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**REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
VADNAIS HEIGHTS PLANNING COMMISSION
MARCH 24, 2020**

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OPEN MEETING AND WELCOME

Vice Chairperson Martin Jokinen called the Regular Meeting of the Vadnais Heights Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on March 24, 2020.

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ROLL CALL

Evan Cordes, Chairperson	Absent
Linda Bigelbach	Absent
Edward Caillier	Present
Brian Carnes	Present
Curt Cooper	Present
Martin Jokinen, Vice Chairperson	Present
Joseph Stumph	Absent
Jerry Moynagh, First Alternate	Absent
Terri Dresen, Second Alternate	Absent

Also present: Kevin Watson, City Administrator; Nolan Wall, Planning/Community Development Director; Jeff Melcoch, Cable Producer.

Commissioner Carnes noted several members were absent due to social distancing and the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for only a quorum to be present.

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APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion by Commissioner Cooper, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the March 24, 2020, Regular Meeting Agenda as presented.”

Ayes – 4 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

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APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Vice Chair Jokinen requested spelling corrections for Commissioner Dresen’s name.

Upon motion by Commissioner Cooper, seconded by Commissioner Caillier, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2020, Regular Meeting as corrected.”

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Ayes – 4 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Vice Chairperson Jokinen opened the floor to the public at 7:02 p.m. for questions and comments on items not on the agenda.

As no one wished to address the Commission, Vice Chairperson Jokinen closed the meeting to the public at 7:02 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Case 20-002: Dakota UPREIT LP – Planned Unit Development Amendment and Site Plan Review at 905-955 East County Road E (Vadnais Square)

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared the applicant is requesting to divide the 32,500-square-foot “minor anchor” tenant space at Vadnais Square into up to three retail suites through a Planned Unit Development (PUD) Amendment and Site Plan Review. He said the subject property contains the Vadnais Square shopping center development and was rezoned from City Center (CC) to Planned Unit Development (PUD) in 2016. Dakota UPREIT LP purchased the shopping center in 2016. He spoke how market trends were changing and the need to split the tenant space into several spaces versus larger big box stores and instead have smaller destination retail stores. As a result of the vacancy created in the former Xperience Fitness tenant space, the property owner is proposing to split the space into up to three retail suites. One tenant, Foss Swim School, has been identified, but no other tenants have lease agreements for the remaining space(s), as of yet.

Wall noted that the original Development Agreement was executed in 1995 and approved a 27,500-square-foot minor anchor retail store at the southwest corner of the retail building. Subsequent amendments have changed the exact size of the space, but it has always been considered as an anchor tenant. Use of that space, as approved, continued until November 2019 when the tenant vacated. A similar process was followed in 2014 to reconfigure the former Festival Foods space into several smaller suites to accommodate a new grocery tenant that didn’t need all the vacant space. He stated the review process to split the former Festival Foods into five retail suites six years ago triggered a deliberate conversation about the changing retail environment and the intent and vision for the Vadnais Square development in the larger context of the City Center District. The same circumstances are facilitating the requests in this case. The importance of the entire City Center area depends in large part on maintaining a vibrant multi-tenant shopping center that is viable in the current retail market. The property owner shares the same goal. To that end, they are reacting to losing Xperience Fitness as the minor anchor tenant and the current market to fill it. Wall stated plans show the proposed layout for Foss Swim School, which would occupy approximately 12,000 square feet and provides a similar use to the former fitness club. The applicant/property owner is requesting to split the

97 remaining 22,000 square feet into at least two more retail suites for future tenants. The
98 request offers them flexibility in attracting tenants, but would still allow for one larger
99 tenant to lease all the remaining space.

100
101 Vice Chairperson Jokinen opened the public hearing at 7:09 p.m.

102
103 As no one wished to address the Commission, Vice Chairperson Jokinen closed the
104 public hearing at 7:09 p.m.

