CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
JOINT MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JULY 15, 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. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom.

II. ROLL CALL

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Robert Dew, Chair
Kevin Fuller, Vice Chair
Don Jensen, Treasurer
Tom Schifsky VIA ZOOM
Archie Vickerman
Terry Furlong, Mayor/Council Representative
Tim Cole, Council Representative
Brett Garry, Business Association Representative ABSENT

STAFF
Brian Frandle, City Manager/EDA Executive Director
Eric Zweber, Planning Consultant
Lisa Ritchie, Planning Secretary

III. ADOPT AGENDA

The July 15, 2021, Joint Meeting Agenda was adopted by consent.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority Joint Meeting minutes of March 18, 2021 were approved as presented by consent.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

There were no comments.

VI. COMMISSION BUSINESS, ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Redevelopment Master Plan Update/Review

Economic Development Authority Chair Robert Dew reviewed the Redevelopment Master Plan, a joint effort between the EDA and Planning Commission in 2012, with funding from a Livable Communities grant. He added the Master Plan was developed to align various agencies with the City including the City Council and Planning Commission in terms of what the overall long-term vision for the City should be. He noted the Master Plan was set up in 3 five-year phases, with a recommendation that it should be updated after approximately 10 years.

Chair Dew stated the Master Plan is currently used as a source document for North St. Paul, and much of the development that has occurred is consistent with what was laid out as goals in the Master Plan. He added he hopes that revisiting the plan will ensure that City agencies are aligned, and that any new issues can be addressed.

Chair Dew stated the Master Plan refers to the EDA's responsibility to update and drive the document through its life cycle. He added the EDA reviews development with a view of what is good for the economic health of the community, while the Planning Commission has expertise in dealing with the needs and desires of the community. He noted there are many elements, including pedestrian traffic and bike lanes, that are not discussed at the EDA but are very important to the community, and are salient topics for this joint meeting.

Chair Dew stated the EDA was contacted today by a party interested in purchasing a property in the City and hoping to understand the City's vision for the property in question as well as surrounding areas. He added the Master Plan is extremely valuable for providing that type of information for people who want to invest in the community. He noted it will also be great to be able to say that the City is working on updating the Master Plan.

City Engineer Morgan Dawley stated the City received a fairly significant grant to develop the Master Plan. He added his participation was to advise and provide information regarding infrastructure and transportation, as well as engineering-related issues like land use and zoning. He noted Capital Improvement Plans and other documents were used as guiding documents to prepare the Master Plan.

Mr. Dawley stated he has been through this process with other cities, and the Master Plan is a very good, comprehensive plan. He stressed the importance of understanding that the Master Plan is a guideline and is not meant to be implemented exactly as written. He added it speaks to the quality of the plan that it was completed in 2013 and many recent developments that have happened have made sense. He noted a lot of that depends upon who owns the property and if they are willing to develop it.

Mr. Dawley stated the Master Plan is a guiding document, and an update will benefit the community with a re-interpretation of the goals and objectives to layer on top of the plan so it continues to be a living document that has value. He added the document is useful and has been reviewed by City Staff many times over the years. He noted the Master Plan provides insight into how development comes to fruition with hard work.

Chair Dew stated the objective of tonight's meeting for the EDA is to obtain feedback and comment from the Planning Commissioners and others regarding the value of the document, and what would be the next steps in terms of an update. He added a review should be fairly expedient, showing where the City is today and confirm or deny what is laid out for the next 5-10 years.

Commissioner Monge asked whether the proposed Master Plan update was triggered by a specific development activity.

Chair Dew stated everything that is going on now in the City has been in the works for a very long time, with a few minor exceptions. He added he has been on the EDA almost 11 years, since its inception. He noted development has unfolded as envisioned for the most part, after work sessions and community input.

Chair Dew stated the City will have $155 million in new taxable revenue from development projects over the last 24 months.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated the Master Plan is beneficial because it gets everyone thinking in the same direction. He added this is a key component of the success that is a result of having a Master Plan document. He noted it would be valuable to adjust and update the document to ensure its continued validity.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated it would be valuable to have a recognizable entrance to the City. He added that could be on the west side of McKnight Road. He noted outcome of the Highway 36/Century Avenue intersection is still undecided and could inhibit development in that area.

Chair Dew stated the Highway 36/Highway 120 intersection is a very big issue from a development standpoint. He added the EDA/City has acquired property in that area to encourage development, but it is difficult when there are so many unknown factors. He noted the EDA has requested that the City Council continue to ensure that this issue is a priority.

Chair Dew stated the EDA does not review issues related to parks and green space, especially in the downtown area. He added they are components that are part of the overall planning process and should be revisited.

Commissioner Wise stated he believes there is tremendous value in updating the Master Plan. He added the Comprehensive Plan is a general framework for development, but the Master Plan is aspirational, providing proof that the City is moving towards investment and ownership. He stressed the importance of parks and pedestrian aspects of the Master Plan, and the discussion about how to balance available parking. He expressed his support of giving new life to the Master Plan document.

Ms. Ritchie stated the key to potential projects is the possibility of grant funding. She added Mr. Zweber has mentioned potential funding for a parking ramp, which would have to coincide with a new construction project. She stressed the importance of having resources in place to apply for grants when they become available.

Mr. Zweber stated the advantage of the LCDA is that it is metro area-based and tends to support funding efforts that involve local community groups, especially for transit-related funding.

Chair Dew stated the EDA has not considered seeking grants for updating the Master Plan. He asked whether there is a consensus to move forward with updating the Master Plan.

