

**City of Columbus**  
**Regular Planning Commission Meeting**  
**August 7, 2013**

The August 7, 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, Pam Wolowski, Jesse Preiner, Jody Krebs, and Garth Sternberg; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, and Recording Secretary Karen Boland.

Also in attendance were City Council member Denny Peterson, Eugene Kohler, Pat Preiner, and Mary Preiner.

**AGENDA APPROVAL**

*Motion* by Anderson to approve the Agenda as presented. Second by Krebs. Mursko requested an addition to the agenda to review a new building rendering submitted by Zaczkowski Trucking. This item will be added to the agenda as 4(a). Motion carried.

**APPROVAL - ZACZKOWSKI TRUCKING (13461 LAKE DRIVE) CUP APPLICATION PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES OF JULY 23, 2013**

*Motion* by Krebs to approve the minutes from the Zaczkowski Trucking CUP Application Public Hearing held on July 23, 2013. Second by Sternberg. Motion carried.

**REVIEW OF NEW BUILDING RENDERING FROM ZACZKOWSKI TRUCKING**

A new building elevation plan submitted by Zaczkowski Trucking was reviewed by the PC per condition 11 set forth in the CUP application of Zaczkowski Trucking at the PC meeting held on July 23, 2013: “The CUP is contingent upon the applicant re-submitting a building elevation plan for approval by the Planning Commission.”

In the CI district the ordinance requires a 50% non-metal standard for the street-facing elevation. In the past the PC has shown some flexibility with regard to interpretation of this standard along Lake Drive. Zaczkowski Trucking’s rendering showed changes in the side of the building facing Lake Drive to bring it more in line with the ordinance. At the previous meeting it was agreed that the side facing 135<sup>th</sup> Street is acceptable, since the focus will be on Lake Drive. Planner Dean Johnson stated at that time that this is consistent with what the PC has done in the past.

Mursko suggested the PC look at amending this ordinance in the future.

*Motion* by Krebs to approve the revised building elevation plan drawing submitted by Zaczkowski Trucking dated August 7, 2013. Second by Sternberg. Motion carried.

**APPROVAL - REGULAR PC MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 23, 2013**

*Motion* by Krebs to approve the minutes of the July 23, 2013 regular Planning Commission meeting as written. Second by Anderson. Motion carried.

**MTS TRUCKING & EXCAVATING NON-BINDING CONCEPT PLAN DISCUSSION**

Gene Kohler is the owner of MTS Trucking. He has a tentative deal with the bank on the property that used to be Jay Brothers, alongside the racetrack. He wants to relocate one of his

businesses there to offset the property taxes until the land can be sold for development into retail space. He would like to move his trucking business, currently located on a smaller parcel in Blaine, onto that property. He plans to keep the land for sale.

Trucks and trailers will be stored on the property and worked on in the building. Offices will also be in the building. The building would need to be brought up to code. MTS runs about 80-100 trucks a day, but less than 30 come back to the yard at the end of the day. Thirty would be there overnight in summer. In winter the equipment is parked. They don't work January through March, so in winter there could be up to 100 pieces sitting on the property. Operating hours are 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. There is some Saturday work, but virtually no Sundays.

Kohler said he can close with the bank any time. MTS probably wouldn't move in until late fall, when work slows. The building needs some wiring, a sewer issue has to be cleared up, and the offices need to be remodeled first. No materials will be stored other than the trucks. The trucks leave empty in the morning and come back empty at night. MTS employs seven people in addition to the truck drivers.

The property is currently zoned Commercial Retail. If the PC feels this is an appropriate use in this area, based on the information they have, Kohler is considering requesting an IUP. Mursko thinks it's been about 5 years since Jay Brothers was there. Approximately 7800 cars go by the property each day. She pointed out that based on the County road plan, the access to the property cannot come off of Lake Drive. Because this is a change in use, the access needs to be changed. Kohler has no problem changing the access to Zurich Street. He said he has the equipment to do that. He believes trucks turning left onto Lake would be dangerous. He'll move the berm from the west side, where the entrance will be, to the north side, blocking the current entrance. He plans to plant some pine trees there and do some landscaping. The berm should be tall enough to screen the trucks from Lake Drive traffic. The berm along Zurich will also act as a screen, except for the entrance. He would probably switch the entrance this winter. It will be a 32 or 33-foot entrance. Mursko said the driveway will go where the new road will go in the future. The property is just under 10 acres and the driveway will be around the halfway point.

