

City of Columbus
Regular Planning Commission Meeting
January 16, 2013

The January 16, 2013 regular meeting of the Planning Commission for the City of Columbus was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chair Barbara Hvass at the City Hall. Present were Commission members Andy Anderson, Myron Organ, Jesse Preiner, Jody Krebs, and Garth Sternberg; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko and Recording Secretary Karen Boland.

Also in attendance were City Council members Denny Peterson and Bill Krebs; Mayor Dave Povolny; and Daniel Graff.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Motion by Anderson to approve the Agenda as presented. Second by Krebs. Motion carried.

APPROVAL - REGULAR PC MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 2, 2013

Motion by Preiner to approve the minutes of the January 2, 2013 regular Planning Commission meeting as written. Second by Organ. Motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARING – GRAFFCO INC., - 13957 LAKE DRIVE - CUP AMENDMENT APPLICATION (PC-13-101)

At this time a public hearing was held to receive testimony regarding the request of Graffco Inc., for an amendment to an existing Conditional Use Permit to allow a new business tenant at 13957 Lake Drive, Columbus, MN. Separate minutes are prepared.

GRAFFCO INC., CUP AMENDMENT DISCUSSION

Hvass asked if Mr. Graff had read over and agrees to the findings of fact and conditions put together by the City Planner. He does. Organ pointed out that the date on Finding #13 is incorrect. It should read January 16.

Motion by Krebs to forward to the City Council the application of Graffco Inc., for an amendment to the existing Conditional Use Permit to allow a new business tenant at 13957 Lake Drive with a recommendation for approval based on the findings of fact and recommendations and conditions in the Planner Memo dated January 10, 2013, with changes reflected below to Finding of Fact #13 to correct the date. Second by Anderson. Motion carried.

Findings of Fact

1. An application for a CUP Amendment was received from Daniel Graff, Graffco, Inc. (Graffco), 13957 Lake Drive (Property), on December 14, 2012.
2. The application was found to be complete.
3. The 60-day review for the application terminates on February 12, 2013. The 120-day review, if necessary, will terminate on April 13, 2013.
4. Graffco operates a used fuel dispenser reconditioning and brokerage service.

5. Graffco was issued a CUP in 1992, which allowed a 50 feet by 200 feet cold storage building, in addition to an existing 50 feet by 200 feet building used for office and servicing fuel dispensers.
6. A condition of the 1992 CUP was that the Planning Commission must approve any use other than cold storage for the "new" building.
7. Another condition of the 1992 CUP was that no outside storage was permitted except within trailers.
8. Bald Eagle Erectors, Inc. (Bald Eagle) relocated its business from Eagan to Columbus and occupied the westerly building on the Property in November 2012.
9. Bald Eagle is a steel erection, rigging, and miscellaneous iron work business serving the upper Midwest.
10. Bald Eagle is using the Property as the company's headquarters, and for rigging, welding, and storage.
11. The majority of Bald Eagle's employees report directly to job sites rather than the Property. Most company vehicles are kept at employees' homes.
12. Bald Eagle also proposes to use the Property for outside storage of miscellaneous steel on steel racks (project overruns), miscellaneous fabrication items and equipment, and job trailers. No regular inventory of steel for jobs is kept on the Property.
13. The Planning Commission held a public hearing for the proposed 1992 Graffco CUP amendment on January 16, 2013.

Recommendations/Conditions

Based upon the above Findings of Fact, the Planning Commission recommends approval of an amendment to the Graffco 1992 CUP, incorporating the following additional conditions:

1. Bald Eagle Erectors, Inc. is approved for tenancy of the westerly building, subject to all other applicable permits, licenses, and regulations.
2. Outside storage associated with tenant use of the westerly building is limited to the south side of the building and shall not be located between the building and Lake Drive.
3. Changes in the use of the Property are subject to future review and approval according to the Conditional Use Permit procedures of the Columbus City Code.
4. Approval of this CUP amendment is not a substitute for other applicable permits or approvals, including but not limited to building permits, plumbing permits, HVAC permits, electrical permits, and SSTS permits.
5. The use of and operations on the Property by Graffco and its tenants shall be consistent with all federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances.

Anderson stated that he was surprised to find that the tenant referred to in Graffco's application for CUP amendment (Bald Eagle Erectors, Inc.) had already moved into the location, prior to the application being filed. Mursko said that no contact had been made by Graffco before the tenant moved in. She contacted Graffco about amending the CUP. Anderson does not think this should be allowed to continue. He asked that the City Council review the procedure.

