

**REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
VADNAIS HEIGHTS PLANNING COMMISSION
JANUARY 24, 2023**

OPEN MEETING AND WELCOME

Chairperson Jokinen called the Regular Meeting of the Vadnais Heights Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on January 24, 2023.

ROLL CALL

Martin Jokinen, Chairperson	Present
Curt Cooper, Vice Chairperson	Absent
Terri Dresen	Present (arrived at 7:17 p.m.)
Steve Jorissen	Present
Jerry Moynagh	Present
Adam Schreiber	Present
Joseph Stumph	Present
VACANT, First Alternate	
VACANT, Second Alternate	

Also present: Council Liaison Kelly Jozwowski; Nolan Wall, Planning/Community Development Director; Jeff Melcoch, Cable Producer.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion by Commissioner Moynagh, seconded by Commissioner Jorissen, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the January 24, 2023, Regular Meeting Agenda as presented.”

Ayes – 6

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion by Commissioner Moynagh, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve minutes of the October 25, 2022, Regular Meeting as presented.”

Ayes – 5

Nays – 0

Abstain – 1 (Stumph)

The motion carried.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Chairperson Jokinen opened the floor to the public at 7:07 p.m. for questions and comments on items not on the agenda.

As no one wished to address the Commission, Chairperson Jokinen closed the meeting to the public at 7:07 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Planning Case 22-018 – City of Vadnais Heights – City Code Amendments.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the City is proposing amendments to City Code Chapters 2 and 38, respectively, concerning roles and procedures for the Board of Appeals and Adjustments contained in DRAFT Ordinance 763. Wall stated that the proposed changes are basically housekeeping tasks associated with trying to clean up and clarify some of the procedures and defined roles for this very specific section of the Code. He reviewed the proposed changes and stated that the Planning Commission will continue to serve as the Board of Appeals and Adjustments. He stated that the proposal does give the Planning Commission authority to make decisions regarding appeals, which is different than all other actions of the Planning Commission. He added that he couldn't find any actions from this group having taken place in recent history. He stated the ordinance amendment removes duplicative/conflicting authority of Council to hear zoning appeals, and creates new procedures for filing, noticing, and considering appeals to the Board. These changes were discussed with the City Council at their workshop on January 3. After discussions at the workshop, it was decided to propose that actions by the Planning Commission acting as the Board of Appeals and Adjustments would be the final decision by the City, subject only to judicial review.

Chairperson Jokinen opened the meeting to the public at 7:17 p.m.

As no one wished to address the Commission, Chairperson Jokinen closed the meeting to the public at 7:17 p.m.

Upon motion by Commissioner Dresen, seconded by Commissioner Stumph, it was "RESOLVED to recommend approval of Planning Case 22-018 and DRAFT Ordinance 763 for the proposed amendments to City Code Chapters 2 and 38 as presented.

Ayes – 6 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

A. County Road E Corridor Action Plan Update

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared a presentation on the County Road E Corridor Action Plan that was presented to the City Council at their last meeting.

He discussed goals and objectives of the plan and highlighted five opportunity sites, two of which are located in Vadnais Heights. He stated that the process was unique in that it asked for involvement of the public in discussions prior to any projects being on the table for approval. He added that the corridor is very diverse in transportation functions, land uses, and the fact that it is in three different cities, also plays a part in the unique nature of this roadway.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said that a series of workshops were held in September with various stakeholders, and the planning process went by very fast. A developer panel and a final meeting were held in October where members of the public influenced what the County Road E Corridor Action Plan document said and reinforced what was heard at the workshops. He stated that the project team was large and represented intergovernmental cooperation as many were interested in this planning process. He also indicated that a Corridor Advisory Group made up of business owners, residents, and other stakeholders in the area participated in the process as well. There were a number of members that served on the Corridor Development Initiative Team that served as the consultant. Ramsey County covered half of the costs associated with this planning process, with the remaining half being split by White Bear Lake, Gem Lake, and Vadnais Heights.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall discussed the themes and block exercises that came about as a result of the meetings. He stated that the block exercises were very interesting and seemed to be a useful exercise which brought a lot of realism and understanding to the process. He reviewed the developer plan highlights and the action plan recommendations. Near-term strategies and long-term strategies were also discussed, including forming a coalition with the three cities involved to continue discussions into the future. Chair Jokinen asked if Ramsey County could be included in the coalition since they control County Road E. Wall responded absolutely, since Ramsey County is a valuable participant with much information on traffic patterns in the area. He stated that the planning process is done, with the cities now being responsible for actions moving forward.

