

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
April 21, 2021
DRAFT

This meeting is being conducted electronically pursuant to the Open Meetings Act MCL 15.263 (2) and
MCL 15.263a 1(b).

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; Sharda Chambers; Brian Pittelko; Sakhi Vyas; David Burgess, Mariah Phelps, Jennifer Swan; Michael Harrison; James Pitts

Members Excused:

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Pete Eldridge, Assistant City Planner; Clyde Robinson, City Attorney; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Andie Miller, Senior Systems Analyst

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 Pittelko, moved approval of the April 21, 2021 Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Vyas, seconded by Commissioner Chambers, moved approval of the March 4, 2021 minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Burgess, seconded by Commissioner Harrison, moved approval of the April 7, 2021 minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Anderson announced that she missed calling on Commissioner Pitts for roll call. Commissioner Pitts responded.

Chair Milliken announced the process for people to call in to leave comments to be played during Citizen Comments.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

F. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS:

Planner Eldridge asked Planning Commissioners to make sure they respond to emails regarding attendance. The intent is to make sure there is a quorum at the meetings.

1. Planning Commission Training (Part 2):
 1. Planning Commissioner Role & Responsibilities
 2. Decision Making

Planner Eldridge reviewed decision making. He said the most common items presented at Planning Commission meetings are rezoning cases, text amendments and special use permits. For rezoning, they will usually see one or two properties come forward – usually as a citizen initiated item. City staff will bring larger rezoning cases forward. He showed an example of a large scale rezoning initiated by the City.

Text Amendments are City staff initiated. Citizens can bring ideas forward, but the text put forth for amending a zoning ordinance would come through the City staff. He gave examples of text amendments associated with the NFP Overlay ordinance, adult use marihuana regulations, and the new downtown districts. Planner Eldridge stated that many text amendments will come with an element of a zoning change. He said that rezoning and text amendments are recommended for adoption from the Planning Commission to the City Commission.

Planner Eldridge explained that special use permit decisions are final with the Planning Commission. Special use permits are a review of land uses and how they fit a certain zone district. He said there is specific review criteria to apply. Planner Eldridge shared some examples of special uses in residential zone districts: schools, religious assembly, group day cares, community service centers. He said that some are quasi-commercial - large scale churches or schools with a large parking lots, large occupancy numbers with added traffic to the area. In commercial zones, special use permits could be outdoor sales or storage where the land use is primarily a parking lot.

Planner Eldridge said that Planned Unit Developments (PUD) and subdivisions don't come before the Planning Commission very often. Right-of-Way (ROW) Vacations are seen a couple times a year. He mentioned that review of land use development and related plans touch on the guiding documents of the Master Plan, neighborhood plans, or the capital improvement program.

Planner Eldridge said the City Planner has developed a process for the larger scale City driven initiatives to make sure there are multiple touch points with the Planning Commission. That way the Planning Commissioners are brought into the loop early in the development stages of the initiative. Planner Anderson will provide draft material and a presentation, a public hearing with a formal presentation and vote. Planner Eldridge went through and explained the review criteria

for rezoning and text amendments and special use permits. He commented that the criteria are laid out in the Staff Reports the Planning Commissioners receive.

3. Site Plan Review Oversight and Explanation of Site Plan Review Process

Planner Eldridge explained that Site Plan Review is the responsibility of the Planning Commission. He shared that they would vote that night on whether the Planning Commission would delegate that responsibility to the site plan review committee for completion of reviews and approval of site plans.

The site plan review board is a composition of City Staff involving multiple departments and disciplines: CPED – planning staff, zoning staff, and the Building official; Public Services – water, stormwater and sanitary engineers, and the Environmental Programs Manager; Public Safety - Fire Marshall. Planning Commissioners will receive a monthly update of projects in site plan review. He shared that the current site plans under review are on the website and those are available to the public. Planner Eldridge stated that Planning Commissioners are welcome to attend the site plan review meetings to see how the process is conducted.

Planner Eldridge reviewed what projects may be exempt from site plan review, but said that most projects, especially commercial projects, fall under the site plan review process. He reviewed the steps of the site plan review process. The steps are pre-application meeting, prepare site plan, site plan application submittal, site plan review meeting, revised site plan submitted, and final site plan approval. No development activity can take place until the site plan is approved.

