

**MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER
31555 11 MILE ROAD, FARMINGTON HILLS MI
JUNE 12, 2014**

Chair Topper called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:31 p.m. on June 12, 2014.

Commissioners Present: Blizman, Mantey, McRae, Orr, Stimson, Topper

Commissioners Absent: Fleischhacker, Rae-O'Donnell, Schwartz

Others Present: Staff Planner Stec, Assistant to the City Manager Geinzer, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant Arroyo

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by McRae, support by Orr, to approve the agenda as published.

Motion carried unanimously

REGULAR MEETING

A. Grand River CIA Botsford focus area overlay district discussion

Planning Consultant Arroyo introduced this item, noting that this had been discussed previously. The Commission had before them this evening a Zoning Text Amendment, amending chapter 34, "Zoning," to add new section 34-3.1.33, Grand River Corridor Overlay 1 (GR 1), 4th Draft 05/8/14. Mr. Arroyo emphasized that the underlying zoning of this district would remain the same. As an overlay district, it was the applicant or property owner's option to request PUD approval under this district.

Mr. Arroyo called the Commission's attention to D. i., which outlined a mandatory Pre-Application Conference. The applicant could request that the Pre-Application meeting take place with staff and the Planning Commission, or just staff.

Commissioner Orr hoped that any time an applicant wanted to involve the Planning Commission in a Pre-Application meeting, they would have met with staff first.

Mr. Arroyo confirmed that if an applicant asked to have the Pre-Application Conference with the Planning Commission, they would have met with staff first, so that they could be correctly prepared for this meeting. Further, paragraph D.ii. permitted applicants to fast track through the process, allowing for concurrent Final Determination, Site Plan, and Landscape Plan approvals.

Regarding building heights, 5 stories would be the maximum height south of Grand River, and 4 stories would be the maximum height north of Grand River.

Commissioner McRae suggested that the language be changed to limit the maximum building height south of Grand River to that portion of the district east of Whittington Street. He believed residents would be more comfortable with this language. It was noted in discussion that these heights were not

an automatic function of the zoning district, but had to be justified under a PUD proposal.

Commissioner Blizman noted that Botsford had some very high buildings. Mr. Arroyo explained that the Botsford property was deep. The overlay district standards needed to reflect sensitivity to the nearby traditional residential areas.

Mr. Arroyo directed the Commission's attention to G. Building Elements, where applicants were required to use the design standards in this section for facades other than front facades: *The requirements listed in this subsection shall apply to all front-facing and exterior-side facing facades as well as facades that directly face a park, plaza or river. Walls shall not be blank.*

Chair Topper noted that the word *river* needed to be added to G.d.iii.a and b:

- a. . . . facing a street, park, ~~or~~ plaza, or river . . .
- b. . . . not facing a street, park, ~~or~~ plaza, or river . . .

Chair Topper asked about patio dining on the river or park side of a property. Mr. Arroyo said that F.c. addressed this issue: *Forecourts: The approving body may grant an exception for a building façade to retreat up to thirty (30) feet from the building line, into the building mass, to provide an open space plaza, courtyard or outdoor dining area provided that at least thirty-five (35) percent of the total building frontage falls within the build-to zone.*

Mr. McRae said that the proposed overlay district as shown related almost exclusively to Grand River. Perhaps the vision for the proposed district could include buildings facing the river, for instance.

Assistant to the City Manager Geinzer commented that the Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) plan for this area did include buildings providing an attractive façade inward, away from the street. The effect was to have two "fronts" to the buildings.

Mr. McRae noted that L. Pedestrian Access a. b. (page 9 of the draft) needed some clarification in order to encourage business owners to build two "front" facades – one facing Grand River and one facing inward.

Regarding the proposed pathway system, Mr. Orr said that all paths had to be ADA compliant, the cost of which would be prohibitive. The text amendment required that if the path was not constructed, the applicant *shall post cash or an automatically renewing letter of credit equal to 1.5 times the estimate cost of construction to connect from the subject site to the Rouge River pathway system.* Again, this was cost prohibitive and would discourage development.

In answer to a question from Commissioner Mantey, Attorney Schultz said under a PUD the City had the ability to require a dedicated easement for a city-constructed path or for a future path, should the cost of the path be cost-prohibitive. Some developments could bear the entire cost of path construction.

Commissioner Blizman said that the pathway constituted a public improvement. Public access to the pathway should be required. Mr. Arroyo said that the proposed district envisioned the path as private, not public. Mr. Geinzer said that shared connections to the path would be possible.

Attorney Schultz said that there needed to be a plan for a pathway in order to require that

developments contribute to the pathway system either through construction or providing an easement; this had to be clearly shown on the plan before any development was proposed. Language regarding this should be placed directly in the text amendment.

Mr. Blizman said that topographically it might be impossible to put a path on the north side of the river.

Mr. Arroyo suggested the following sentence be added after the last full sentence of paragraph L.Pedestrian Access.a.b:

Two or more properties may share a private connection to the Rouge River pathway system provided all have an internal connection to the shared private connector.

Chair Topper reviewed the discussion so far: 1) will there actually be a pathway system? 2) if there is a pathway system, how frequent should the connections be? 3) who will pay for the pathway's construction?

Mr. Schultz said that tonight's discussion was dealing only with the PUD part of the ordinance. If the Commission wanted to require a pathway or an easement for a pathway within the overlay district even if a PUD process was not used, that would have to be done separately. For instance, the ordinance could be changed in the section on Site Plan Approvals, specifically requiring an easement or a pathway in this overlay district.