Commissioner Stumph inquired about the speed limit on Highway 61 and asked if the limit would be reduced as density increased. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the speed limit is currently 55 MPH and likely would not decrease as the goal is to carry traffic. He stated that Highway 61 is a US highway and he didn't think it would ever be treated as a boulevard or parkway.

Commissioner Moynagh said he was really impressed by the process and the execution of a plan. He further stated that the plan doesn't necessarily mean that's what the area will look like, but in order for this to work, there needs to be demand. He mentioned that we have successful examples of businesses in that area and some businesses that no longer exist. He said it's a signal to residents that we need to support local businesses. He also mentioned that developing is a risky business. He stated that prior to appearing before the Planning Commission or City Council, businesses spend a lot of money preparing plans, and he said it is painful if that plan is not accepted. This process gives developers an idea of what may be acceptable in the corridor.

Commissioner Dresen said as someone who was a part of the team who did this work, it was very interesting to approach land use planning in such a rapid manner and to watch the

communities come together, and it was very interesting to listen to the people who attended the sessions. She added one of the biggest vocal points that she agreed with was transportation and the need to find a sustainable transportation system that will provide for economic growth, but also address the climate changes. She said she was impressed with the level of passion and compassion that was at the table. She asked about next steps. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said building off the data collected as part of this process, there needs to be some consistent work with the other cities moving forward; however, he doesn't know what that work is yet. He said all three cities have their own work to do. Ideally, he'd like to build off the momentum we have by concentrating on what we can control in the northeast quadrant, getting more information on market trends and some of the constraints on those sites. He added, ultimately, what's good for Vadnais Heights is also good for Gem Lake and White Bear Lake, and vice versa. He would like to keep the momentum of this group going by sharing information. He felt giving some sort of identity to County Road E would be a benefit, thoughtful branding of the area and its businesses, plus promoting the businesses should be pursued. He stated that Vadnais Heights will ensure that our portion of County Road E will continue to have high quality investment. Commissioner Dresen agreed, stressing the importance of focusing on the future as well. Planning/Community Development Director Wall thanked everyone who participated.

Commissioner Schreiber commented on the importance of creating a unique identity with a walkable/bikeable feel of community.

Chair Jokinen asked if next steps would include a request for proposal process. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said most likely as this was part of a grant process and would include obtaining site and soil information, market studies, etc. He said the more information we can provide the development community will be best so the City can share what we'd like to see instead of reacting to proposals.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Elect Chairperson

Planning/Community Development Director Wall explained the need to elect officers for 2023. He noted Chair Jokinen was not eligible to serve as Chair this cycle due to a two year limit in our Code. Past practice has been for the Vice Chair to assume the Chair role. He noted Commissioner Cooper was willing to serve if that was the Commission's desire.

Upon motion by Commissioner Moynagh, seconded by Commissioner Dresen, it was

“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioner Cooper as Chairperson for 2023.”

Ayes – 6

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

B. Elect Vice Chairperson

Commissioner Dresen thanked Commissioner Moynagh for his outstanding work on the Planning Commission and she wished to nominate him as vice-chair if he was willing. He indicated a willingness.

Commissioner Schreiber thanked Commissioner Moynagh for his involvement in City operations and organizations outside the Planning Commission which has proven to be very valuable.

Upon motion by Commissioner Dresen, seconded by Commissioner Schreiber, it was

“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioner Moynagh as Vice Chairperson for 2023.”

