zweber reviewed amendments to the conditions as discussed by the Planning Commission: modifications to #4; modifications to #8 regarding traffic signage or stop sign; the addition of 3 new conditions; report back to City Council by November 1, 2021; signage plan and wayfinding for directional flow; and improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Chair Barton stated signage in the parking lots should not be limited to drop off locations but rather any place where it would be appropriate to increase traffic flow efficiency.

Motion by Commissioner Wise, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to recommend conditional City Council approval of a Conditional Use Permit to Construct a Three-Story and Eleven Classroom Addition to North High School at 2416 11th Avenue E.

Motion by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Monge, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to recommend conditional City Council approval of a Height Variance for the proposed Addition to North High School not to exceed Three Stories and 41 feet in height.

C. ZTA-21-1 Zoning Code Text Amendments to Implement the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Zweber reviewed lengthy Zoning Code text amendments, which are intended to bring the Zoning Code up to date and in alignment with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Zweber reviewed proposed changes to six sections of the Zoning Code:

Truck parking restrictions – proposed amendments would place restrictions on certain vehicles including commercial and larger vehicles as well as limitations on where they can be parked in residential districts.

Land Use definitions – 41 new definitions and 25 modifications are proposed to better describe regulated uses and add new definitions due to changes in State statute.

Table 3 – Residential Districts – the proposed addition of cottage developments and definitions for accessory uses. The use table for mixed uses would be combined with the table for residential uses to ensure consistency.

Table 4 – Residential Lot Requirements, to reduce minimum the lot size in R-1 and R-2 districts and reduce lot width from 60 feet to 50 feet.

Table 5 – increase maximum density for R-1 and R-2 to match the Comprehensive Plan and add livable floor space requirements for two-family and townhome units.

Tables 6 and 7 - Mixed Use Districts and Lot Requirements – the addition of a minimum lot requirement per dwelling.

Overlay Districts – Downtown Overlay, Shoreland Overlay and Planned Unit Development. Townhomes are proposed to be prohibited in the Downtown Overlay District. A minimum lot width would be created in the Shoreland Overlay District that is the same as R-1 and R-2, and lot size that is the same as the R-2. Changes would need to be approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR).

Mr. Zweber stated he recommends that minimum lot area should be included in R-1 requirements to ensure less impervious surface.

Section 10 – amendment of 5 subsections, including usable open space, supplemental regulations, architectural requirements, landscaping and screening, and off-street parking and loading.

Chair Barton asked whether the Planning Commission already decided on a minimum dwelling unit for a detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU). She added it is necessary to provide adequate livable space.

Mr. Zweber stated he recommends a minimum of 201 feet, as accessory structures under 200 feet do not require a building permit. Chair Barton stated she would recommend 300 feet to be consistent.

Chair Barton opened the public hearing at 8:45 p.m.

John Schmahl, 2750 Chisholm Avenue, stated he submitted his comments to Mr. Zweber yesterday, as he was unsure whether he would be well enough to join the public hearing.

Mr. Zweber reviewed his notes regarding his conversation with Mr. Schmahl. He stated Mr. Schmahl expressed concern about parking provisions for large recreational vehicles, and the requirement that recreational vehicles cannot be parked in the front yard or driveway for more than 72 hours. Mr. Schmahl indicated he would like more community outreach on this issue because this will be a big change for residents.

Mr. Zweber stated Mr. Schmahl expressed concern about restrictions related to vehicles parked within the 10-foot right of way, from the back of the curb or driveway. He added he and Mr. Schmahl discussed right of way width, which has been moved to another section of the Code, and whether 10 feet is the right number.

Mr. Zweber stated, in Section 3, parking stall size should apply to detached residential properties.

Mr. Schmahl stated the section in the Traffic Code about vehicles being actively loaded and unloaded should be removed, as it relates to commercial vehicles.

Mr. Schmahl stated he thought the section prohibiting landscaping within drainage and utility easements was positive.

Mr. Schmahl asked whether “authorized parking area”, must be paved or properly surfaced, and an appropriate size. He added a 9x20 foot minimum area is required when a new home is built. He noted there should be something in the code that regulates the size and condition of authorized parking areas.

Mr. Schmahl stated driveways may not exceed 22-foot maximum width at the property line. He added this is a problem for pie-shaped properties and caused a dispute between neighbors on Chisholm Avenue when someone wanted to widen their driveway. He noted it should be stated that you are dealing with property lines when you expand the width of a driveway.

Mr. Schmahl stated he agrees that vans can be commercial vehicles.

Mr. Schmahl stated it is strange that you can park a commercial vehicle in your front yard for as long as you want, but you cannot park a recreational vehicle for more than 72 hours. He added he does not see what the problem is with parking recreational vehicles in front yards.

Mr. Schmahl stated parking of recreational vehicles in “side yard or rear yard surfaced area” should be referenced under the “no parking limit”.

Mr. Schmahl stated the measurements stated in the draft document should be defined to determine where the front yard is.

Chair Barton closed public hearing at 9:12 p.m.

Chair Barton stated she forwarded some comments to Mr. Zweber. She asked whether the Planning Commission wanted to review her comments, or discuss issues brought up during the public hearing.

Commissioner Blees stated he would prefer to table this lengthy discussion to another meeting. The Planning Commission agreed.

Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission discussed recreational vehicles at a previous meeting. She added she will find the minutes and review them.

Mr. Zweber stated the definition of “commercial vehicle” was erroneously omitted. He agreed to look into it.

Mr. Zweber agreed to combine the group’s comments, Chair Barton’s recommendations and comments from Mr. Schmahl and draft a memo outlining changes and why they were made. He requested that any comments or suggestions should be forwarded to himself or Ms. Ritchie.

Chair Barton stated she would like to discuss two uses: community gardens and accessory uses – yard sale. She added they are not allowed in the MU districts, and yet there are residential homes in the MU districts, so it seems that they should be allowed. She noted yard sales are listed as an interim use which is even more strange.

Mr. Zweber stated the use could be added as an interim use in the MU districts, which would indicate that it is eventually meant to be redeveloped into something else.

Commissioner Worm asked for this item to be tabled.

Chair Barton stated she wanted to get agreement on potential uses.

Mr. Zweber stated he will have all the necessary information ready for the May 6, 2021 meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Worm, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to table Zoning Code Text amendments to be addressed at the May 6, 2021 meeting.

VII. COMMISSION BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

-None.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

-None.

IX. REPORTS FROM STAFF

Chair Barton asked Ms. Ritchie whether the new Planning Commissioners will be getting a City email address on the CivicPlus platform. Ms. Ritchie stated she has not heard that Commissioner email addresses have been put on hold, but she does not have additional follow-up on that issue.

Mr. Zweber stated there are no applications for the Planning Commission's May 6, 2021 meeting, but City Staff are in discussions with two potential applications.

X. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL LIAISON

City Council Liaison Wong thanked the Commissioners for their hard work and efforts which are greatly appreciated. She stated the Planning Commission/EDA Joint meeting was a great opportunity and she hopes that can be planned on a more regular basis.

City Council Liaison Wong stated the City Council is working on developments in terms of property use in the downtown area.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether there is a possibility that the City might prioritize infrastructure, in particular, potential improvements at the intersection of Highway 36 and Century Avenue.

City Council Liaison Wong stated there has been discussion at the City Council level about that issue as a main priority that would require funding opportunities. She added American Investment Plan funding is being considered as a potential source of funding.

XI. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

-None.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion to adjourn by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Worm, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adjourn the meeting at 9:36 p.m.

The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission Meeting is Thursday, May 6, 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