

WEST ST. PAUL PLANNING COMMISSION

Work Session

The West St. Paul Planning Commission work session meeting was called to order by Assistant Community Development Director Ben Boike on Tuesday June 18, 2019 at 5:34 p.m. at the Municipal Center, 1616 Humboldt Avenue, West St. Paul, Minnesota, 55118.

ROLL CALL Chair Kavanaugh and Commissioners McPhillips, Fransmeier, Strohmeier, Leuer, and Stevens.

Absent: Commissioner Green

Also Present: Asst. Community Development Director Boike, Community Development Coordinator Melissa Sonnek, and City Council Liaison John Justen

B2 Overlay District Asst. Director Boike kicked the work session off by summarizing the most recent changes to the overlay draft language and summarizing the comments and ideas from the Commissioners on potential restricted uses.

Asst. Director Boike then explained the next steps for the possible zoning code amendment, ultimately going before the City Council for formal review and approval. Asst. Director Boike explained that the City Attorney has also reviewed the draft language for the overlay district.

Asst. Director Boike showed a map defining the proposed boundaries of the overlay district. Chair Kavanaugh then asked if there was a downside to including the Doddway Shopping Center in the overlay district. Asst. Director Boike stated that there is not really a downside considering if that area were to redevelop, it would most likely require a Planned Development tag. One thing that Asst. Director Boike clarified that was a question during a previous work session discussion was that a Planned Development is allowed within an overlay district. The Commission agreed that the proposed boundaries were ok.

Circling back to elaborate on the permitted, conditional, and restricted uses, Asst. Director Boike expressed concern that after compiling all of the uses the Commissioners proposed to put on the restricted list would be too restrictive, especially since the B2 zoning district is already limited to neighborhood like uses. Commissioner Leuer prompted the idea of making some of the proposed restricted uses conditional uses. The Commission then proceeded to discuss which uses belonged in which categories and why. Commissioner Fransmeier stated that one of the reasons she chose to have some uses within the restricted section was if the use would require a significant amount of parking such as an appliance store or medical use. Similarly, Commissioner Strohmeier stated that he would like to add sporting goods store to the restricted use list, in order to avoid a large retailer of that type since it would not fit the area. Along the same idea, Commission Strohmeier expanded by saying that the size of the use is potentially a larger concern than the use itself. Commissioner Leuer stated that what uses and businesses come into the area is going to be dictated by the market and economics based on the lot size and parking availability. Council Liaison

Justen mentioned that while something larger like a library more than likely would not come to that area; however, having it under the restricted uses would be perceived negatively.

The Commission continued to run through the potential uses and discuss if they should be restricted or conditional. Commissioner Fransmeier stated that there are some uses she would be ok with as an accessory use, but not as the primary use within a building. For example, a tanning salon on its own does not provide charm as a part of a beauty salon it could. The Commission discussed appliance repair stores in more detail, agreeing that a smaller scale or local business would be more appealing; however, it might be unlikely, as the big-box retailers have driven many smaller companies out of business. Council Liaison Justen mentioned that if this area were to allow an appliance repair store or something similar would go against the recent efforts communities have put toward the fix-it yourself school of thought such as the “fix-it clinics”.

Asst. Director Boike then began discussing the setbacks for the overlay district, stating that previously the language called for a 15 foot front yard building setback, but has since been changed to 10 feet. Chair Kavanaugh added that the 10 feet is in addition to the right-of-way. Commissioner McPhillips stated that 10 feet does not leave a lot of room for snow storage in the winter. Asst. Director Boike mentioned that the current buildings have a zero foot setback line, so this would be providing more room for outdoor seating, landscaping, as well as snow storage in the wintertime.

Asst. Director Boike then moved on to parking as it is viewed from the front of the block, previously Asst. Director Boike had written that a maximum of 50 percent of the block frontage may be occupied by parking. However, after some discussion with the Commission, the draft language reads a maximum of 30 percent. Commissioner Leuer asked if that 30 percent included the drive aisle, Asst. Director Boike stated that it does include the drive aisle. Asst. Director Boike continued by saying that with the size of the currently existing lots, there would be very limited room. As such, in order to do anything significant, the interested party would most likely have to combine multiple lots. As an example, for a one-way drive aisle you would need a minimum of 15 feet, and then another 15 feet to allow for angled parking. Asst. Director Boike helped to better explain his point by showing some of the proposed measurements and requirements on the computer. Commission McPhillips stated that when Asst. Director Boike explained with the visual aid, it made sense and that he agreed with the concept. The rest of the Commission agreed.

Asst. Director Boike then moved on to projecting signs, explaining that he conducted some more research. Asst. Director Boike then referenced the examples provided in the work session packet, stating that the maximum size for this type of sign would be six square feet and shall not project more than four feet off of the building and the signs would not be allowed to be internally lit, but may have light shine onto them. Chair Kavanaugh asked if all of the signage requirements would apply to these as well. Asst. Director Boike confirmed.