In response to a question from Mr. McRae regarding constructing patios, balconies or terraces at the rear of buildings, Mr. Arroyo said this was possible within the proposed district as long as setback requirements were met.

Staff Planner Stec said that as the path was planned, justification for the location should be noted in terms of grade, best placement, etc. Some properties would require greater easements than others, based on topography and best path placement.

Mr. Stec continued that the goal for the area was not the development of individual properties, but rather large parcel development under the PUD process. Mr. Arroyo added that there were incentives for developers to assemble numerous properties, including greater height allowance. Also, perhaps a minimum acreage could be required for a PUD development.

Mr. Schultz wondered if the height allowance was enough of an incentive.

Mr. Geinzer said the CIA was very interested in successful assemblage of properties. They had tried to build in flexibility to come up with creative incentives. The CIA could possibly participate in public parking, storm water runoff, etc. Significant investment could be made in the road right-of-ways. The CIA could communicate its interest in helping a developer in these ways, as long as the PUD process was utilized.

The Commission discussed other incentives already in the proposed text amendment, including greater density, more uses, flexibility, and of course the greater height.

The Chair recognized resident Spencer Brown, 28901 Scotten, Farmington Hills, MI 48336. Mr. Brown asked about projects such as warehouses in this area. Mr. Arroyo said that such projects would be discouraged, but if they did move forward, they would have to conform to the overall plan for the

area, including attractive rear walls.

Referring to paragraph L.a.b on page 9, Mr. Mantey suggested that the reference to 100 feet be removed or changed, as a pathway connection every 100 feet was too frequent.

Chair Topper asked about footnote 1 on page 3: *The required 25 foot setback may be reduced to 5 feet if the adjacent residential property is in a 100 year flood plain, . . .*

Mr. Arroyo explained the justification for this footnote, noting that properties in 100-year flood plains were probably vacant and already would be providing a significant buffer. Mr. Mantey pointed out that practically all the properties in this area would be adjacent to a residential property in a flood plain, even if the adjacent border was very small. This footnote in effect changed the setbacks to 5 feet for the entire area. Mr. Arroyo suggested the footnote be removed or further limited in its description.

Mr. McRae asked who would maintain plantings *on the residential side* as shown on the graphics on page 9. Given the schematics presented, Mr. Orr asked about garage access to the alley on the north side of Grand River.

Mr. McRae asked about using CIA funds for public gathering areas, the construction of a bus/rapid transit stop, etc. Mr. Geinzer said that the CIA did have proposed streetscaping. If a bus stop was created, perhaps funding could be shared between the CIA, the City, and the transit entity.

Regarding the sketch on page 5, Mr. Arroyo said that he was planning on using a more modern design in the final document. Also, in order to give greater flexibility, the *Transparent Glass* specifications note attached to that sketch would be changed from 60-90% to 50-90%.

Referring to paragraph K.a.Parking, Chair Topper suggested that whatever elements were ultimately chosen for the masonry wall or fence along Grand River Avenue should blend with but not be exactly the same as the streetscape design for the City of Farmington. Mr. Geinzer agreed that they didn't want a precise match with the City of Farmington, but did want compatibility.

Mr. McRae asked for an overview of the entire area during the Public Hearing, so that the scheduling of future plans and areas could be laid out clearly.

Seeing that discussion had ended, Chair Topper asked for a motion.

MOTION by McRae, support by Stimson, to set Grand River Corridor CIA Vision Plan, Botsford Focus Area for Planning Commission Public Hearing on July 17, 2014.

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Discussion Item: Motion Making

Since Commissioner Schwartz was instrumental in getting this item on the agenda, and he was absent this evening, the following motion was offered:

MOTION by Blizman, support by Stimson, to delay Discussion Item: Motion Making to a date uncertain.

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Discussion Item: Capital Improvements Plan

MOTION by Blizman, support by Stimson, that the Planning Commission maintain the current process for Capital Improvements Plan review and discussion.

Motion carried unanimously.

During the discussion that followed this motion, the following points were made:

- Resident input during this process was invaluable, especially regarding sidewalks and other infrastructure needs.
- The process helped achieve transparency.
- Questions were raised and discussion was had on the public record regarding the CIP that would not occur elsewhere.
- It was good process for departmental officials to present to the Commission, thus seeking the Commission's advocacy to City Council.
- The CIP process kept the Commission informed and in the loop.

Mr. Blizman asked that the Planning Department get the CIP to the newspaper before Planning Commission meetings were held, thus encouraging public awareness and participation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Orr asked staff to find out when the burned restaurant SIPS would be demolished.

Referring to the Planning Brief distributed to the Commission by Mr. Arroyo this evening, and specifically the reference to Aging Population, Mr. Mantey advocated for Bocce Courts in the City. Bocce courts were used by all ages, and were tremendous fun.

Regarding walkability, Mr. Mantey suggested having benches and rest stops on sidewalks throughout commercial areas in the City.

Mr. McRae noted that 8 Mile Road west of Farmington was in terrible shape. While the City was not responsible for this road, would staff find out what the plan was for improvements here?

Mr. McRae asked if staff could list the available sites for assisted living facilities in the City.

Mr. Blizman pointed out that while a portion of the population was aging, a younger population including immigrants could be encouraged to choose Farmington Hills through excellent schools, wonderful neighborhoods, etc.

Chair Topper asked staff to discover whether the Sara Fisher facility had been sold.

Chair Topper stated that a long-term garage sale on 12 Mile Road west of Inkster had opened for business.

ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no further comments, Chair Topper adjourned the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Schwartz
Planning Commission Secretary

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