

Heather Hanover
Chair

James Eshelman
Vice-Chair

Commissioners

Scott Dzurka, *Mayor*
Eric Hufnagel, *Commissioner*
Mark Holden
Melvin Renfrow
Eric Harger
Brian Mills
Vacant



PLANNING COMMISSION

NOVEMBER 13, 2024
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the St. Johns Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Hanover at 5:32 p.m.

Members Present: Heather Hanover, Mark Holden, Brian Mills, James Eshelman, Scott Dzurka
Members Absent: Melvin Renfrow, Eric Hufnagel, Eric Harger
Staff Present: Chad Gamble, City Manager; Mindy Seavey, City Clerk; Chris Khorey, McKenna

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Holden to approve the agenda as presented.
YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills
NAY: None
Motion carried.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – OCTOBER 9, 2024 MEETING

Motion by Commissioner Mills seconded by Commissioner Holden to approve the minutes as presented.
YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills
NAY: None
Motion carried.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

Chairperson Hanover stated that since Chris Khorey from McKenna wasn't here yet they would start with some items besides the public hearings.

8. Approval of 2024 Planning Commission Meeting Dates

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Eshelman that the Planning Commission approve the 2025 Planning Commission Meeting dates as presented.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

7. OLD BUSINESS:

B. 450 Townsend – City Commission Preference for R-2 Zoning

Chairperson Hanover discussed agreeing with City Commissioner Hyzer and keeping this zoned R-1. She said the average price of homes in St. Johns are entry-level stock. She said the average price in Michigan was \$270,000. We need more of the upper level houses.

City Manager Gamble said the R-2 designation does not explicitly require R-2 housing; it allows single-family, duplex, triplex, quadplex and townhouses. He discussed the process of going for RFP and try to get housing in this area and we would be open to all of those types, we would send it to local developers and advertise for this on different developer websites to glean as many proposals as we could for this site.

Mayor Dzurka said there have been people that have expressed interest in this property. We opted to put together an RFP to take proposals from people. It is currently zoned R-1 and we had conversations between R-1 and R-3 of what would be appropriate. He said R-2 allows up to 4 units on a lot. We would consider zoning it R-2 to see what developers come back with. We want to see something happen with it; we don't want to sell and have someone sit on it. We don't have a city housing assessment, but we did look at the county housing assessment. Our hope was to look at some options out there.

Commissioner Mills asked why you would want to limit input from developers (R-1, R-2 or R-3)?

City Manager Gamble said developers are going to be hesitant to respond to the RFP if property isn't already zoned what they are proposing to do.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, arrived. He said R-3 would be for all options, but you would have to be comfortable with the top level.

Chairperson Hanover discussed their job as the planning commission; the subdivision doesn't want R-3. We approved a plethora of duplexes, but we haven't approved R-1.

Mayor Dzurka said there was hesitancy over R-3. There is a need for housing so there is a hesitancy in keeping it just R-1, and there is R-1 going on, but it is very cost-prohibitive right now. We are not against R-1, but we are willing to be a little more open.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said they are working on some data analysis and that's why we don't have further master planning on the agenda tonight.

City Manager Gamble discussed: trying to brainstorm an RFP process with everything aligned; then having a development agreement; a possible hybrid on R-1 housing and starter homes; dynamics and future development on land that the Catholic Church owns.

Commissioner Eshelman said our average income for homeowners was quite a bit lower than Dewitt. He said he keeps going back to the model they went to in Charleston, SC. He said he thinks this is the right way to go, look at townhomes and quads to drive affordability level down.

Mayor Dzurka said there is not a lot of turnover of our housing stock.

Commissioner Holden asked if it is possible for a developer to build a house under \$200,000?

City Manager Gamble said in doing an RFP, we will see what the market will drive on the property. R-2 allows for all the options we talked about.

Commissioner Mills said he is fine with R-2 as long as doesn't preclude the R-1. He said he would put in the RFP the city would incentivize for R-1.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, asked who is covering the cost for re-aligning Townsend Road.

City Manager Gamble said he would think it would be more of a city cost than a developer cost since the realigning is not driving the development. He discussed the alignment would make the area safer.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said under R-2 zoning it could accommodate townhouses and single-family homes. He said it would barely get you to 20 units. Is a developer going to be interested in such few homes?