The discussion then transitioned into the minimum requirements for on-street parking. Asst. Director Boike mentioned that some of the language was changed to be more specific per the recommendation of the City Attorney. Asst. Director Boike informed the Commission that Commissioner Fransmeier proposed the option of a tiered parking requirement system based on the square footage of the building. Commissioner Fransmeier elaborated by stating she came up with the tiered system based on the number of existing parking stalls available to the current businesses in the area, which worked out to be about 10 percent of the required minimum. Commissioner Leuer commented that he liked the idea, Commissioner Stevens agreed. Chair Kavanaugh stated that he believes that businesses will determine their parking needs, similar to what happened with FoodSmith; therefore, he would like to leave it up to the businesses. Commissioner Fransmeier asked the Commission as a whole where they are leaning. Commissioner McPhillips stated that he would like to see a public parking lot, this would help to bring more people to the businesses rather than just the same people that live in the neighborhood. Commissioners Leuer and Stevens stated they were in agreement with Commissioner Fransmeier. Commissioner Leuer stated that if for some reason the businesses are unable to provide the amount of parking required by the code, they can still come to the Planning Commission for a variance. Council Liaison Justen asked how much parking he would need for his business, as a point of example. Asst. Director Boike stated that based on the square footage of the building, Council Liaison Justen would need 25 parking stalls; however, with the new language it would allow a reduction down to 6 stalls. Council Liaison Justen stated that he wanted an example of the numbers because in the case that a business is selling a specialty item, they would not have 10 customers in the store at one time. Commissioner Fransmeier stated that the parking would be used by both customers and the employees. Asst. Director Boike stated that if the tiered system were something that the Commission is interested in, City Staff would have to test it against the various uses and see if it make sense. Asst. Director

Boike mentioned that it might be a good starting point to bring the discussion back to the City Council, and then asked if the Commission wanted to move the item forward to the City Council or if they would like to see the draft language one more time. Commission Fransmeier stated that she would like to see how the numbers test out against the parking. Asst. Director Boike mentioned that Staff could send out the numbers via email and if there is a consensus that it could go to Council, but if not, it could come back to the Commission. Commissioner Leuer stated that he was fine with it going to the City Council because the numbers will continue to be changed. Asst. Director Boike explained that the City Council could either reject the draft entirely, or they could say that they like the draft. Then it would come back to the Planning Commission to being the formal amendment process.

Banquet Halls

Asst. Director Boike then began the discussion on banquet halls, mentioning that this was a continuing discussion. The last discussion ended with the Commission wanting to know more about if other cities allow them and if so, how do they regulate them. Asst. Director Boike reviewed several other city codes and found very little information, but then posted the question on the League of Minnesota Cities' website and received a few responses which were then included in the work session packet. The general consensus provided by other cities, was that banquet halls are typically in the retail/commercial district and only as accessory uses to restaurants or golf courses, similar to Southview Country Club on the southeastern portion of West St. Paul.

Asst. Director Boike explained that those two options might be a good fit because they both provide parking and are in their own building. So the question becomes if the Commission wants to allow them just as accessory uses, or if the Commission wants to allow them as a primary use and if so, where. Commissioner Stevens stated that the industrial district might be a good option as well. Asst. Director Boike explained that Staff had initially recommended either the B3 – General Business District or in the Industrial District, either way it could be in a stand-alone building. Asst. Director Boike went on to explain that Staff recommends that it be a conditional use, which then allows the application to be formally reviewed by both Planning Commission and City Council.

Chair Kavanaugh asked if there would be concern about using up industrial land for this use. Asst. Director Boike stated that is always a concern when you open up any zoning district to a new use, particularly for the industrial area, as it is not a big area. Commissioner Fransmeier asked if someone had recently said something about the industrial district not being fully utilized. Asst. Director Boike mentioned that the district is pretty full. Comm. Dev. Coordinator Sonnek stated that when the Commission reviewed the DARTs project at 1631/1645 Marthaler Lane, that question was raised and it was mentioned that there are some vacant parcels and there are some businesses in the area looking to expand. Asst. Director Boike mentioned that the area had seen some additional redevelopment since that project.

Commissioner Leuer asked where could a hotel be located in West St. Paul, as the code would allow, as this was a topic in previous discussions. Asst. Director Boike stated that hotels are permitted in the B3 and B4 districts.

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Commissioner Fransmeier asked where they could expect to see a banquet hall if it were to be allowed as an accessory use. Asst. Director Boike stated that it could go into a restaurant, which are allowed in the B2, B3, and B4 districts. Chair Kavanaugh explained that if it were only allowed as an accessory use, that would eliminate the possibility of having larger spaces that would only be used two or three days out of the week. Commissioner Fransmeier stated that she liked the idea of a stand-alone building in either the B3 or the industrial district. Commissioner Leuer stated that he would like make all of them a conditional use. Asst. Director Boike stated that he thought that it would be a good option;

however, he was not sure if you could require a conditional use permit for an accessory use. Council Liaison Justen stated that if it is allowed in the industrial district, it is important to remember that it would be taking away land that could otherwise be used for industrial type jobs that would pay better than retail or a restaurant. Commissioner Fransmeier stated that a business owner looking to open up a banquet hall, they would not look for a larger industrial space as it is not as economical. Commissioner Stevens stated that she does see the need for it within the community, specifically for non-profits, and does not want to restrict it too much to the point where it is not feasible at all. Commissioner Fransmeier questioned if there needs to be a banquet hall in West St. Paul since a lot of the surrounding communities like Eagan or St. Paul already have space, considering that West St. Paul is only five square miles. Commissioner McPhillips added that a lot of the new apartment complexes that have been approved do have a common area or community room. Council Liaison Justen referenced a comment made earlier about lodging, stating that if an event center or banquet hall does come to town, a hotel could as well especially considering how close to West St. Paul is to downtown.

The Commission voiced a general consensus to make the banquet hall an accessory use as a conditional use permit within commercial areas like a golf course or restaurant.

ADJOURNMENT: The Tuesday June 18th, 2019, Planning Commission work session was adjourned at 6:44 p.m.

Melissa Sonnek

Community Development Coordinator