PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
April 15, 2015
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER
6:30 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: R. Johnson**,** C. Zuellig, A. Bedogne, P. Hollifield, N. Sandberg, H. Jugenitz, S. Straley

Staff: Bonnie Wessler, Acting Planner II
Nan Schuette, Executive Secretary
Gino Piccirilli, Planning Intern

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 18, 2015

Commissioner Sandberg moved to approve the minutes of March 18, 2015 with correction as noted under V-1 (Support: P. Hollifield) and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Ralph Lange, 206 N. Huron, City Manager, introduced the new Economic Development Director, Beth Ernat, who will be head of both Planning and Building Departments.

Mr. Lange applauded all the work by the Planning Commission on the Herman & Kittle project. Staff is moving quickly to finalize a location for the Recreation Center. The grid was amended but there is still some more "tweaks" to come. However, staff will try to keep to the guidelines as much as possible. The economics of the city is dependent on the outcome of the Water Street projects. Family Dollar is looking good and we expect more activity.

V. PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

1. EMU Class Project

Ben Tellerico, part-time EMU Professor. This term his class identified four areas for projects, which included a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of each area, conducting an inventory study, interviewing residents, determining potential improvements and costs. Each group will do a ten minute presentation of their particular location. Mr. Tellerico added that they would leave some time at the end of each presentation for comments or questions by board members.

Brad Peters and Matt McKernan, chose the south end of the Historic South Side Neighborhood between Buffalo and Harriet and Hamilton to Huron. They walked the area many times throughout the semester, attending neighborhood meetings, and have come up with a plan for the area, looking at current and future land use.

There's a noted difference between the north and south ends of the neighborhood and talking with residents, there is a feeling of disconnect among the residents. There is a newly designated neighborhood corridor along Harriet. They did a preliminary housing analysis from the sidewalk – there is an impression that the neighborhood is run down but they thought the majority of houses are in good condition with a variety of setbacks and little landscaping. One of the houses they saw that was in poor condition dated back to the mid-1800's – there are 4 churches in the area dating back to the 19th century. The area was first settled by African-Americans so was quite progressive for the time.

One of the strengths is the proximity to downtown – they listed some of the weaknesses - which are that the neighborhood lacks an identity of its own, no good options for shopping and there is an increase in rentals, bordered by fast one way streets. They provided some slides on future land uses, which were innovative. The project included 7 goals for the project; however, they boiled it down to three: 1) address the connectivity of the community, 2) create an identity, and 3) tie to the northern half of the neighborhood.

They produced their version of the road diet, which is already under discussion with the City. They agree with the Shape Ypsi Plan that Hamilton should be two-way.

Their final "piece de resistance" would be a park at the corner of Buffalo and Washington, which is a vacant property –it is a prime location for a park; not a playground park, since most residents are older, but creating a park that facilitates historic education, particularly highlighting some noteworthy former residents of the community. It would have an activity shelter and historic markers. Generous estimate to create this park would be $103,000.

Commissioner Zuellig asked the number of vacant properties. Chairman Johnson liked the way they addressed separation looking at the area from a different point of view.

Abigail Jaske (HDC Intern) and Jenna Levin (former intern) – chose the Miles Street Neighborhood located on the east side of the city for their presentation, which is on the border of Ypsilanti Township. This has recently been rezoned from R2 to R1.

Ms. Levin listed a number of facts about the area, determining the boundaries. She printed out copies of their presentation for all of the board members because of the time limitations. They conducted a neighborhood inventory and survey, interviewed residents about different suggestions for the neighborhood. They did a SWOT analysis determining the strengths, weaknesses as well as opportunities of the area analyzing those facts to determine four goals. Strengths include: Accessible from Michigan Ave, close proximity to Prospect Park, close to Historic District. Weaknesses include no bike paths, pedestrian amenities are lacking, lack of public transportation. First is to improve Miles Street circulation as a complete street, improve housing conditions and blight removal, provide a zoning analysis, and Prospect Park improvements, which was included in the boundaries.

They defined complete streets. They are looking to narrow the travel lanes on Miles, increase sidewalk width, wayfinding signs, etc. Currently, there are many complaints on speeding, confusing lane divisions, no parking lane lines, no bike lanes, few streetlights, etc. On the housing, they are primarily 1 story cottages – 53 in good condition, 27 fair and 7 poor, with one home dating to mid-1800's. There are 4 churches in the area.

Goals were listed: Urban Design Improvements, Proposed Circulation, Community Services and Facilities Changes and Rezoning (determine if R1 housing is appropriate for the neighborhood), install fountain in park as well as picnic tables and benches, to help spruce it up.

Chairman Johnson stated they had some very progressive ideas. Commissioner Jugenitz was pleased that bike lanes were considered.

Emily Davison and Anthony Bass – their presentation was based on the LeForge Area. They gave a quick overview noting that they had studied the boundaries, road diet and came up with goals, a budget and a timeline. They noted that Penn Park and residential complexes are the majority of the neighborhood. Mr. Bass noted that the Master Plan is zoned as a corridor – it was their thought that the next time the Master Plan is being updated that it not be considered a corridor, since it is their opinion that a corridor is an area where you go through and not stay – 36% of the people that live there are students.

Strengths include Huron River Watershed adjacent to the Paper Mill. Weaknesses include lack of walkability, crime, lack of light and bathrooms in park area.

Their goals would include improve park lighting, needs sidewalks, update park cleaning up blight, add playground equipment, bike lanes, restoration or improvements of paper mill.

