

**CITY OF COLUMBUS
PUBLIC HEARING
INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY MEETING FORMAT
RPAW TEXT AMENDMENT & PUD CUP
12-20-2023**

The 12-20-2023 Public Hearing to consider a request for a text amendment to allow veterinary services as a conditional use in the Highway Commercial (HC) zoning district and to allow a conditional use permit for a planned unit development for a veterinary wellness clinic in the Highway Commercial (HC) zoning district was called to order by Commission Chair Lynn Carver-Quinn at the City Hall at 6:04 PM. Present were Planning Commission members Lynn Carver-Quinn, Barb Bobick, Judy Huntosh, and Robin Wood, City Council Liaison Jesse Preiner, City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, City Planner Dean Johnson, Planning and Zoning Tech Eleanor Hahn, Ron Hanegraaf, Eric Vidden, Elizabeth Gigler, Steve Gaffney, and Timothy and Cathy Mackenzie.

In attendance via interactive technology was Sue Wagamon.

Absent from the meeting was Planning Commissioner Bethany Barrette.

The meeting was held in an interactive technology meeting format.

Carver-Quinn: Now we'll move on to our public hearing. Eleanor, would you read the notice published in the Forest Lake Times?

Hahn: Absolutely.

At this time, Planning and Zoning Technician Eleanor Hahn reads the public notice.

Carver-Quinn: Thank you, Eleanor. At this time, I would ask the applicant, Elizabeth Geisler, to please come forward. Have a seat at the table, give us your name and address and make sure you talk into the microphone so everyone can hear you, even though it's on.

Gigler: It's Elizabeth Gigler and it's 10704 Stutz St. in Circle Pines, MN 55014.

Carver-Quinn: OK, so the Commission reviewed your application as a normal protocol. For the record, could you brief us a little bit about your application and plans?

Gigler: Yeah so, currently we run a nonprofit rescue organization, and we're looking to lease the property on Feller to create a nonprofit veterinary Wellness Center for the animals that are in our care, along with other rescues in the community. And we do hope later on in the process that we can open it to the community for low-cost services.

Carver-Quinn: Thank you. For the record, did you receive a copy of the staff report developed by associate planner Eleanor Hahn regarding this application? This report notes certain findings numbered, for the text amendment one through 11 on pages one and two, and the recommendations and conditions one through 23. And on the CUP PUD? Or that was - Nope, that was all of them. So, do you understand her recommendations and conditions?

Gigler: Yes

Carver-Quinn: Eleanor, do you want to give us a description of your facts of finding?

Hahn: Absolutely. So, before we can really talk about this project and the CUP, we first have to talk about that text amendment to allow veterinary services in the highway commercial district. Currently in the freeway district as a whole, five of the seven commercial districts allow veterinary services as a conditional use. The two that do not are the general commercial and the highway commercial districts. There is a bit of background on to why this is, at least from what I learned from doing my research. Of uh, how this all came to be? If you'd like to hear about that. So last year we recently did. No, this year we did an ordinance redefining and differentiating different animal facilities. Mostly between commercial facilities such as boarding, training, and grooming, and veterinary services, to be able to separate those two and place them in different districts. The reason that we really did this is the state will regulate veterinary clinics, but we as the city have to regulate commercial facilities. And we simply do not have the manpower nor the expertise in order to really effectively manage commercial facilities. And so, we needed to separate those and limit the amount of commercial facilities, and the extent of those because we as a city do not have the basis to regulate them to the same extent that they can be regulated by the state. And the other reason for this ordinance was land use. And these commercial facilities such as dog boarding and training, those types of things tend to use a lot of empty lands. They have to have big backyards in order to train those animals. They have 30 to 50 different animals at the facility at one time and in the freeway district, we're trying to focus a little bit denser of development, or at least not that much empty land. We talked about that in our design standards of not wanting a tiny little coffee shop on a giant plot of land. And so those were the two reasons of differentiating those. The reason that I found that it was left out of the highway commercial and the - Which one was it, general business? General commercial. Yeah, in 2021 before we split this these up into different categories, there was a dog training facility that was proposed in the Highway Commercial district and the Planning Commission at the time went "that's way to land intensive, that's way too much regulation. We don't want animal facilities in the highway commercial district." But that was a dog training facility, not a veterinary clinic. But when we were doing this ordinance, we looked at minutes and we said "the Planning Commission doesn't want animal facilities in the highway commercial district." And so that's what we went with, but allowing veterinary clinics in the highway commercial district is a lot different than allowing these boarding facilities. So that's what I found while doing research on the text amendment portion. Do we have any questions on that?