105
106 Upon motion by Commissioner Carnes, seconded by Commissioner Cooper, it was

107
108 “RESOLVED to approve the proposed comprehensive plan amendment, rezoning,
109 and planned unit development amendment requests, based on the finding of fact
110 that the applicant is responding to the current retail market in an attempt to keep
111 the shopping center viable and leased.

112
113 Subject to the conditions:

- 114
- 115 1. A development agreement amendment between the property owner, and all
- 116 others with interests in the subject property, shall be entered into with the
- 117 City, to be recorded at the applicant’s cost with the offices of the Ramsey
- 118 County Recorder and/or Register of Titles, prior to issuance of a building
- 119 permit.
- 120 2. Building and demolition permits in compliance with all applicable code
- 121 standards shall be submitted prior to commencement of any construction
- 122 activities on the subject property, to be reviewed/approved administratively.
- 123 3. Sign permits in compliance with all applicable code standards shall be
- 124 submitted prior to any sign(s) being installed/relocated on the subject
- 125 property, to be reviewed/approved administratively.
- 126 4. The existing “minor anchor” space shall not be divided into more than three
- 127 separate tenant spaces without approval by the City Council, after review by
- 128 the Planning Commission.”

129
130 Ayes – 4 Nays – 0

131
132 The motion carried.

133
134 B. Case 20-003: At Home Apartments, LLC – Rezoning, Final Planned Unit
135 Development Plan, Site Plan Review at Unaddressed Parcel at County Highway
136 96/McMenemy Street

137
138 Vice Chairperson Jokinen stated the public hearing for At Home Apartments, LLC –
139 Rezoning, Final Planned Unit Development Plan, Site Plan Review at Unaddressed
140 Parcel at County Highway 96/McMenemy Street would be opened but continued and
141 action postponed to the April 2, 2020, special meeting. He said no formal action would
142 be taken this evening and encouraged the public to review the City’s website for public
143 input opportunities for the continued public hearing.

144

145 Vice Chairperson Jokinen opened the public hearing at 7:09 p.m.

146

147 Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared that At Home Apartments,
148 LLC, is proposing to re-zone the subject property to PUD to allow for construction of a
149 multi-family residential development, including final PUD and site plan reviews. At the
150 January 21 meeting, the City Council approved the applicant’s request to reguide the
151 subject property’s future land use designation from Office-Business to Mixed Use, which
152 is currently being reviewed by the Metropolitan Council and we expect action on it next
153 month.

154

155 Wall noted that the proposed development is a rental community that includes a mix of
156 two-story, attached townhomes and a four-story apartment building, totaling 163 units.
157 Several revisions were made to the proposed plans resulting from the Concept PUD Plan
158 public testimony and subsequent City Council and Planning Commission discussions. If
159 approved, construction would occur in multiple phases, commencing late spring/early
160 summer this year to be completed by the fall of 2021. The proposed development
161 includes 14 buildings (1 apartment/13 townhomes) on one platted lot. The proposed
162 development includes two housing types, attached townhomes and an apartment building.
163 The pitched roofs would complement the dwellings in the adjacent single-family
164 residential neighborhood, as opposed to flat roofs which may better complement the
165 surrounding office/warehouse uses and often evoke a more urban-feel. In addition, the
166 two-story townhome design offers a transition between the height of the adjacent
167 dwellings and the four-story apartment building. The townhomes would be constructed in
168 three phases, with completion estimated for spring, summer, and fall of 2021,
169 respectively.

170

171 Wall noted that the proposed development does not include any land dedicated to the
172 public, so the applicant will likely be required to pay the applicable park dedication fee in
173 lieu of dedication, as allowed by the City Code. The proposed development would
174 include outdoor amenities for residents and guests, including an outdoor pool, gazebo,
175 grilling areas, and a covered bar area with outdoor TVs. The proposed apartment building
176 will have a fitness room, yoga room, and community space. In addition, trail connections
177 to the existing off-street trail facility on the south side of County Highway 96 were
178 proposed from within the development on the north and west sides. Wall shared existing
179 developments within surrounding communities were analyzed for density for comparison
180 and the main points included: gross density range for certain existing/approved
181 developments in surrounding communities is approximately 8–51 units/acre; gross
182 density range for existing developments in Vadnais Heights is 8–29 units/acre; proposed
183 development has a gross density of 12.2 units/acre and is significantly less dense than
184 comparable developments in the City and the surrounding area.