CONTINUED COMMUNITY VISION PLANNING DISCUSSION

Mursko went over some procedural changes that were agreed upon at the last City Council meeting when their organizational meeting was held. One decision was to eliminate the rotating CC liaison to the Planning Commission position. Instead, joint meetings will be held between the PC and CC, possibly on a quarterly basis. The first joint meeting is scheduled for February 20, 2013. The Quad 35 transportation planning will be discussed. This involves the new interchange, road alignment, and backage roads. This has been in the works for more than two years. At the joint meeting, public input will be taken from land and business owners, as well as a fact-finding pros and cons approach. Anoka County has asked the CC to adopt an alignment for the new County Road 54. This decision will need to be in place to bring in developers.

The CC has given no direction to the PC thus far about new housing in the City Freeway District. The PC can discuss housing, but it will probably be addressed in a joint meeting after the CC has given more direction. The CC would like to begin giving the PC direction on a task, and having the PC come back to the CC with a pros/cons report with fact-finding data as well as their opinions.

Mursko stated that Commissioner Anderson was reappointed. There is one vacancy on the PC that will be advertised. Applications will be taken until approximately February 9, 2013. Krebs asked about the application process. Mursko said the application is on-line. It can be downloaded and mailed or e-mailed or walked in. It must be signed. The interview process will depend on the number of applicants in the pool. The Park Board, Tree Board, and EDAB also have vacancies.

Preiner asked if the PC should look at the map or talk about housing issues as discussed at the last CC meeting. Mursko showed the zoning map. The City owns 85.43 acres on the east side of the freeway. Only about 40 acres are able to be developed, and it is not contiguous. The City owns land on the east side and on the west side of the interchange, and on the north and south of Trunk Highway 97. About half of the City-owned property is wetland.

The Metropolitan Council Utility Service Area is a three-square-mile area established in 1999. The interceptor is in Forest Lake and has four ports. One was dedicated in part to Columbus. Forest Lake put in a 26-inch pipe to accommodate our sewage. Lift station #1 on the east side of the freeway is the City's largest lift station, because all the sewage in the freeway district goes into that lift station. The capacity is limited. In the City's Comprehensive Plan it states that the City can have only so many gallons of sewage a day and only so many units can be developed over time. There is a schedule to accommodate the sewage capacity. Met Council has a formula. Whether it's residential or commercial the acronym used is SAC (Sewage Availability Charge) units. One house equals one SAC unit. For 2013, a SAC unit is \$2435. That pays for the treatment down the line and the maintenance of the system. The City collects that money and gives it to the Met Council. Our local sewer availability charge is \$385. For a commercial development the Met Council uses a formula to determine SAC units. For example, Gander Mountain was evaluated at 26 SAC units using the formula. A property's SAC units are credited for the life of that property. If, for instance, a new business moved into the Gander Mountain location and was assessed 32 SAC units, they would already have a credit of 26 units and would only have to pay for an additional 6. If the SAC units are less, the developer can sell the extra credits. You never lose the dollars you put in.

The water system is a bigger City expense. It has to be built and maintained by the City. We had a large capital outlay because of large fire suppression needs by the initial businesses. Water units are based on upland acreage. A one-acre upland site equals five units. Each unit is approximately \$1385/year. The water access charge is paid to the City. A large-acre site gets expensive.

When looking at housing, it will be important to look at the capacity of the system, and how it will be phased into the system.

Senior housing has been allowed for in the Comp. Plan for 12 years. It is by conditional use permit. In 2009 the Overlay districts were added for Suburban Residential.

Part of the discussion at the CC meeting was about where the utilities are available. Sewer and water pipes are not all laid. Three of the 5 phases of sewer and water are complete. There are no sewer and water pipes phased in on the east side of the freeway district south of 145th St. There is ½- acre zoning in the Freeway District as long as you can take care of your own storm water.

Preiner asked how we know we have enough sewer capacity to accommodate an interested developer. Mursko said this will be discussed with the City Engineer. Getting answers to that will help the CC determine what we have capacity for, without taking away from everyone else in the area. Sternberg expressed concern that the capacity not be used up by houses so that it is unavailable to commercial businesses. He thinks this is an important consideration.

A Comp. Plan amendment would be needed to change the current zoning. This is approximately a six-month process, with much back-and-forth correspondence with the Met Council. In the SR Overlay the Comp Plan currently allows for a density of 3-6 units per acre. This has already been approved as part of the Comp Plan, including sewage capacity flow. The SR Overlay northwest of the freeway is about 80 acres. Mursko does not know how much of that is wetland or floodplain.