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Corner Lots Zoning Amendment

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Eshelman to open the public hearing.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The public hearing was opened at 6:02 p.m.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, discussed the zoning amendment would clean up some inconsistencies in how corner lots are treated and how we deal with frontage. He said it would clearly define what the front is with the corner lot.

There were no public comments.

There were no commissioner comments.

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Eshelman to close the public hearing.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The public hearing was closed at 6:03 p.m.

B. Accessory Structures Zoning Amendment

Motion by Commissioner Mills seconded by Commissioner Eshelman to open the public hearing.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The public hearing was opened at 6:03 p.m.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, discussed this would change how we would measure height. He said it has caused issues even though our current language is very common. He said other changes include clarifying the way setbacks work, cleaning up the accessory structure section. We are trying to make this as easy as possible.

There were no public comments.

Commissioner Mills asked if the permitting of an accessory building would trigger the sidewalk ordinance.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said for residential no. In some cases, for a commercial or mixed-use lot, but only for a large accessory structure.

Commissioner Mills said there is a question mark on non-residential, section M.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, said right now we have a 16' height limit. This language says it can't exceed the height of the principal building. He said the suggestion was to say it only applies in non-residential districts.

Mayor Dzurka said it would still allow for commercial to be higher than 16'?

Mr. Khorey said not higher than the principal building.

Mayor Dzurka asked if there is a need for an accessory to be higher than the principal building in commercial and industrial.

Mr. Khorey said this section needs some thought and discussed the 35' maximum in non-residential.

Mayor Dzurka said they can always come back for a variance on that.

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Holden to close the public hearing.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The public hearing was closed at 6:14 p.m.

C.Landscaping Zoning Amendment

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Eshelman to open the public hearing.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The public hearing was opened at 6:14 p.m.

Chris Khorey, McKenna, discussed this would allow the planning commission to waive landscape and it also would add a chart. He said the current ordinance is extremely overbroad and this would add common sense to when those things are required. He said we have our suggested, but not required, planting materials.

There were no public comments.

There were no commissioner comments.

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Holden to close the public hearing.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None
Motion carried.

The public hearing was closed at 6:18 p.m.

6. NEW BUSINESS:

7. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Zoning Amendments – Recommendation to City Commission

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Eshelman that the Planning Commission forward the corner lot zoning amendments as presented to city commission.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Mills that the Planning Commission forward to the city commission the accessory structures zoning amendments with the change of removing the question mark under section M.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

Motion by Commissioner Dzurka seconded by Commissioner Holden that the Planning Commission forward to the city commission the landscaping zoning amendment as presented.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

B. 450 Townsend – City Commission Preference for R-2 Zoning (continued)

Commissioner Mills asked what happens next with this.

City Manager Gamble discussed if the planning commission would be comfortable with re-zoning to R-2 since it is currently zoned R-1.

Mr. Khorey said we need a public hearing for that and would recommend we re-zone the whole parcel. The RFP could ask for a mixed type of development, and it would then have to be parceled out.

There was a discussion of the RFP process.

9. COMMITTEE SITE PLAN APPROVALS - NONE:

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Mills said Chris Khorey was named one of the top individuals (40 Under 40 2024) in Crain's of Grand Rapids. Kudos to you Chris.

City Manager Gamble said at the last commission meeting they approved of the budget schedule. He said there are a couple of meetings you might be interested in: November 25th at 4 p.m. is the first strategic planning meeting; December 9th at 4:30 p.m. is the second strategic planning meeting; our joint meeting is on February 24th at 4:00 p.m.

Chairperson Hanover asked how many members we are down on this committee.

Clerk Seavey said one.

City Manager Gamble said we have another member that rarely attends.

Chairperson Hanover said things are being said on Facebook that the city has blocked Meijer, Cabela's and Culver's from coming to St. Johns and discussed there weren't any proposals to the city for this.

There was a discussion about any land large enough for Cabela's and Meijer would not be within the city limits.

Mayor Dzurka said he addressed those rumors with the city manager today.

Mr. Khorey said Meijer did have land (in the township), but they decided not to build.

Commissioner Mills said on the agenda it would be great at the end to have a standing item to get feedback on what the city commission said on their (planning commission) recommendations and a status report.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Holden seconded by Commissioner Mills that the Planning Commission adjourn the meeting.

YEA: Hanover, Holden, Dzurka, Eshelman, Mills

NAY: None

Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:38 p.m.