Planner Eldridge reminded Planning Commissioners about the virtual meeting tips from Disability Network. He shared that there were no applications for the May 6 Planning Commission meeting, so they would cancel that meeting.

Planner Anderson asked for any questions regarding the site plan review process. She explained that staff has worked hard on the site plan review process to make sure it runs efficiently. The State through the Redevelopment Ready Community and the Michigan Municipal League have lifted up this process as a good example of how to do site plan.

Commissioner Burgess said it is clearly a very thorough process with a lot of staff involved. He wondered how long the City has been doing it this way. He also wondered if Planning Commission has done some of the reviews, or if it is all or nothing. Planner Anderson said the revised process has been in place for approximately two years. Planner Eldridge said he thinks staff has handled site plan for approximately eight to ten years. He remembered them doing two Planning Commission meetings a month to handle site plan review. Planner Eldridge said that the Planning Commission is required to review the Business Technology and Research Park site plans. He said they still do the internal staff driven process, but then share those plans with the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Milliken thinks it is an efficient and effective process. He appreciated getting monthly updates. Commissioner Milliken mentioned they can get emails regarding site plan review projects and they get the spreadsheet. If they want to ask questions, they can do that at

the Planning Commission meetings. He said that when they think of the substantial number of cases and the depth of knowledge and detail required to go through those and review them in an efficient manner to maintain the pace of development, he didn't think it's something the Planning Commission can do. He didn't think they have the capacity or capability to perform that function. Commissioner Milliken believes that the staff does a great job.

Planner Anderson shared that Planning Commissioners can sign up on the site plan webpage to get alerts when a site plan is posted. She said she would send that link.

Commissioners Swan and Vyas agreed that sitting in on site plan meetings is helpful to understand how the process works.

4. Closing Training Comments – Chair Milliken

Commissioner Milliken encouraged Planning Commissioners to ask questions before the meeting, during the meeting, and to participate in discussion. When they wrap up the public hearing, they make a motion to start discussion. He said they don't have to immediately say how they are voting. They can have discussion and it is ok to disagree. The Planning Commission is a diverse board that is representative of the City. They won't always agree, but they need to remain civil. Commissioner Milliken encouraged them to do their research, get the packet, keep an open mind, and base their decision on research and what is on the record. He reminded them to stay within the standards of the ordinance. Commissioner Milliken emphasized that being a Planning Commissioner will require preparation. They won't be able to walk into the meeting and make a good decision. They will need to do work ahead of time. He encouraged them to ask for more time or what they need if they are not ready to make a decision. Commissioner Milliken said this is a volunteer position, but it is serious, with real implications for the community. He appreciated their willingness to serve and their attention at the meeting.

2. Annual Vote to Delegate Site Plan Review to Site Plan Review Committee

Planner Anderson stated that annually, they ask the Planning Commission to renew their authorization for staff to continue conducting the site plan review process.

Commissioner Phelps, supported by Commissioner Chambers, moved to delegate the site plan review process to the site plan review committee.

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

3. Vote on Commission Officers – Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary

Planner Anderson asked for nominations for the offices. She said the Chair runs the meeting and the Vice Chair runs the meeting in absence of the Chair.

Chair

Commissioner Vyas, supported by Commissioner Chambers, moved to nominate Commissioner Milliken for Chair.

Commissioner Milliken accepted the nomination.

A voice vote was taken and passed.

Vice Chair

Commissioner Pittelko, supported by Commissioner Chambers, moved to nominate Commissioner Vyas for Vice Chair.

Commissioner Vyas accepted the nomination.

A voice vote was taken and passed.

Secretary

Commissioner Chambers, supported by Commissioner Vyas, nominated Commissioner Pittelko for Secretary.

Commissioner Pittelko accepted the nomination.

A voice vote was taken and passed.

Planner Anderson announced the new officers of the Planning Commission.

G. REPORT:

1. City Planner's Report

Commissioner Milliken commented that he saw the site plan for Consumer's Credit Union at Oakland and Parkview. He requested the status and timeframe for that project. Planner Anderson said that project was delayed. They are requesting two variances from the NFP ordinance. One variance was for a dumpster placement which encroaches into a slope area. The second variance is for a corner of a parking lot to encroach into a critical root zone.

Planner Eldridge said they go to the NFP Review Board on April 27 and that board will provide a recommendation to the ZBA on May 13. If all is approved, they will proceed with site plan review.

