PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
June 26, 2013
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER
7:30 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: R Johnson, B. Lenart, G. Clark, M. Bullard, R. Murphy, P. Hollifield, D. Lautenbach

Absent: C. Zuellig (excused) K. Weger (excused)

Staff: Teresa Gillotti, Community Development Director
Bonnie Wessler, Planner I
Nan Schuette, Executive Secretary

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – March 20, 2013 and April 17, 2013

Commissioner Lenart moved to approve the minutes of March 20, 2013 (Support: G. Clark) and the motion carried unanimously. Commissioner Lautenbach moved to approve the minutes of April 17, 2013 (Support: B. Bullard) the motion carried unanimously.

IV. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

None

V. PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

1. Alley Vacation

Ms. Wessler, Planner I, presented her staff report stating that this is a request for an alley vacation located at the southern portion of the westernmost north-south alley between Maple, Prospect, East Cross and North River. The property owners to the north use the north part of

the alley for access to parking, ingress and egress. The property commonly known as the Thompson Block and the vacant lot at 107 E. Cross is currently separated by the alleyway and the applicant intents to combine these lots to further redevelop the Thompson Block.

The alley has been closed since 1984 by a barrier placed in the center of the alleyway, with rights of access reserved to the City to maintain, repair and construct any necessary utilities. The property owners to the north use the north part of the alley for access to parking, ingress and egress. Ms. Wessler reviewed the standards adding that since the alley is currently closed, some standards do not apply, and referred to these particular standards. Fire access will also be maintained, which is part of any site plan. She also added that a utility easement will be maintained if approved. Staff is recommending approval of the application.

Ms. Gillotti, Director of Economic Development added that the vacation is part of a plan for the redevelopment of the Thompson Block that would include the parcel to the east, which would likely become the parking area to help support the businesses and expected residential units when that building is redeveloped.

Commissioner Lenart moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: D. Lautenbach) and the motion carried unanimously.

Stewart Beal, Owner of the Thompson Block – stated that this is a critical piece of the redevelopment plans since he has already purchased the property located at 107 E. Cross and would like to combine the properties In order to do a historic Planned Unit Development, if the alley is not vacated, he would be unable to do this. By vacating the alley, it would create 22 parking spaces overcoming parking issues and alleviate the need for a fee in lieu of parking, as well as using parking in Depottown. Chairman Johnson asked Ms. Gillotti if there would be any zoning issues and she responded that in using the PUD, it would basically be rezoning the Thompson Building, the alley portion and 107 E. Cross, using the historic PUD standard, which states that ½ acre of property is required and the intent of which is to restore historic property, and by doing this it would qualify for a PUD.

Michael Gelletly, 414 N. River – stated that he had two concerns – the alley from Maple and Cross is a higher elevation and might need a swale and if the property at 107 E. Cross becomes parking, that the alley is used for residents directly behind their property and not for a shortcut for those parking in the lot.

Irm Gelletly - she is the other owner next door and wonders if the parking lot would have to be screened and Chairman Johnson stated that it would be treated the same as all site plans with some kind of screening.

Commissioner Clark moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: P. Holifield) and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Lautenbach moved that the Planning Commission approve vacation of the alley immediately abutting 400 N. River and 107 E. Cross with the following findings and conditions:

Findings:

The southern portion does not serve a vital function for the neighborhood, and its vacation will not negatively affect the health, safety, welfare, or traffic/freight patterns of the neighborhood.

Conditions:

1. The City shall retain and reserve within the entire former right-of-way an easement for installation and maintenance of utilities.
2. No vehicular connection between the vacated alley and the remaining north alley shall be permitted, to preserve the existing traffic patterns on Maple Street.

The motion was supported by Commissioner Murphy. A roll call vote was taken and carried unanimously.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Water Street Update

   Ms. Gillotti gave a brief update on the Family Dollar stating that the city has a development agreement so everything is starting to move forward. Family Dollar has met the guidelines and done the survey work required as well as the Phase I environmental so the project is proceeding.

2. Master Plan Agreement and Process Update

   Ms. Gillotti gave an update on Shape Ypsilanti and the various focus groups that had been held. She added that a draft will be forthcoming to the Steering Committee on June 28th and released to the public on July 16th. She invited all members to attend the council meeting on July 16th for a formal presentation of the entire draft. Commissioner Clark asked if staff had a percentage of the population of the city who attended the various focus groups and Ms. Gillotti provided that tracking information. Commissioner Clark also had questions on the cost of the contract, which Ms. Gillotti provided.