185

186 Wall said the subject property and proposed apartment building’s location are generally
187 isolated from surrounding structures, therefore it is not anticipated that any significant
188 view-sheds will be interrupted. The Vadnais Heights Fire Department has reviewed the
189 proposed plans and does not have any concerns with the building’s height, as they have
190 appropriately-trained staff and equipment to respond to a fire event in a tall building. In
191 addition, the proposed development provides the required fire access around most of the
192 building and is required to install fire suppression/alarm systems. For comparison

193 purposes, the R-3 District’s maximum building height standard is 36’, which generally
194 only allows for a three-story building and is consistent with most existing multi-family
195 residential buildings in the community. Most new suburban multi-family residential
196 construction is three or four stories tall, but can vary in overall height depending on the
197 roof design (pitched vs. flat) but noted there was a growing trend in suburban
198 communities to allow taller buildings in appropriate locations to increase density.

199
200 Wall said in response to the comments received as part of the Concept PUD Plan review
201 process, the applicant incorporated the following revisions into the Final PUD Plan:
202 removed ingress/egress from McMenemy Street; consolidated ingress/egress to one
203 driveway on Oak Grove Parkway as far from the intersection as possible; enhanced the
204 exterior building materials (more colors, stone, and brick); provided berming and robust
205 landscaping to provide screening to/from surrounding properties; enhanced the outdoor
206 amenity space by including more pedestrian trails throughout the site and an outdoor
207 gazebo/pergola area; provided an emergency-only access easement in the southeast
208 corner of the site.

209
210 Staff recommends approval of the proposed rezoning, final planned unit development
211 plan, and site plan requests, based on the following findings of fact:

- 212 1. The City Council has already approved the required comprehensive plan
213 amendment to re-guide the subject property from Office-Business to Mixed Use
214 and provided comments on the Concept PUD Plan.
- 215 2. The proposed development allows for the following:
 - 216 a. Multi-family residential development that meets the current market demands.
 - 217 b. Additional housing units to assist in meeting the 2040 population/household
218 forecasts. c. A range of housing choices in terms of style, size, location, tenure
219 and cost.
 - 220 d. A balanced housing supply with housing available for people at all income
221 levels.
 - 222 e. A variety of housing types for people in all stages of the life-cycle.
- 223 3. The proposed development is compatible with other surrounding uses and,
224 through thoughtful design, provides appropriate transitions/buffers and access that
225 mitigates potential impacts.
- 226 4. The proposed development is consistent with the applicable density ranges.
- 227 5. The proposed development is consistent with the purpose and intent of the
228 Planned Unit Development District by encouraging zoning flexibility that
229 enhances the project without negatively affecting surrounding land uses, natural
230 resources, or the public.
- 231 6. The flexibility being requested as part of the Planned Unit Development process
232 is justified and allows for reasonable development of the subject property.

233
234 Subject to the following conditions:

- 235 1. The proposed comprehensive plan amendment approved by the City Council, as
236 in Resolution 20-01-016, shall be approved by the Metropolitan Council, in
237 accordance with the required procedures.
- 238 2. A development agreement between the applicant, and all others with interests in
239 the subject property, shall be entered into with the City, to be recorded at the

