

**City of Columbus
Regular Planning Commission Meeting
September 4, 2013**

The September 4, 2013 regular meeting of the Planning Commission for the City of Columbus was called to order at 7:00 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 members Denny Peterson and Bill Krebs, Pat Preiner, and Mary Preiner.

AGENDA APPROVAL

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

APPROVAL - LOT 3, BLOCK 1- DEER MARSH VARIANCE APPLICATION PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES OF AUGUST 21, 2013

Motion by Krebs to approve the minutes from Lot 3, Block 1-Deer Marsh Variance Application Public Hearing held on August 21, 2013. Second by Preiner. Motion carried.

APPROVAL - REGULAR PC MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 21, 2013

Motion by Krebs to approve the minutes of the August 21, 2013 regular Planning Commission meeting as written. Second by Organ. Motion carried.

PLANNING COMMISSION DISCUSSION (continued) – How to stimulate both residential and business growth, and balancing the two.

Commissioners Krebs and Preiner interviewed Land Development Manager Daren Laberee with Mattamy Homes. Prior to their meeting, Krebs sent Laberee Columbus' zoning map and current building statutes. The criteria the builder considers for a possible building site include school district, job market, analysis of what is available for land and services, commercial services, business district, rooftops, and the businesses and rooftops of abutting communities. In the immediate metro area, Columbus is in an area graded 'C' with 'A' and 'B' being more desirable, and 'D' and 'F' less so. It is easiest for developers to build and sell a house in the 'A' areas. In terms of school districts, Laberee told them winning high-school sports teams are a big draw to parents. Proximity to jobs is also important. The longer the commute, the less desirable the location. Laberee expressed that the City being at the junction of 35E and 35W is favorable, as is the availability of the commuter bus service.

Krebs said Laberee felt the City's building density requirements could be more flexible. He also thought light industrial in the corridor could be a deterrent, due to the proximity to family housing. Laberee thought the City abutting Forest Lake and its businesses was a plus.

Mattamy does build multi-family homes. They also have their own mortgage company. Laberee recommended considering zoning changes in the area of Kettle River and Broadway. When asked, Laberee said Mattamy would not be likely to build in Columbus at this time. Krebs said

he indicated a lack of available land at a price they'd be willing to pay. Preiner added that there is a lot of land available in locations closer to the Twin Cities. Laberee believed we are at the beginning of a new surge in home building.

Krebs said Mattamy's desired densities were fairly comparable to those Commissioner Sternberg found in Blaine. At the last meeting, Sternberg said he found the low density housing in Blaine to be 2 to 6 units per acre, medium density is 6 to 10 units per acres, and high density is 10 to 20 units per acre. Mattamy recommended 2 to 5 for low density, 3 to 10 for medium density, and 10 to 30 for high density.

Sternberg asked City Administrator Mursko about the McCombs study. She said that was done approximately five years ago. The Council at the time looked at it and made some ordinance changes, and then the market fell. Now the data is too old to be applicable. The retail market has changed dramatically – for instance, there are no more video stores, big-box stores are downsizing, etc. The retail market is not back and building. The McCombs study was for commercial development and our trade area only; it was not a housing study.

Commissioner Anderson plans to talk to the developer of the newest housing development in Hugo, and find out why that City and site were chosen. Anderson asked if our lot sizes were a deterrent according to Laberee. Krebs said no. She said our ordinance didn't offer the variety in terms of density.

Sternberg recently talked to the Hugo City Administrator, Bryan Bear. He was told Hugo had one big development already in progress when they decided they needed to do a study to properly plan for development. Bear said the study was key. They then had an 18-month moratorium on development until the study was completed. They followed the study and ended up with the Victor Gardens deal. Hugo's policy is that no development should cost the citizens, so the developer coming in had to pay for water, sewer and roads. Mursko said Bear was the Community Development Director in Hugo when all that was taking place. Hugo also had a full-time Economic Development Director, and an intern for economic development. Sternberg said Bear's recommendation to them was to be patient. Bear felt Hugo had the perfect set of circumstances; developments were in motion just before the economy took its downward turn.

Preiner said Laberee also said we may have to wait until communities closer to the Twin Cities fill up. Krebs said we can work on what we have to offer in terms of ordinance updating, clarification, ease, and flexibility. She said Laberee felt our ordinance is difficult, too technical, too detailed and restrictive. Anderson asked how we compare with surrounding communities. He asked Mursko's thoughts on that.

