

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
July 7, 2022
FINAL

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; David Burgess; Brian Pittelko; Michael Harrison;
*Shardae Chambers; Sakhi Vyas, Vice Chair; Mariah Phelps

Members Excused: James Pitts; Jennifer Swan

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative
Assistant; Chris Praedel, City Commissioner; Zach DuMont, AmeriCorps Service
Member; Charlie Bear, Assistant City Attorney

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Planner Anderson proceeded with roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Vyas, seconded by Commissioner Harrison, moved approval of the July 7, 2022, Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Burgess, seconded by Commissioner Pittelko, moved approval of the June 2, 2022, minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

PC #2022.06: 2001 Cameron St. / 1510 and 1518 Bryant Street. Tree of Life School is requesting a special use permit to expand school facilities onto 1510 and 1518 Bryant Street.

*Commissioner Chambers entered the meeting during Commissioner Milliken's explanation of how the public can comment during the meeting.

Planner Anderson said the Tree of Life school has requested a Special Use Permit for the expansion of school facilities onto the Bryant Street lots. They have proposed recreational facilities and a garden on these parcels. She showed pictures and maps of the parcels/area. Planner Anderson noted that the school and parcels are in the Edison neighborhood. The school is located in zone district M-1 with the remainder of the neighborhood in the RS-5 district. She noted that schools are commonly found in the RS-5 district. Planner Anderson reviewed the rationale for staff recommendation. She stated that the garden plots will be

closer to street with the recreation area in the back. Staff found no environmental impacts and the streets have adequate capacity to handle the school expansion. It is anticipated that students will walk across the street when using the site, so no additional parking is required. Planner Anderson stated that the expansion would have to go through the site plan process.

The applicant, Mr. Adam Sterenberg, came forward to speak to the request. He said they are excited to have the opportunity to expand outdoor recreational activities for students and the Edison community. Mr. Sterenberg said they purchased the lot across Cameron a few years ago and wanted to develop something that would benefit the community. They are proposing a basketball court and two tetherball courts. Mr. Sterenberg shared that they have also raised money to replace their playground equipment. He said they learned that the lot to the east is owned by the Kalamazoo Land Bank. If the Tree of Life school is awarded the Special Use Permit, the Land Bank will sell them the adjacent lot. Mr. Sterenberg said they would love to put community gardens on that lot.

Commissioner Chambers asked if there would be any additional parking needs or additional traffic in the area. Mr. Sterenberg didn't think there would be an increased need for parking. After hours, the public can use the school parking lots. When the school has fund raisers, people generally park in the street. Otherwise, he believes that people in the neighborhood would be walking or biking.

Commissioner Pittelko asked if they anticipated issues with kids crossing the street. Mr. Sterenberg said he couldn't speak to the issue regarding neighborhood kids, but students at the school would be supervised during playtime.

Commissioner Vyas asked if they plan to fence in the areas, or would the area be open for use by community members. Mr. Sterenberg explained the fencing at their location and confirmed that it will be open for use by the community.

Commissioner Phelps asked if they would need additional staff to monitor play areas and students crossing the street. Applicant said there would never be just one staff member. They would get whatever staffing was needed for both areas.

Commissioner Milliken opened the public comment portion of the hearing.

Mr. Joe Hohler shared that since the school has come in the neighborhood, they've cleaned and maintained their lot well. He believed they would take good care of the additional parcels. Mr. Hohler was happy to see the land be of use to the community.

Mr. James Potter said he loves having the playground area nearby for his grandchildren. He believed that recreational facilities in urban setting usually benefit the neighborhood. Mr. Potter was in support of the request calling it a win win.

There were no phone comments.

Commissioner Milliken closed the public comment portion of the public hearing.

Commissioner Milliken asked the City Planner if there was any other feedback from neighbors or others. Planner Anderson said there were no additional comments.

Commissioner Phelps moved to approve a special use permit for 1518 Bryant Street; seconded by Commissioner Chambers.

Planner Anderson clarified that the motion should include both addresses – 1510 and 1518 Bryant Street.

Commissioner Phelps amended her motion to include 1510 and 1518 Bryant Street; seconded by Commissioner Chambers.

Commissioner Phelps said that staff had done a good job of vetting the applicant. The applicant seems passionate about bringing much needed recreational use to the neighborhood and community and she would support the request.

Commissioner Harrison was excited about bringing another park to the community. He believed that parks bring residents together. He was glad to support this initiative.

Commissioner Chambers agreed that it was nice to have a park open to the community, especially in that neighborhood. She believed it will bring more students to their school in years to come. Commissioner Chambers noted that the request falls in line with their neighborhood plan, and she is excited about what they will bring.

Commissioner Milliken stated that, per the staff report, this request meets requirements of the zoning ordinance. He mentioned that one of the speakers talked about the railroad right away. There is a unique configuration of the lots there and seeing them put to good use is valuable beyond the recreational elements.

