

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES - CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS

Wednesday, November 6, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.
City Hall Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue

Commissioner Scales called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Pat Simon
Tony Scales
Joan Robertson
Brett Kramer
Jonathan Weber
Elizabeth Niemioja

Commissioners Absent: Armando Lissarrague (excused)
Annette Maggi (excused)
Dennis Wippermann (excused)

Others Present: Heather Botten, Associate Planner
Allan Hunting, City Planner

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the October 15, 2019 Planning Commission meeting were approved as submitted.

DAKOTA COUNTY SMART BUILDING – CASE NO. 19-51V

Reading of Notice

Commissioner Simon read the public hearing notice to consider a request for a variance to allow a 34-foot setback along TH 52/55 whereas 75 foot is required, for the property located at the northern corner of Concord Boulevard and Courthouse Boulevard. 35 notices were mailed.

Presentation of Request

Allan Hunting, City Planner, explained the request as detailed in the report. He advised that the applicant is requesting a setback variance to allow a future addition to the SMART center facility 34 feet from the property line along Highway 52/55 whereas 75 feet is required. The future addition would have the same setback to the highway than the fire station. The future addition has been incorporated into the stormwater management plan for the property, so the system has been sized accordingly. The site has constraints that limit building placement due to two large wetland areas, a stormwater infiltration area, and steep topography. The proposed location of the future addition is the logical place and would require a setback variance. Staff recommends approval of the request.

Opening of Public Hearing

Joe Lexa, Dakota County, advised he was available to answer any questions.

Commissioner Scales asked the applicant if he read and understood the report.

Mr. Lexa replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Scales closed the public hearing.

Planning Commission Recommendation

Motion by Commissioner Weber, second by Commissioner Kramer, to approve the request for a variance to allow a 34-foot setback along TH 52/55 whereas 75 feet is required, for the property located at the northern corner of Concord Boulevard and Courthouse Boulevard, with the condition listed and the practical difficulty listed in the report.

Motion carried (6/0). This item goes to the City Council on November 12, 2019.

DAVID WICKLUND – CASE NO. 19-46V

Reading of Notice

Commissioner Simon read the public hearing notice to consider the request for a variance to allow an accessory structure that does not comply with exterior building code requirements on single-family residential property, for the property located at 8260 Dawson Way. 11 notices were mailed.

Heather Botten, Associate Planner, advised that the applicant withdrew his variance request.

ADAMS FRENCH PROPERTY, LLC – CASE NO. 19-45C

Reading of Notice

Commissioner Simon read the public hearing notice to consider the request for a conditional use permit to exceed the 25% maximum impervious surface allowed in the shoreland district and a conditional use permit to allow a mini-storage facility to be constructed on the property located at 7855 Cahill Avenue. 87 notices were mailed.

Presentation of Request

Allan Hunting, City Planner, explained the request as detailed in the report. He advised that the property is zoned B-3, General Business. The applicant is proposing to develop a 3.8-acre parcel with a three-story, 105,600 square foot climate-controlled storage facility, which is a conditional use in the B-3 zoning district. The property is contained within the Shoreland Overlay District of Simley Lake. Total impervious surface on the lot would exceed the maximum allowed; however, a conditional use permit may be issued if the City has a stormwater management plan in place, which it does. This site also naturally drains into South Valley Park and away from Simley Pond. Mr. Hunting showed a rendering of the proposed building which was a combination of metal, prefabricated brick, and block. The DNR reviewed the request and had no comments. Commissioners were given two emails from residents who had concerns with the project. Commissioners also received a traffic report showing that mini-storage facilities are low traffic generators. Staff recommends approval of the two requests.

Commissioner Robertson asked how long this property had been for sale.

Mr. Hunting was not sure of the exact amount of time, but believed it was quite a few years. The only application he recalled receiving for this property was approximately 15 years ago.

Commissioner Niemioja asked if the City Council had provided any opinions on allowing more storage facilities in response to the Planning Commission's concern about the number of units in the city.

Mr. Hunting replied that staff had not yet broached the subject to Council but would likely bring it to them at a work session in the coming winter months.

Commissioner Niemioja asked for clarification that there were 11 existing storage facilities in the city.

Mr. Hunting was not sure offhand of the exact number.

Opening of Public Hearing

Max French, Adams French Properties, advised he was available to answer any questions.

Commissioner Scales asked the applicant if he read and understood the staff report.

Mr. French replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Simon asked how large the internal storage units would be.

Mr. French replied that the average unit would be 100 square feet, with some being larger and the smallest being 250 square feet. All units would be heated and air conditioned, but not refrigerated.

Commissioner Simon asked how items were transported to the upper floors.