- 240 applicant’s cost with the offices of the Ramsey County Recorder and/or Register
241 of Titles, prior to issuance of a building permit.
- 242 3. Building permits shall be submitted for administrative review/approval, prior to
243 commencement of any construction activities on the subject property.
- 244 4. Construction shall be completed and ready for occupancy according to the
245 approved plans and specifications within one (1) year following issuance of the
246 building permit, unless within that time an extension is granted by the City
247 Council as part of the development agreement.
- 248 5. A Fire Certificate of Occupancy shall be obtained annually from the Fire
249 Department by the responsible party, in compliance with the City Code.
- 250 6. A sign permit shall be submitted for administrative review/approval, prior to any
251 sign(s) being installed on the subject property.
- 252 7. The applicant shall work with the City to erect a city monument/gateway sign at
253 the corner of the McMenemy Street/County Highway 96 intersection.
- 254 8. If construction of the proposed development has not commenced within twelve
255 (12) months from effective date of the approval ordinance granting the proposed
256 rezoning, the City Council shall consider commencement of proceedings to
257 rezone the subject property back to the original classification, in compliance with
258 the applicable procedures and with notice to the property owner/applicant.
- 259 9. A portion of the parking near the front of the apartment building shall be marked
260 as visitor parking.
- 261 10. Ground-mounted mechanical units and building utility areas shall be adequately
262 screened by plant material and/or fencing and shall not obstruct fire department
263 connections or hydrants, to be administratively reviewed/approved as part of the
264 building permit.
- 265 11. Existing vegetation proposed to be preserved shall be done so in compliance with
266 the applicable requirements of Chapter 38, Article IV, Section 601(11) of the City
267 Code.
- 268 12. Trash/recycling containers housed within the building’s underground parking
269 garages are only permitted to be stored outside on a temporary basis to be
270 emptied.
- 271 13. Trash/recycling containers and dog-waste stations shall be provided around the
272 exterior of the development for use by residents and visitors.
- 273 14. The applicant shall provide an emergency cross-access easement to the adjoining
274 property to the east, to be shown on the site plan as part of the development
275 agreement, and recorded by document at the applicant’s cost with the offices of
276 the Ramsey County Recorder and/or Register of Titles, prior to issuance of a
277 certificate of occupancy.
- 278 15. Exterior off-street parking stalls shall not be used for parking/storage of boats,
279 trailers, or recreational vehicles.
- 280 16. Compliance with the conditions included in the Consulting City Engineer’s
281 memorandum, dated February 28, 2020.
- 282 17. Compliance with the conditions included in the Fire Technician’s memorandum,
283 dated March 2, 2020.
- 284 18. Compliance with the conditions included in the VLAWMO memorandum, dated
285 March 13, 2020.
- 286 19. Compliance with the conditions included in the Director of Public Works/City
287 Engineer memorandum, dated March 13, 2020.

288 Wall said the action requested at this meeting is to table the requests and continue the
289 public hearing to the April 2, 2020, special meeting, for public input and action and
290 extend the application review period an additional 60 days, in compliance with Minn.
291 Stat. Sec. 15.99. He outlined the public process included a project webpage, electronic
292 comment forms, and emails for the record from those who do not want to attend as well
293 as an online sign-up sheet to allow residents to schedule a time to testify in five-minute
294 blocks to limit public attendance and provide an orderly process but noted staff
295 encouraged online input instead. He said a letter was provided beyond the required
296 meeting notice that stated the hearing would be continued and once input was taken at the
297 Planning Commission meeting another opportunity would be provided for comments at a
298 City Council meeting.

299
300 Vice Chairperson Jokinen confirmed the proposed irrigation pond would be aerated.

301
302 Pete Keely, Collage Architects, recapped design considerations made regarding access,
303 traffic, and design, and said they kept with the motif of the modern farmhouse design and
304 developed more materials such as stone and accents and dropped to three stories on the
305 corners. He outlined the outdoor spaces and balconies, gable approach to match the
306 townhomes, different coloring for different looks throughout, then reviewed the proposed
307 landscaping and materials mix between buildings for different looks with rustic wood, lap
308 siding, stone, metal roofing and shingles throughout. Keely spoke about the three-foot
309 berming, gables differing throughout to mimic a series of homes, then shared images of
310 amenity spaces inside and outlined the plan of more one-bedroom units and one-bedroom
311 with den units, fitness room, wine bar, and package/mail room and shared how they
312 worked to get access off Oak Grove and connect to the parking lot to the east with the
313 pond designed as a wet pond with bounce.