A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

F. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

PC #2022.07: Update to the Public Participation Policy

Planner Anderson shared that the Public Participation Policy (PPP) is the City's commitment to outreach and engagement. It is meant to be a part of everyday work and not just big projects. The document includes an understanding of who should be at the discussion table and why. She said that it highlights the importance of engagement at all stages of a plan (before, during and after) to make sure they are understanding the impacts and to answer questions. Planner Anderson stated that three major areas were updated. They added specific developer/applicant outreach (formalizing what is done currently). They also created a Community of Practice. This is an internal working group made up of representatives of staff across departments. They will collaborate on events and taking information to neighborhoods. In the longer term, they hope to have the Community of Practice group lead communication audits to make sure information is clearly written and transparent. Planner Anderson said this group will be important as they move toward IK 2035. The final update to the document was the Engagement Guide and Toolkit. She said she used this process for the two-way conversion project for Kalamazoo Avenue. It was helpful to think through who is impacted, stakeholders, level of impact, who needs to be at table and why and then figure out engagement activities. Planner Anderson noted that they have included virtual/digital means of outreach as well. She noted that they did receive some feedback and made those changes to the document.

Commissioner Harrison asked how they will measure goals and evaluate success. Planner Anderson said they could measure by number of participants or if they reached all the groups they needed to reach, and if there were questions. She said the Toolkit has an exercise for coming up with goals for each individual project so they can be measured at the end. It also gives space to think about what was heard and what that means for the outcome. Planner Anderson thought the first activity of the Community of Practice group would be to set those goals. She noted that they tend to gravitate towards numbers, but public participation is measured in trust, level of comfortability, open lines of communication, and people coming back for next process after participating previously. Those are harder to measure. That group will have to figure out how to measure those things.

Commissioner Chambers asked if there were common issues heard from the community. Planner Anderson said feedback was regarding specific details that needed to be clarified. She thinks this policy will set a clear and transparent process no matter who is driving the project.

Commissioner Milliken clarified that this is above and beyond required notices that gets mailed for a public hearing. Planner Anderson agreed that this is above the State's requirements for public hearings. Commissioner Milliken noted that for special use permits, the policy wouldn't change things, but the policy would really give strength to the larger projects (for ex: rezonings, street vacations, PUD, or big NFP projects). Planner Anderson shared that later in the toolkit, it talks about high impact, low impact, high geography, low geography. A street vacation has potential for a larger impact on a larger area than a side yard setback. That is why it is scaled the way it is. Commissioner Milliken and Planner Anderson talked about some examples of low impact vs. high impact street vacations.

Commissioner Milliken asked to clarify the action needed on the PPP. Planner Anderson said it is a recommendation of approval to the City Commission. She noted this is part of the RRC which is why they need the formal approval process.

Commissioner Vyas, seconded by Commissioner Pittelko, moved to recommend approval of the Public Participation Policy to the City Commission.

A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

G. REPORTS:

Planner Anderson shared that staff gave a presentation to the City Commission on the Streets for All project. They introduced the work on converting Kalamazoo. She noted that they are in the process of organizing a lot of meetings. They will have an Art Hop and will be at Lunchtime Live. She said they are seeking input on are best areas for north/south pedestrian crossing improvements. Another element for discussion will be for the section downtown, east of Westnedge to Harrison, and what that street section should include. They are trying to think about what's needed for Kalamazoo Avenue and what will happen on Michigan Avenue in the future.

Commissioner Vyas asked the date of the Art Hop and Lunchtime Live. Planner Anderson said they will be at the August 5th Art Hop. Lunchtime Live will probably be starting the last week in July, but definitely in August. She added that the City is partnering with SW Michigan First to hold a Business Townhall. They plan to have another downtown meeting with the Stuart Neighborhood and two discussions in the Stuart/Douglass/Kalamazoo area. There will also be opportunities for participation online.

H. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No comments.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Praedel announced that the City Attorney is retiring. He reports directly to the City Commission. Mayor Anderson, and Commissioners Decker and Praedel are on a subcommittee. They have elected to use the Michigan Municipal League to help with search. Commissioner Praedel said they hope to garner feedback from the City Commission, senior City staff and the public. He hopes to have someone announced in early fall. The Community Sustainability Plan was adopted at the City Commission's June 21st meeting. Commissioner Praedel noted that it is a 10 year plan. He shared that Streets for All presentation mentioned by Planner Anderson was fantastic. Commissioner Praedel was proud of the last month's work. He said they used \$2.1 million to support youth initiatives. There were 31 organizations supporting youth this summer along with KIDnet, Parks & Recreation and the Police Athletic League. Rocket football funding will support 650 youth in community. Commissioner Praedel said they were finally able to get consensus to support \$550,000 gun violence intervention strategies. They will be working with the United Way and five non-profits have been chosen to do the work. He said they are working together with county to double the impact. In June they allocated \$1.1 million to support approximately 70 new housing units. Commissioner Praedel said they had a first reading to amend Chapter 22. This will decriminalized things like spitting on sidewalk or public urination. Taking them from misdemeanors to civil infractions.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Chambers thanked City staff for their work with community engagement and updates for the two-way conversion. She believed it will be an excellent enhancement for Kalamazoo. Commissioner Chambers encouraged them to vote in the Aug 2nd election.

Commissioners Milliken and Pittelko will not be available for the next Planning Commission meeting.

Commissioner Milliken promoted using Kik Pool. He said he was a part of a big swim meet there and the facility really showed well. Commissioner Vyas said that memberships are available at Kik pool or the Parks & Recreation Offices on Mills Street. She also encouraged use of the splash pads.

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K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 7:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. Anderson", is written over a horizontal blue line.

Christina Anderson,

City Planner

Community Planning & Economic Development