Planner Anderson reviewed some projects that will be coming before the Planning Commission.

Northside zoning

Planner Anderson talked about the area for the rezoning saying it is approximately 80 parcels. All but two of the parcels are zoned M-1. It is zoned manufacturing, but it is a mix of single-family homes, vacant lots, and some active commercial and also some intensive commercial businesses. She said the zoning in this area doesn't meet the community vision and is narrow in what it allows. That limits the neighborhood's ability to meet its goals in the Neighborhood Plan. Their goal is to put zoning in place that allows flexibility and supports buildings that are the right character and size for the area.

Planner Anderson said two parcels were added that are used for manufacturing but are zoned RMU with the riverfront overlay. She explained that the Riverfront Overlay district is narrower in what it allows in RMU. It definitely doesn't allow manufacturing uses. Graphics Packaging wants to use those two parcels to consolidate where trucks are going between the north and south of Paterson through their facilities. The zoning there now does not reflect the current use and that Paterson is an industrial corridor.

Planner Anderson reviewed the outreach they have done for this rezoning: hand delivered and mailed flyers; three presentations; copies of the presentation and maps are online. She will also give a presentation at the NACD meeting in May. There will be an interactive online map for people to respond to share their number one street or intersection that they would like to have improved in this area. Planner Anderson stated that the Gibson Guitar facility is not in this rezoning area and 315 E. Frank was already rezoned to LW-1.

Planner Anderson explained reasons why M1 and RMU/Riverfront Overlay are zoning challenges for this area. She said they want to allow maximum flexibility. The area is unique with manufacturing, mixed use, and residential. They want to make sure the zoning allows for a flexible mix of residential and commercial uses. Planner Anderson explained which parcels they want to rezone to Live Work 1, Live Work 2, and mixed use. She said they are also trying to be more mindful to have conversations regarding what most needs to be improved with reference to streets, sidewalks, lighting, and trees. Planner Anderson said the feedback has been positive.

NFP Phase II

NFP has spent time going back over its data for creating the map and text amendments for Phase II. They looked at how easy or hard it was for small property owners to respond to the requirements. They have discussed these things at the NFP meetings, and a culmination of those discussions will be placed online.

Planner Anderson reviewed the timeline for the Phase II project. In May, the draft map, text amendments, and a by address table will be published at ImagineKalamazoo.com and at City Hall. The address table will identify what features qualified the parcels to be put in the NFP Overlay. The NFP Review Board will take public comments at their meeting and vote to move Phase II to the Planning Commission. In June, Ms. McCarthy will make a presentation to the Planning Commission, notice letters will be mailed, they will hold a Townhall and staff office hours, and they will take public comments at the June NFP meeting. The Planning Commission will hear the public hearing in July.

Commissioner Milliken said this project is a great example of where homework will be important for Planning Commissioners. New members can look back at previous presentations by Ms. McCarthy to understand more about the NFP and the Overlay. He appreciated notices going out sooner to give people time to ask their questions.

H. CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Regarding non-agenda items)

None.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

None.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Harrison would like to look at the book showing details of what running a meeting looks like as the chair.

Planner Anderson stated that if Planning Commissioners attend training or want to share information, this is a great time to share that. They can share information about trainings attended, lectures, articles, or books.

Commissioner Vyas asked for Pete to share his PowerPoint presentation.

Commissioner Phelps asked if any commissioners were from the Northside neighborhood since there would be a Northside rezoning coming. Commissioner Pitts indicated he is from the Northside.

Commissioner Chambers stated there would be an election on May 4 for KRESA. She encouraged people to go out and vote or turn in an absentee ballot. She also shared that the County ID program is up and running. Anyone who needs a County ID until they can get a State ID can schedule an appointment on the Kalamazoo County website under the Clerk's page.

Commissioner Pitts congratulated the officers and said he looks forward to working with the new Planning Commissioners.

Commissioner Milliken thanked everyone for their trust in him and he welcomed the new Planning Commissioners. He encouraged everyone to get their Covid shots.

Planners Anderson and Eldridge verified that the May meeting would be cancelled.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 8:20 pm.

Planning Commission

April 21, 2021

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. Anderson", is positioned above a solid blue horizontal line.

Christina Anderson,

City Planner

Community Planning & Economic Development