314
315 Commissioner Carnes said he appreciated the changes from the initial proposal as they
316 are well done and thanked the applicant for their work.

317
318 Leanna Stefaniak, At Home Apartments, stressed how they wanted to be collaborative
319 partners and hoped that goal was reflected in the design changes. She said they amended
320 their plans based on the public input received and described the amenities for the outdoor
321 spaces and said they anticipate more feedback at the continued public hearing and would
322 work to incorporate changes to develop a better project.

323
324 Commissioner Caillier thanked the applicant for the changes and asked about the
325 definition of transient housing and how At Home vests their long-term renters and
326 activities such as Air B&B-type rentals and not allowing sublets and the corresponding
327 parking impacts. Stefaniak explained how all residents (anyone over the age of 18) must
328 submit applications for criminal and financial background investigations which is why
329 they do not allow subletting. She said this project is a huge investment for both us and
330 their tenants and if someone was living onsite who was not a resident, they are made
331 aware of the fact through onsite management whom will be living onsite and will know
332 the residents. She outlined the seven-night guest policy and the need to sign lease
333 addendums in order to get on a current lease to ensure property rules are followed,
334 vehicle registrations received, and fees paid, adding the 1.8 parking ratio was based on
335 current market trends and was still adequately parked with the average being 1.4.

336 Commissioner Cooper asked for more information on the market At Home will be going
337 after and the unit costs. Stefaniak responded they anticipate their residents to be baby
338 boomers who are downsizing and right sizing as well as older millennials who may want
339 more space and be closer to work. She spoke about Class A new market apartments and
340 blended averages of approximately \$2/square foot for suburban units and \$3/square foot
341 for urban units.

342
343 Upon motion by Commissioner Carnes, seconded by Commissioner Cooper, it was
344

345 “RESOLVED, to table consideration of At Home Apartments, LLC – Rezoning,
346 Final Planned Unit Development Plan, Site Plan Review at Unaddressed Parcel at
347 County Highway 96/McMenemy Street and continue the public hearing and
348 action to the April 2, 2020, public hearing, and extend the application review
349 period an additional 60 days, in compliance with Minn. Stat. Sec. 15.99.”

350
351 Ayes – 4 Nays – 0

352
353 The motion carried.

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355 **NEW BUSINESS**

356
357 None.

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359 **OLD BUSINESS**

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361 None.

362
363 **REPORTS**

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365 A. Council Liaison

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367 Councilmember Patricia Youker was absent.

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369 B. Planning Commissioners

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371 None.

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373 C. Staff

374
375 Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared the Rush Line group will be
376 conducting virtual meetings and has postponed public engagements at this time and noted
377 that residents who live on the corridor should be very aware of the proposed project due
378 to the group’s active communication.

379
380 City Administrator Watson shared an update regarding the City’s response to COVID-19
381 and how staff is continuing to serve the public as always but not with any in-person
382 services. He said staff are working onsite and from home and splitting shifts to do its best
383 to mitigate cross infections. He commented on the impact these actions are having and

384 how staff is working to respond to needs as they arise and he said that he appreciates the
385 public's patience during this time. He encouraged anyone from the public to share their
386 ideas, especially the business community, and shared one example of flexibility provided
387 around temporary signage for activities such as restaurant take-out and thanked the public
388 for their support during this time.

389

390 **NEXT MEETING**

391

392 Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the next meeting would be held in
393 April at a date to be determined.

394

395 **ADJOURN MEETING**

396

397 Upon motion by Commissioner Carnes, seconded by Commissioner Cooper, the meeting
398 was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

399

400 Respectfully submitted,

401

402 Cathy Sorensen, *TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*

APPROVED