Organ asked how big of a detriment it is with developers if a City changes its Comp Plan too often. Mursko said she doesn't know if it deters developers, but she added that it is impossible to anticipate every possibility. It's hard to guess what a developer will want.

A commercial broker markets the City land zoned CR to potential business clients. Mursko pointed out that while they do want to sell the City land, she represents everyone, so she tries to see that interested parties know of all the land that is for sale—City and privately owned.

Preiner said the two positives to increasing housing density seem to be to have more tax flow into the City and to change the threshold of the City in terms of fiscal disparity. Mursko agreed. She has requested a report from the City financial expert about the impact on the fiscal disparity threshold. All of this has to be taken into consideration: How many SAC units do we have? Where is it best to put those units? How many housing units should we bring on per year to balance commercial development? There are more questions than answers at this point.

Mursko said the population of the City has been decreasing for the past 20 years. It was up to just below 4000 residents and is now down to 3914 at the last census.

Sternberg does not see the benefit of rezoning since we already have land that is properly zoned. The only land the City can control is City owned and that is prime CR, CI real estate. He asked if there has been marketing of this land toward businesses. Mursko said a retail survey was done in 2007 to determine what businesses would do well in this area. There was a list of types of businesses that could go in there, but then the market dropped out. Our trade area is very large – about 8 miles. About 18,000 cars come out of Forest Lake every day. Sternberg believes a push should be made to market to commercial developers. A new billboard/tagline was suggested. Tax incentives were discussed. Land value stays constant. What you pay today, you pay tomorrow. The increment is the cost between the land value and what the new taxes would be, because of the new development. An example was given that a million-dollar business would pay \$36,000 in today's taxes. The formula the CC picked was that they would pay their fiscal disparities portion first. So, of that \$36,000, 40% would go into the fiscal disparities pot and then the City would retain the 60%. Then the City determines what project it is going to finance using that increment over ten years. State statute lays out what specific things it can be used for. Those CC decisions have to be made when the project comes in. Anderson said Cambridge is an example where they gave so many tax incentives to major businesses that they actually did not help the city at all. Mursko agreed –if you take the increments out, it doesn't ease the burden on the rest of the property owners.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

Council Member Peterson spoke. He believes Columbus needs better branding. It would be better if businesses identified themselves with Columbus rather than Forest Lake. Members gave examples of media outlets incorrectly reporting happenings in Columbus as occurring in Forest Lake or other surrounding communities. Sternberg said in White Bear Township businesses all have the township logo on their business communications.

Anderson gave members a survey comparing our PC with the PCs in surrounding communities. It compared number of meetings/month, and fees paid per meeting. Chisago, Centerville, Lino and Scandia all have one PC meeting per month. Many members felt having two monthly meetings helps things move along faster for residents and keeps meetings a more reasonable length. If there is nothing on the agenda, the meeting is cancelled. Columbus PC members receive a lower per diem pay per meeting (\$20) than any of the six surrounding communities. Mursko said the PC budget for 2013 is \$4000. If PC members are paid more than \$600/year, it is no longer considered a per diem, but taxable income. Anderson believes, based on PCs in surrounding communities, PC members should be paid \$50/meeting.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mursko asked if the PC would like to hold its organizational meeting tonight.

Motion by Anderson to hold the 2013 organizational meeting tonight. Second by Organ. Motion carried.

One nomination was made for PC Chair. *Motion* by Anderson to nominate Hvass as 2013 Planning Commission Chairperson. Second by Organ. Motion carried. Hvass accepted.

Motion by Preiner to continue rotating Vice Chairperson duties for 2013. Second by Sternberg. Motion carried.

Motion by Organ to keep 2013 Planning Commission meeting times at 7 p.m. Second by Anderson. Motion carried.

Mursko reiterated that the Feb. 20 PC meeting will be joint with the CC at 7 p.m. The new alignment of the road (Cty. Rd. 54) will be the main topic of discussion. It will not be a public hearing, but there will likely be many members of the public for public forum. Comments from members of the public may need to be limited to three minutes.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS' REPORT

Nothing to report.

ATTENDANCE - NEXT CC MEETING

Hvass is scheduled to attend the City Council meeting on January 23, 2013. Mursko said the PC liaison role to the CC meetings will change. The CC wants the PC liaison to report to the CC, but also to report back to the PC about occurrences at the CC meeting.

Motion by Krebs to adjourn. Second by Sternberg.
Meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Boland, Recording Secretary