Commissioner Zuellig appreciated the presentation – agrees that there are things that could be done to improve the area. Chairperson Johnson added that the term "corridor" in the Master Plan refers more to what he would consider a "transition" area. Commissioner Bedogne discussed the walkability issues further with regard to installation of sidewalks.

Huaitao Liu and Hailun Wong – their presentation was based on the Warner neighborhood.

They used the SWOT analysis according to the Master Plan – most houses are single family homes built from 1901-1948, most of which are owner occupied. Most of them are two stories, single family, approximately 2500 sq. ft. near Recreation Park. Single family homes will hold their value because of proximity to the park.

One of the strengths of the neighborhood is that they are located in a quiet area, within reach of the Recreation Park, good for walking dogs. Weaknesses are lack of on street parking, and the need to improve walkability and the neighborhood.

Ben Tellerico added that he has been working through Ms. Wessler. The teams will complete their final report next week and he will forward this report Bonnie to give to the board.

2. Special Use Permit

Ms. Wessler stated that the Special Use Permit would be presented by our intern Gino Piccarilli. Mr. Piccarilli stated that this is a request by Strong Housing located on Towner Street. The buildings are an existing use, legal non-conforming because it does not have a special use permit at this time.

The applicant is to rehabilitate an existing multifamily housing site with a total of twenty-six units. Currently, the 16 unit building is a legal non-conforming use. The building on the East of the site will be labeled as the East building; while the buildings on the West will be referred to as the "West buildings". The West site has three buildings and a small courtyard in the middle. The East site has a "U" shaped building with a straight sidewalk that branches off into different apartment entrances.

Staff recommends approval of the special use permit with the various conditions.

Commissioner Johnson asked about wheel stops, which was addressed. Commissioner Sandberg asked about bike parking, which will be covered by the applicant and Commissioner Zuellig asked for clarification of parking and the chain link fence, which Ms. Wessler responded will also be covered by the applicant in his presentation.

Commissioner Zuellig moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: H. Jugenitz) and the motion carried unanimously.

Zach Fosler, Executive Director of the Housing Commission – was in attendance to present this request accompanied by Jim Pappas, Architect, Ferndale, Michigan. Mr. Pappas has also worked on other projects through-out the City, i.e. Hamilton Crossing.

Mr. Pappas highlighted the dumpster enclosure, added bike parking, handicapped spaces and loading zone for handicapped. He listed the façade improvements, proposed landscape plan and photometric plan, which is also included.

The board members had a number of questions on fencing, bike racks, etc. which were covered in detail. Commissioner Bedogne asked for clarification on the dumpster being located off-site, what are the legal ramifications and contingency plan? Ms. Wessler agreed that this could be an issue and they would have to revise the site plan and bring back to the board. The back-up plan would be that they apply for vacation of that alley and then approach the neighbor to the west to have it deeded.

Commissioner Zuellig moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: N. Sandberg) and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Zuellig moved that the Planning Commission approve the Special Use Permit expansion for the Strong Housing project at 711-741 Towner with the following findings and conditions:

Findings: The application is substantially in compliance with Sec 122-165(b).

Conditions: Special Use approval shall be subject to approval of sketch plan.
The motion was supported by Commissioner Sandberg. A roll call vote was taken carried unanimously.

Commissioner Zuellig moved that the Planning Commission approves the Site Plan per the drawing submitted on April 15, 2015 711-741 Towner with the following findings and conditions:

Findings:

1. The application substantially complies with Sec 122-127.

Conditions:

1. That the 4" chain link fence in front of the east building be removed.

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

3. Zoning Amendment: Administrative Hearings Bureau

Ms. Wessler stated this is a Zoning Ordinance amendment for violations and penalties. Article I of the zoning ordinance addresses the penalties for violations of the zoning ordinance. The ordinance adopted in December contained language used prior to the 2010 establishment of the Administrative Hearings Bureau. This update corrects that reversion.

Commissioner Bedogne moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: P. Hollifield) and the motion carried unanimously.

Since there were no comments, Commissioner Hollifield moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: A. Bedogne) and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Bedogne moved to recommend to City Council for further action the amendment to Sec 122-8 presented at the April 15, 2015 by staff (support: H. Jugenitz). A roll call vote was taken and carried unanimously.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Special Use Permit Revocation

A memo was included in the packet which lays out our current process giving the board an opportunity to be prepared to discuss this at next month's meeting.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Wessler distributed copies of the matrixes taken directly from the Master Plan. We have made good progress on the Master Plan but some things will be on-going for some time. We processed 18 applications, continuing on some major initiatives, i.e. Capital Improvement Plan. There will be more zoning amendments in June. Staff has an intern working on the non-motorized plan. Some discussion was held on goals and it was agreed to make all necessary changes and bring back to the May meeting.

VIII. FUTURE BUSINESS DISCUSSION/UPDATES

1. 130 N. Normal
2. Revocation of 52 Ecorse
3. Commissioner Sandberg informed the board that she will be resigning from the board at the end of June due to potential changes in employment.
4. Commissioner Bedogne has been working with students inventorying street furniture in the City of Ypsilanti, with a kick-off meeting on Monday, April 27th in Riverside Park. He gave a brief outline of the plan using a GIS map. Commissioner Zuellig recommended that cultural art be considered. Commissioner Bedogne added that he hoped to include historic markers.

IX. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Non-Motorized Committee: The meeting minutes for March were included as well as the 2014 Non-Motorized Annual Report. Chairman Johnson thanked Bob Krzewinski for all his hard work on this committee +on behalf of the City.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Since there was no further business, Commissioner Hollifield moved to adjourn the meeting (Support: S. Straley). The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.