

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Special Meeting Minutes
December 18, 2024
FINAL

Members Present: Mitchell Curtiss; Gregory Milliken, Chair; Ian Smith; Michelle Audette-Bauman; Jennifer Swan; *Shardae Chambers; Wendell Tolber

Members Excused: Christine Dascenzo; Brian Pittelko

City Staff: Pete Eldridge, Zoning Administrator; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Bill Bates, Assistant City Attorney

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Mr. Eldridge proceeded with roll call and determined there was a quorum.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Mr. Eldridge noted that City Commissioner Praedel would not be there for item I. City Commission Liaison Comments.

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Curtiss, moved approval of the December 18, 2024 Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Tolber, moved approval of the November 7, 2024 minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

Commissioner Milliken shared how to call in for public comment on non-agenda items later in the meeting.

F. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

1. P.C. #2024.11 – 3301 Tech Circle Drive – Site Plan Review by Planning Commission for Office Building Addition

Mr. Eldridge shared that 3301 Tech Circle Drive has an existing building and parking lot. The building was constructed in 2005 and is roughly 10,000 square feet. Mr. Eldridge showed maps of the location in the Business Technology and Research (BTR) park explaining that it is zoned CBTR. He shared that back in 1999, when the BTR park was created by Western Michigan University, there were concerns from neighbors that development would overwhelm the natural features. To help minimize concerns, an ordinance was created to state that all site plans for the BTR Park would go to the Planning Commission for review and approval. Site plans are still required to go through the staff driven site plan process. Mr. Eldridge said that Planning Commissioners were reviewing the site plan and considering approval with the condition that it would then go through the usual full site plan process. He shared that the property is also in the Natural Features Protection (NFP) Overlay which was adopted years after the creation of the BTR Park. The site plan was reviewed by the NFP Board on November 26, 2024. They approved the site plan with the condition of full site plan approval through the staff driven process.

Mr. Eldridge showed plans for the building, stating that they were adding a 5,124 square foot single story expansion, 16 additional parking spaces, and landscaping improvements. He indicated that the site was designed to handle additional stormwater.

*Commissioner Chambers entered the meeting at this time.

Mr. Eldridge showed pictures of the property noting that a couple of trees would need to be removed as part of the project. He reviewed the staff rationale of recommending approval of the site plan. Mr. Eldridge mentioned information that Planner Durkee had emailed to Commissioners. This email shared responses to the questions raised by site plan reviewers. The applicant has already incorporated changes to the site plan in reference to the reviewers feedback. He noted that all code standards would be covered by the Site Plan Review Committee. The required approvals for this project are through the NFP, Planning Commission, and Western Michigan BTR Park Design Review Committee. Mr. Eldridge stated that staff recommends approval of the site plan with the condition that the applicant obtains full site plan approval from the Site Plan Review Committee.

Mr. Eldridge announced that Mr. Tom Carpenter from AR Engineering and Mr. Adam Harvey from Glas Associates were present at the meeting to address any questions.

Mr. Harvey thanked everyone for setting up the special meeting. He said the project is a small addition for the engineering firm which has been there since the early 2000s. Mr. Harvey stated that existing utilities would be used. There was not a lot of infrastructure expansion other than stormwater management. The building would continue to be fully fire suppressed. Exterior façade finishes will be similar to existing finishes. He said they would work with staff to replace any required landscaping features.

Commissioner Milliken asked if this was an expansion of the existing use. Mr. Harvey said the new addition will be office space. They are adding a training facility which includes a multi-purpose space where they can telecommunicate with other locations for projects.

Commissioner Curtiss, seconded by Commissioner Swan, moved to approve the site plan as submitted with the condition that the applicant obtain full site plan approval from the Site Plan Review Committee.

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

G. REPORTS:

1. City Planner's Report

Mr. Eldridge announced the Happy City book event with the author Charles Montgomery. He encouraged Planning Commissioners to sign up for the event.

Mr. Eldridge explained that there were two Planning Commissioners completing their second full term next year, so there would be vacancies. He announced a need for a volunteer interview team of three to look at the applications. Commissioners Chambers, Curtiss, and Audette-Bauman volunteered for the team.

2. Site Plan List

No questions.

3. 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Mr. Eldridge announced that January, April, and July meetings were not scheduled on the usual dates of the month due to holidays.

Commissioner Milliken asked other Commissioners about Tuesday, January 7, 2025. Consensus seemed to be in favor of the January date.

A voice vote was taken, and the 2025 Planning Commission meeting calendar was confirmed as presented.

H. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No in-person comments nor call-in comments.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

None.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Curtiss said he just finished reading Happy City. He highly recommended the book and said he was looking forward to the author event.

Commissioner Audette-Bauman asked if the Business Park was the only district that had the special requirement for the site plans to come to the Planning Commission. Mr. Eldridge confirmed that was the only place in the City that was zoned CBTR. Commissioner Audette-Bauman asked what it would take to have that changed. Mr. Eldridge said a change would require an ordinance amendment. Commissioner Audette-Bauman said given the NFP overlay and other checkpoints in the system, she thought it was worth exploring. She didn't feel it was necessary for those site plans to come before them.

Commissioner Milliken asked what qualified the property for the NFP. Mr. Eldridge said it was adjacent to the Asylum Lake Preserve and some sloped areas.

Commissioner Milliken encouraged everyone to enjoy the next few weeks. Happy Holidays.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 7:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CK Anderson", is written over a horizontal blue line.

Christina Anderson,

City Planner
Community Planning & Economic Development