Mursko said an IUP may be issued for up to five years, and would be eligible for renewal. That is all at the PC's discretion. If the property sells right after MTS moves in, Kohler has no problem moving MTS back out. He chose to move this business because it is easy to relocate. An IUP would not be transferred to a new owner. Kohler would like an IUP with a five-year term. He said he will be happy to sell the property to a retail developer any time, but he doesn't anticipate that happening in as few as three years.

No PC members opposed the concept plan. Some expressed a preference for a 3-year IUP term.

Mursko said the City Council will look at the concept plan at their next meeting, based on PC meeting minutes. Kohler is welcome to attend, but not required.

**PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION – How to stimulate both residential and business growth and balance the two.**

During the joint meeting between the PC and CC on June 19, 2013, there was discussion of this issue. How can Columbus attract residential and commercial development? What are other communities doing?

Some communities give away land and/or tax breaks. Columbus leadership has traditionally been conservative; that has been a goal of the community. There is not a lot of extra to provide incentives to developers.

Wolowski asked what reason businesses have given in the past for by-passing Columbus. Mursko said that early on this was a residential community. In 1979 a fair amount of zoning came in. The commercial district on Lake Drive has been a long-established district. Around 1999 the new Comp Plan looked at how we could move forward in the freeway district and take advantage of that area, including where utilities should go. Mursko believes the biggest deterrent from any large user coming in, was the fact that there were no public utilities. We were unable to meet the demand for utilities at the peak of the development spurt in the early 2000s. The reason for the type of development that has occurred on Lake Drive is that they are the types of businesses that can survive on a well and a septic system. They are typically low-use with small offices. In 1999 the Met Council agreed to put us in MUSA (Metropolitan User Services Area), which changed the outlook on Columbus and the commercial districts.

In Section II of the 2030 Columbus Comprehensive Plan, the Land Use Plan states under I-35 Corridor Suburban Residential that the SR Overlay in the northwest corner includes 61 acres of developable land with a minimum density of three units per acre. The southeast corner has 122 acres of land with a minimum density of three units/acre.

Mursko said currently there are no condo developments, but the single family housing market has picked up. The freeway district has sewered lots, so single family homes are possible. The PC must think about, ideally, where they would go and how they will be compatible with businesses.

Krebs felt the consensus from the CC is that we need more overlay. She thinks we need to look at the wording and determine if changes to the ordinance and Comp Plan are necessary, based on what the CC has requested. We need to find out from developers how many units per acre are needed for them to consider a project.

The question arose about what the City needs for the future. Mursko said you almost need to look at it financially. Are you looking at increasing the population? Are you looking at increasing the rooftops? Are you looking at what's going to generate more property taxes? Our population is declining. According to Met Council we have 1418 households. How many households would you need to add for the revenue you want, and is that okay?

An analysis 10-12 years ago indicated that a \$250,000 house had to be built to break even on the service expenditures. If someone was building a \$100,000 home, someone else was paying proportionately more to make up the disparity, because the break-even point was \$250,000. Businesses pay more in taxes than they get back in services. It's important to keep in mind that

as the population increases, so do the service needs. The lower the value of the building you build, the less tax incentives you're going to get.

Anderson wondered if, even though single family homes in the NW and SE overlay districts may not be able to pay their own way in terms of taxes vs. services, maybe the added rooftops would potentially attract commercial development. Mursko said she would not recommend extending sewer and water lines to the SE (the overlay south of 145<sup>th</sup>) corner as a City project at this point. The City's debt ratio would be too high. The PC should be looking at the quadrants where we have utilities, unless some large, large developer came in and wanted to extend utilities.

Krebs said the CC has asked that, in addition to the NW overlay, the PC look at potential Suburban Residential overlay for the CR district east of the freeway where utilities are in place. Sternberg said the downside would be putting residential in a prime commercial retail area. Would people accept a big retail store in a high density neighborhood? He asked what neighboring communities are offering as far as the number of houses per acre.

Mursko said there is heavy competition for developers, and, right now, some communities even give free land. Columbus can't afford to do that. We've had developers look, but if we have no roads or they have to bring in utilities, they aren't interested. She doesn't believe it is the zoning code that is currently hurting the City's development, it's not being shovel-ready.

Sternberg said he doesn't think density is the problem if we can't provide utilities and roads. The northwest SR overlay is already in place, without interested developers, and we have some landowners that want a premium price for their land. Forest Lake is zoned for high density residential right up to our border, but there's no demand for development right now.