Mr. French replied that they will provide a covered loading zone on the north side of the building that can accommodate a 40-foot box truck. Customers can unload their items at the sliding glass doors and move them to their unit using carts and a large hospital-sized elevator.

Commissioner Robertson noted that from Cahill Avenue people would see an industrial-looking building whereas some building fronts have a more aesthetically appealing view from the street with a front entry, etc.

Commissioner Weber noted that because the building would sit below street level, the building would likely look more like a two-story building.

Mr. French advised that the building would sit five feet below street level.

Commissioner Robertson replied that her concern was with the aesthetics of the building rather than the height.

Bill McLean, 7935 Boyd Avenue, suggested that rather than giving them a conditional use permit for impervious surface, the applicants should shrink the building, re-orient it, and make the front more aesthetically appealing with a brick façade. He did not believe the proposed building was a good fit for this neighborhood and asked for clarification on details of the stormwater management system.

Robbie Latta, Civil Site Group, advised that a large underground infiltration basin would be installed along the western drive aisle and would meet all City requirements.

Commissioner Scales closed the public hearing.

Planning Commission Discussion

Commissioner Robertson stated although the property had been for sale for a number of years and would generate minimal traffic, she struggled with approving the request because of the industrial look of the building and the image it would present along Cahill, the City's main corridor.

Commissioner Niemioja stated in her opinion the proposed building was aesthetically a mismatch for this neighborhood and was not a good fit next to the high school, residential properties, park,

etc. She would prefer something that would generate more traffic as it would help the businesses in the area, and she was not necessarily opposed to the conditional use permit request.

Commissioner Simon asked the developers if they would consider modifying the front façade.

Commissioner Scales stated that designing the building was not what Commissioners were being asked to do.

Commissioner Simon agreed, stating that was why she was asking the applicant if it was something they would consider. She asked staff for direction.

Mr. Hunting stated the Commission could suggest the request be tabled to allow time for the developer to redesign the front of the building, or they could make a recommendation tonight and move the request forward.

Commissioner Scales struggled with whether this was the right type of business for this area.

Commissioner Niemioja agreed that finding the right fit was important regardless of how long the property had been for sale.

Commissioner Kramer stated he struggled with this request because although it complied with zoning requirements, he did not think it was a good fit for the Cahill corridor and therefore he would likely vote against it. He would prefer to see an office building or multiple-family housing development that would benefit from the park setting to the west.

Planning Commission Recommendation

Motion by Commissioner Robertson to deny the request for a conditional use permit to exceed the 25% maximum impervious surface allowed in the shoreland district and a conditional use permit to allow a mini-storage facility to be constructed on the property located at 7855 Cahill Avenue.

Mr. Hunting advised that a basis for denial should be stated.

Commissioner Robertson added that her motion to deny was based upon the fact that the proposed storage facility was not a good fit for what is considered the City's main corridor.

Commissioner Weber questioned whether exceeding the impervious surface should be added as a basis for denial.

Commissioner Robertson replied that with the Cub center across the street she did not feel that was a valid basis.

Second by Commissioner Weber.

Motion carried (6/0). This item goes to the City Council on November 25, 2019.

Commissioner Niemioja stated because this is becoming a constant issue, she would like City Council to provide a recommendation as to their thoughts on additional storage facilities.

OTHER BUSINESS

City of Inver Grove Heights—Case No. 19-49X and Case No. 19-50X

Mr. Hunting explained that in Case No. 19-49X the owner of the subject property on Seidls Lake approached the City to see if they would be interested in purchasing their land. The City's master plan is for there to be a trail all the way around Seidls Lake. Staff recommends that the City acquire the parcel and include it as a part of Seidls Lake Park. The Planning Commission is being asked to make a recommendation that the purchase of this property would be consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Case No. 19-50X involves the City agreement to sell the property south of the new fire station to the County for the SMART center training facility. The Planning Commission is being asked to make a recommendation on whether the sale of the parcel is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Commissioner Weber asked if purchasing the subject property on Seidls Lake Park would enable the City to construct the walking path.

Mr. Hunting stated he was uncertain of the other property ownerships and whether the trail could now be completed all the way around the lake.

Commissioner Simon asked if there was a structure, well, or septic on the Seidls Lake property the City was looking to purchase.

Mr. Hunting replied there was not; it was a vacant parcel.

Commissioner Niemioja supported the City taking advantage of the Seidls Lake property purchase and adding it to Seidls Lake Park.

Motion by Commissioner Niemioja, second by Commissioner Simon, to recommend that the purchase of property to be included in Seidls Lake Park is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Motion carried (6/0).

Motion by Commissioner Weber, second by Commissioner Niemioja, to recommend that the sale of property to Dakota County is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Motion carried (6/0).

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Fox
Recording Secretary