There was a majority consensus of the EDA and Planning Commission to move forward with an update of the Redevelopment Master Plan.

Chair Dew stated the EDA can take the lead on this process, but it will be of great value to have participants from the Planning Commission, City Staff and the City Council. He proposed that a group of volunteers get together for an exploratory meeting.

Chair Barton stated, under the former Zoning Code, there was a "diversified district", in which no development was allowed except via Conditional Use Permit. She added this made it difficult to encourage development in that area when land became available. She noted the Planning Commission was working on changing the Zoning Code when the Redevelopment Master Plan was developed, which made the process easier.

Chair Barton stated transportation, parking and transit issues – including walkability, bikability, and getting around downtown – should be incorporated to more of a degree than it is now. She added there is some reference to pedestrian friendly Seppala Boulevard, but nothing about 7th Avenue, bike traffic, or connecting to the trail. She noted making the downtown area more livable will encourage new business.

Mayor Furlong stated, with all the development that is going on, it could be very attractive to new residents if the downtown area was more pedestrian and bike friendly. He agreed these issues should be revisited.

Chair Dew proposed that a working session be scheduled that would include at least two City Council representatives and two EDA representatives, as well as Mr. Dawley and Mr. Zweber.

Mayor Furlong stated the new City Manager should also be involved.

B. Downtown Parking Needs

Chair Barton stated the City received a Resilient Communities Grant in 2013 or 2014, and downtown parking was one of the study areas, which was never completed. She added this provides a starting point for this issue.

Chair Dew stated parking should be included in the Redevelopment Master Plan, as parking will become a bigger problem, and not just for a specific project. He added the Planning Commission's expertise and knowledge will be beneficial in addressing this issue as part of the process.

Mayor Furlong stated the City Council will be reviewing Capital Improvement planning, identifying needs including the potential for electric car charging units in the parking lot behind 7th Avenue.

City Manager/Executive Director Brian Frandle stated, as part of downtown reconstruction, a line was added parallel to 7th Avenue on both sides in anticipation of requirements related to electric vehicles. He added the City's power agency, MMPA, is providing a charging station which will probably be located in the parking lot behind the KMJ site. He added the charging station will be similar to the one located in the Fire Station parking lot.

Mr. Frandle stated bike lanes were added on Margaret Street as part of the Livable Communities project. He added the addition of bike lanes was well received by the community.

Mr. Dawley stated WSB played a role in that grant funding effort, to provide a temporary on-street sidewalk on 1st Street from the High School north to 17th Avenue. He added the project helped determine whether there was dedicated space for sidewalks, and whether they would be used. He noted the temporary sidewalk was heavily used by pedestrians and bikes over the 8-week trial period.

Mr. Dawley stated another demonstration project was completed on Margaret Street with temporary bike lanes from 7th Avenue north to 19th Avenue, which was less conclusive. He added there was not a significant increase or decrease, but rather the same amount of bike traffic in both directions on Margaret Street. He noted, since that time, the City Council authorized a feasibility study on a corridor concept, and the Engineering Department developed some concepts of the roadway cross-section.

Mr. Dawley stated City Staff is aware that there is an opportunity to improve the corridor, if the City Council wants to move in that direction. He added the feasibility study has already been discussed by the City Council, and a multi-modal approach is possible from a design standpoint for the Margaret Street corridor. He noted, in his opinion, there is a lot of opportunity for a logical north/south connector and gateway into the parks system.

Chair Barton stated the Planning Commission discussed having bike routes from the gateway as well as Margaret Street. She added bike parking should be added in the downtown area, as there is currently no bike parking downtown.

Mayor Furlong stated the bike racks were purchased many years ago. He added there should be a plan for adding bike racks in the downtown area.

Mayor Furlong stated the Rotary Club has plans to add signage in Rotary Park, which is a gateway to the community.

Mr. Dawley stated the position of City Staff is that plans and improvements in the downtown area are very flexible. He added there is opportunity for bike parking and bike racks, which can be implemented fairly easily, and have always been part of the overall plan.

Commissioner Monge stated it would be ideal to put some type of City identification on the Margaret Street bridge. He added signage would be beneficial for residents as well as visitors.

Mayor Furlong stated the City had difficulties with MnDOT with regard to getting signage on Highway 36 to identify the City's entrance points.

Ms. Ritchie stated the City Council adopted a Resolution in 2016 approving a Wayfinding Plan. She added the Rotary Club plans to add signage in their park, which could be part of the City's overall signage plan. She noted signage above the bridges was proposed as part of the Wayfinding Plan.

Mr. Dawley stated the Highway 120/Highway 36 interchange will involve two counties and two cities, and the City should be involved throughout the entire process. He added funding has been allocated in the draft transportation plan by Ramsey County and MnDOT for signage on new interchanges.

Chair Dew stressed the importance of joint meetings between the EDA and Planning Commission, to encourage understanding of planning issues that are important for the community. He added he will follow up with regard to the proposed working group.

VII. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL LIAISON

Mayor Furlong thanked the Planning Commission and EDA for their hard work and efforts on behalf of the City of North St. Paul and its residents.

VIII. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Chair Barton asked whether there were any reports from Commissioners.

Commissioner Brenna stated he is a MnDOT employee. He added it is important to keep having these conversations. He noted the MnDOT State Aid Office has funding available every other year for Safe Routes to School, which might be an option for funding for Margaret Street.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion to adjourn by Chair Barton, and seconded by Commissioner Worm, with all present voting aye. Motion carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:51 p.m.