Mursko pointed out that 50% of the businesses on Lake Drive have needed a text amendment. They are all a little different. When businesses want to locate somewhere, they'll do what is required.

Members expressed that until the citizens of Columbus are interested in investing money in the future, it will be difficult to make any progress. The average age of citizens in Columbus is 50-55 years old. Only 26% of the City's population are families with children. If nothing changes, as people age out, taxes would have to be raised significantly.

Members debated whether it's desirable to put housing in your only one of two commercial areas. Should the five-acre minimum be looked at? The City has to look at balancing three pieces at once: commercial industrial, rooftops, and the ability to provide services.

Krebs thinks the wording in the Suburban Residential Policies of the Comp Plan should be changed to allow for single family homes as well as attached homes. There was discussion of twin homes. There was also discussion as to whether people building expensive homes would build them near the freeway. Mursko encouraged PC members to think outside the box. She gets requests from residents on Lake Drive in the commercial district who want to know if they can sell half of their land to a business and live on 2 ½ acres. They live on land zoned commercial,

but are required to have five acres if they have a home. We require this in the freeway district too. Should they be allowed to sell some land and live on less?

Pat Preiner commented that she was on the Town Board years ago and developers at the time were looking for 6-8 units per acre to make a development profitable. The Board decided to limit it to three units per acre at that time. She suggested PC members find out currently how many units per acre it takes to entice a developer to even look at a community. Another suggestion she made was to look at businesses with living units above, which has recently grown in popularity.

Krebs handed out contact information for some developers, to find out what they look for in terms of density per acre of land. Anderson volunteered to call Amaris Custom Homes and Ryland Homes. Krebs will contact Mattamy Homes. Sternberg will look for a developer's association and see what information they have. PC members suggested asking if it is a deterrent that land is near the freeway, what price level and type of houses are being built right now, and how important it is to be shovel-ready.

Preiner asked the minimum lot size for a residential property without sewer and water. Mursko said, ideally, the minimum is one acre.

Mursko pointed out that the homes being built recently have been by individual builders. She doesn't know if there are still builders building large numbers of houses. It is now very difficult to get construction loans. Borrowing money has gotten very restrictive; it may never go back to the way it was. She encouraged PC members to ask developers what the new wave is.

Mursko also suggested that PC members consider an entertainment-type industry that would be suited to the freeway district. Members discussed movie theaters, an indoor shooting range, an ice rink, a water park. Mursko again encouraged members to think outside the box.

## **PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

Council Member Denny Peterson noted that six houses were built in Columbus last year.

He said the reason Mr. Kohler may be having trouble selling his property in Ham Lake is because Ham Lake does not have access to utilities along Highway 65. They are against having it in the future as well.

Peterson suggested the PC consider changing City ordinance to allow any new development over ten acres to go to 2 ½ -acre lots if the particular land will sustain that. This would not change lot sizes for current landowners.

Mursko added that PC members should think about densities and creative ways to increase density. In Grant Township, for instance, four houses are allowed on 40-acres, but the lot sizes can vary. The density is an average of one house per 10 acres, but you can mix it up. If there is a PUD on a 40-acre lot, and the overall density is five acres per unit, but there is flexibility on the placement of the homes, it gives you more flexibility for land usability. Mixed lot sizes would allow more houses around wetlands for instance. One reason there is a struggle for developers in the City's residential district, is because the land that's left has little upland, lots of wetland, the

more difficult soils, etc. There are many state and federal rules and regulations for wetlands that hinder development. So we need tools to make it easier to work with the usable land we have.

#### **CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

Mursko reported that there will be a variance application at the next PC meeting, August 21, 2013. It is located in Deer Marsh. The builder is making the request. In September there may be two more development applications.

#### **PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS' REPORT**

##### **KREBS COMMENT**

Krebs reported that the American Cancer Society raised \$164,000 in the 18-hour Rivers of Hope walk in Stillwater to raise money to cure cancer. It was a wonderful event and experience.

##### **PREINER COMMENT**

Preiner reported that there were almost 4000 participants in the August 3<sup>rd</sup> Dirty Girl 5K Mud Run at Running Aces to support breast cancer awareness and research.

#### **ATTENDANCE - NEXT CC MEETING**

Anderson is scheduled to attend the City Council meeting on August 14, 2013.

*Motion* by Krebs to adjourn. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Boland, Recording Secretary