3. Recreation Master Plan Update

   Ms. Wessler stated the draft is almost complete and should be released for public comment by the Recreation Commission at their July 11th meeting, to which everyone is invited. It will be released to the public for 30 days, after which time, it will come back for any changes prior to recommendation by City Council.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. 1510 Washtenaw

Staff report was presented by Ms. Wessler. She stated that the applicant is requesting site plan approval for the property located at the northwest corner of Mansfield and Washtenaw. The parcel is approximately 0.4 acres in size, with a 6,600 sq. foot one tenant building fronting on to Washtenaw. A narrow paved area surrounds the building to the north and west and the building is built to the west property line. The building was constructed in 1962 for Richardson's Pharmacy and an expansion almost doubling the size of the pharmacy was constructed in 1986. A variance was granted at that time to permit parking space dimensions of 10' x 19'. In recent years, it has been a dollar store and a discount grocer. The applicant is proposing four separate uses making it less non-conforming than previously and also added that the proposed alterations will not alter the footprint of the building or parking. The parking is constrained; there are currently 22 parking spaces located in the front of the building and while it requires 30, a waiver is required and recommended by staff to enable use of the site. It also requires a lot of landscaping waivers. There are no sidewalks to the east or west and no ramps to cross Mansfield so there are a number of options, which she reviewed.

The property is zoned B1 Neighborhood Business, which allows a variety of retail, service and office uses but does limit the size of each use to 3,000 sq. ft. and allows a total of 5,000 sq. ft for multi-tenant developments. The Planning Commission is authorized to permit an additional 1,000 sq. ft of building size for project consistent with the character and intent of the section. By changing from one 6,600 sq. ft use to four 1,500-1600 sq. ft uses, this represents a decrease in the non-conformity, but does require that Planning Commission permit a multi-tenant development 200 sq. ft. in excess of the current standard.

Staff is recommending approval although there are quite a few challenges.

A number of issues were discussed by board members, i.e. utility pole on the corner of Mansfield, ramps across Washtenaw, landscaping, signage and sidewalks. Questions were also asked of the applicant regarding all of these issues and his intent to address all of the issues.

Commissioner Murphy moved that the Planning Commission approve the site plan for 1510 Washtenaw with the following findings, waivers and conditions:

Findings:

1. The application substantially complies with the requirements of §122-127.
2. The use of four 1,500-1,600 square foot uses, although in excess of current requirements found in §122-351, is less nonconforming than the previous 6,600 square foot single use under 122-206(b)(2). The appurtenant parking is likewise found to be less nonconforming.

Waivers:

1. To accept the proposed amount of site landscaping, with the finding that the special characteristics of the site created conditions so that strict application cannot be applied.

2. To accept proposed Greenbelt landscaping, with the finding that the special characteristics of the site created conditions so that strict application cannot be applied.
3. To accept proposed maintenance, with the finding that the benefit intended to be secured by §122-712 will exist with less than the required landscaping or screening.
4. To accept parking space depths of 18 feet.

Conditions:

1. Relocate bike rack adjacent to pole sign to landscaped area near southeast entry
2. Applicant to submit signage plan or to update site plan with signage, subject to administrative approval.
3. A permit from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) may be required for work within the Washtenaw Avenue right-of-way.
4. Move southern curb line of parking area north to remove parking area from the Washtenaw Avenue Right-of-Way and provide screening between parking and right of way.
5. Provide concrete bus pad in Washtenaw Avenue ROW to AAATA specifications.
6. Provide for sidewalk on site, without crossing of Mansfield
7. Provide public access and maintenance easement for sidewalk at building frontage, to allow for potential connections to westerly properties.

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Non-motorized Committee - copies of the May 2nd and June 6th reports were included in packets.

VII. FUTURE BUSINESS DISCUSSION/UPDATES

Thompson Block PUD – possibly August

Chairman Johnson noted that Commissioner Lautenbach had resigned from the board and thanked him for his service to the city and his contribution to the board. Commissioner Lautenbach asked that it be noted for the record that all of the board members attending this meeting had facial hair of some kind. No comments were made.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Since there was no further business, Commissioner Clark moved to adjourn the meeting (Support: D. Lautenbach) and the motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.