Ayes – 5 Nays – 0 Abstain – 1 (Moynagh)

The motion carried.

C. Appoint Economic Development Authority Representative and Alternate

Commissioner Schreiber suggested Commissioner Stumph be considered for the full alternate position. Commissioner Moynagh agreed, stating the alternate should be more involved as well.

Upon motion by Chairperson Jokinen, seconded by Commissioner Dresen, it was

“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioners Stumph and Schreiber as Economic Development Authority Representative and Alternate for 2023.”

Ayes – 6 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

D. Accept Annual Expense Allowance

Upon motion by Commissioner Jorissen, seconded by Commissioner Stumph, it was

“RESOLVED, to accept the 2023 expense allowance as presented.”

Ayes – 6 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

E. Approve 2023 Meeting Calendar

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared the 2023 meeting calendar then noted the December meeting may be rescheduled depending on whether applications are submitted.

Commissioner Jorissen noted the calendar stated that City offices were closed on December 26. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the meeting, if held, would be on December 27.

Chair Jokinen asked if more meetings had been cancelled last year than before. Planning/Community Development Director Wall confirmed they had a number of cancelled meetings in 2022 due in part to the current market and development cycle as well as completing many code amendments and housekeeping items in prior years.

Upon motion by Commissioner Dresen, seconded by Commissioner Moynagh, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the 2023 meeting calendar as presented.”

Ayes – 6

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

REPORTS

A. Council Liaison

Council Liaison Kelly Jozwowski shared the Council interviewed potential Planning Commission members.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall explained the Commission had two open positions due to Commissioner Doll Kanne being elected to Council and Commissioner Caillier choosing not to be reappointed. He said the Council interviewed applicants who have accepted informally and will be appointed at the next Council meeting.

Commissioner Jorissen asked if the City had more applications than vacancies. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the Commission had two applicants for two open seats but noted the Commission process had been amended to accept applications for all Commissions then Council conducted interviews instead of liaisons and staff which provided a more transparent and deliberate process and worked well. He added the City was currently recruiting for youth representatives for all Commissions, stating while they would not be voting members, the intent is to provide input from this demographic to help better decision making in the end.

B. Planning Commissioners

None.

C. Staff – 2022 Community Development Report

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared the 2022 Community Development Report with the Commission. He outlined the department responsibilities, budget, and number of building safety permits issued and inspections performed, valuation

history, and current projects underway. He reviewed new commercial building permits and stated 21 new single-family homes were constructed in 2022. He reviewed completed projects, the number of zoning permits issued, planning applications processed then highlighted code amendments processed and major site plan reviews conducted. Planning/Community Development Director Wall reviewed economic development and housing work activities that included a new TIF district for the Elevage project and the sale of the Garceau corner site, then outlined development resources and tools provided to assist in the development process, including Municode online City/Zoning Code database and OpenGov permitting.

Commissioner Moynagh said staff does a great job with little resources then shared the ease with which to file building permits and complimented staff for their great assistance.

Commissioner Schreiber said there seems to be some contention with the amount of code enforcement conducted and asked for further clarification. Planning/Community Development Director Wall outlined the City's policy to be reactive and rely on complaints then respond. He said staff improved the inspection process through assistance with full-time fire department staff and said they were trying other ways to address code enforcement issues such as home improvement loan programs but said other factors exist such as funding constraints and the cost of new homes. He said while there was a place for proactive code enforcement to address issues before they become larger problems it has to be balanced against current resources, adding sometimes other issues are involved such as social issues and the need for legal assistance. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the Fire Department does a great job focusing on commercial concerns such as required life safety issues and fire safety. However, the residential has been more reactive and can be very difficult to enforce. He stated there is room for improvement if we had the resources to do it.

Commissioner Schreiber thanked staff for a great year.

NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Commission meeting will be held on February 28, 2023.

ADJOURN MEETING

Upon motion by Commissioner Jorissen, seconded by Commissioner Moynagh meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Sorensen
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.