No? OK. For the CUP in general, this is an existing building. Which will be leased to the applicant for a period of five years, and during those five years, both the applicant and the landowner have proposed different improvements in order to bring that building into compliance with our current code. Those specific improvements are really listed in recommendations 10 through 13 on page 4 of the reports, or 24 of your packet. And we are giving them different dates of completion depending on how pressing that matter is, such as connecting to the utilities versus planting boulevard trees. There are certain things that we want done sooner and there are certain things that can be pushed back in the timeline

based on how successful the facility is and when you have time and money to do those things. Because it is a nonprofit and we want to allow them some flexibility in those things.

Finally, the big thing with this one was the parking lot, which is currently non-compliant because we require a 20-foot set back from the property line for parking lots. The current parking lot is only 14 feet from the property line. That's on page 12 of your packet. If you want to look at it. So, what they have proposed is that, when they do the future millings and upgrades, to drop it back to comply with the 20-foot set back. However, that does make the drive aisle and the parking stalls pretty short, and this is a town with a lot of big trucks. So, allowing them to put the millings and forgoing that 20-foot setback to allow for a larger drive aisle, for longer parking stalls – it makes sense to do that if that is something that you guys want to consider. It is in the recommendations as well. I believe that's really it in terms of planning at least. It's an existing building that's going to be adapted.

Carver-Quinn: Thank you. Do any of the Commissioners have any questions or comments for the applicants?

Wood: Well, actually I did have a question. Elizabeth answered it in her presentation. So I have nothing then.

Huntosh: Eleanor, you mean?

Hahn: It's OK. I'm sitting in her spot. So, I know.

Huntosh: So, I do have a question. What kind of parking lot activity do you expect to have?

Gigler: So originally not much because it will just be the veterinarian. Maybe a technician if there's an additional one to me, and then maybe a couple other volunteers. So, in the beginning it's not going to be heavy. If we do open it up to the public for low-cost services, there will be specific hours that will be in that and again, if you only have one veterinarian, then you're not going to be having – I mean, you might have a busy lot, but it's not going to be packed all the time with things happening. So, the parking lot that we figured out should be just fine. And I'm assuming with the quilt people as well, because going by there I haven't really seen more than four to five cars there at a time.

Carver-Quinn: The quilt shop will probably have more vehicles than you do.

Gigler: Right.

Bobick: I have a question. You were really, really thorough on your original concept plan and we really appreciated that. But I was trying to figure out – they're rescue dogs, so you don't bring them all into the facility? Most of that's done over the phone with your foster parents?

Gigler: Yeah. So, the animals will already be in our program. They'll already be in foster homes because our rescue's foster based. So, they already be there. We just don't have a facility to get their vet care done in a timely manner. So normally when an animal comes into the program currently, they'll have to sit 3-4 weeks just to have an intake done. And with this facility, we can get them turned around in a weekend. And then surgery the next week and then we can move on. So, we'll cut back the amount of

time it takes. Plus, we'll also be alleviating all the time that we need to get into the clinics for these simple wellness stuff, so that they can then function with their clients better.

Bobick: And then you schedule appointments so that there isn't overlap like a regular vet clinic would.

Gigler: Correct. They would have the same schedule. The days would be scheduled out with different pets that were going to be there.

Bobick: Okay good. And then it looked like you had six kennels for dogs. Is that about right?

Gigler: Yeah. So those would be anything that we would be working with for the day. And then like I said before, if anybody needed to stay over, say we did surgery late and anyone needed to stay over, they would stay in those kennels, but it wouldn't be something like a boarding like Eleanor was talking about where you know there's 30 dogs staying on the property at a time. And so, the proposed fenced area in the back is just needed for an animal relief area. It's not, you know, we're not going to be out there with 40 dogs.

Bobick: OK. And then I'm not real familiar with cats. So, it looks like the cat room is just one big room.

Gigler: Yeah. So, the cat kennels are normally stacked metal cages that you know, so there'd be like, six or eight to a block and then, like I said, the cats would be there, just like the dogs for the day procedures, so they'd be set up in there. And we do have to comply with the the Minnesota State Board of Animal Health. So, they have stuff that they have in place that we have to have for them, even if they're there for the day.

Bobick: Great. Thank you so much.

Gigler: Yeah, of course. Thank you.

Carver-Quinn: And just the timeline that Eleanor has in her recommendations, you're totally fine with that?

Gigler: Yeah. Yep. I read through all those and it doesn't seem to be a problem. The stuff that's in here as far as what the Mackenzies are doing, that would be up to what their schedule has in place. I know they've already talked to everybody, but as far as the stuff that we have to do, I don't see a problem.

Carver-Quinn: Perfect. Is there anybody in the audience that would like to say something or online? Only Sue Online, I guess. Hearing none, we will close the public hearing.

At this time, Chair Carver-Quinn closed the Public Hearing. Hearing closed at 6:19.

Eleanor Hahn

Respectfully submitted, Recording Secretary Eleanor Hahn