Mursko believes if you are not in the business of reading and interpreting ordinances regularly, they come across as confusing and technical. She said we can tweak them and make changes, but we do this regularly and yet, at least 70% of the developments coming in have required ordinance changes. So, she believes we are and have been flexible, and no matter what guesses are made at changes, it's likely that developers coming in will still require amendments. Preiner is concerned that if the ordinances are perceived as restrictive, developers will be deterred. Anderson said two years ago, the PC was consistently told that Columbus' building codes and

inspector were more restrictive than surrounding communities, but, upon comparison, Columbus was actually the same or even less restrictive than a lot of them. Anderson said the developer he spoke to said it was very important to have a knowledgeable Building Inspector and knowledgeable City staff. That developer also suggested the City focus on reasons people could build here, rather than reasons someone could not. Sternberg added that a surveyor who believes the City's requirements have gotten much better; they are comparable to any neighboring community in terms of being easy to work with.

Anderson complimented City staff on being very friendly and accommodating. Mursko agreed that the staff is here for service, but added that there are rules and regulations that need to be applied. There are City rules, DNR rules, Watershed rules, etc. She also pointed out that if there were no rules or regulations, no one would want to build or live here, because nothing would regulate what type of property was next door to them.

Preiner said Laberee, too, said people want a good separation between residential and light industrial. He brought up the CR district east of the freeway, suggesting if you had business on the freeway side of Hornsby, with housing across the street, you'd have a street separating commercial from residential. Mursko said you have many more complaints when you mix uses, as the PC has seen in the C/I district along Lake Drive. Flexibility ties into what the PC and CC are willing to accept. Mursko said there are four commercial applications for the PC to review in October that will require decisions to be made about what is appropriate when you have different land uses next door to one another.

As mentioned above, Anderson plans to contact the developer in Hugo. Commissioner Wolowski is from White Bear Lake. She worked in Hugo, and believes that over the years, as White Bear Lake grew, people who couldn't afford to live in White Bear continued up to Hugo.

Anderson asked if the bridge at the Columbus exit is detrimental to building in the freeway area. Mursko said the unknown is a deterrent to any developer. It is a problem that they have no idea when construction on the bridge will take place, how long it may affect access to their business, and who will pay for it.

Mursko said it is a struggle for developers in the City's residential district to deal with the prevalence of wetland with pockets of upland on remaining undeveloped residentially-zoned land. We have always required the five acres and the 220 feet of road frontage. We wanted nice, square lots. That worked in years past, but PC members may need to think outside the box. First, because there are 52 miles of roads. At some point, if you add many more miles of roads, there won't be enough staff and equipment to maintain them. Looking big picture, how many more roads do you want to build? How much land is left for the square lots? PC members should think about creative ways to increase density with different lot configurations. Mursko said she has been asked on more than one occasion if the City is willing to look at the same overall density, but with a different concept. Knowing the wetland issues that are out there, what type of combinations would the PC allow in terms of minimum lot size, road frontage, etc., per 40 acres? If on a 40-acre lot, the overall density is five acres per unit, but there is flexibility on the placement of the homes, it gives you more options for land usability. Mixed lot sizes would allow more houses around wetlands. At the next meeting, Mursko will give PC members some

samples involving actual land, to help them get a better idea of what is fair and what might work with subdividing in the residential district.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There was no topic raised for discussion for Open Forum.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Columbus Fall Fest will be Saturday, September 21st. Sternberg will be serving ice cream.

A Recycling Day will be held on September 27th.

The City is up to four houses that were built this year.

The next PC meeting (9/18) is a joint meeting with the CC. There are no applications that night.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS' REPORT

KREBS COMMENT

Krebs said our representatives visited Running Aces. They took a tour and had sulky rides.

WOLOWSKI COMMENT

Wolowski said there was a break-in at the wellness center. The Sheriff will hold a crime prevention meeting for building tenants.

ORGAN COMMENT

Commissioner Organ noted two articles in the Minneapolis newspaper pertaining to Forest Lake and Columbus.

ANDERSON COMMENT

Anderson encouraged all City residents to use Columbus as their mailing address.

HVASS COMMENT

Chair Hvass reported that at the last CC meeting the Council approved the Deer Marsh variance in a 5-0 vote.

ATTENDANCE - NEXT CC MEETING

There is no need for Organ to attend the City Council meeting on September 11, 2013.

Motion by Krebs to adjourn. Second by Organ. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Boland, Recording Secretary