Minutes
Plan Commission Meeting
September 26, 2016
7:00pm

Chair Busse called the meeting of the City of Monona Plan Commission to order at 7:00pm.

Present: Chair Alder Jim Busse, Mr. Robert Stein, Ms. Susan Fox, Mr. Chris Homburg, and Ms. Kathy Thomas

Excused: Mr. Dale Ganser, Mr. Grif Dorschel and Alder Brian Holmquist

Also present: City Planner & Economic Development Director Sonja Reichertz

Approval of Minutes

A motion by Ms. Thomas, seconded by Mr. Stein, to approve the minutes of August 8, 2016 carried without corrections.

Appearances

There were no appearances.

New Business

A. Consideration of Action on Request by Mike Johnson, Graphic House Inc., and Property Owner United Properties to Repeal the Existing 1999 Pier 37 Signage Plan and Replace it with a Revised Comprehensive Signage Plan for Pier 37 Dated September 13, 2016.

Mike Johnson, Graphic House Inc., asked for approval to repeal the existing 1999 Pier 37 Signage Plan and replace it with a revised Comprehensive Signage Plan for Pier 37 dated September 13, 2016. Mr. Johnson referenced the memo from staff and explained that the new plan will eliminate color specifications and dated references like neon lighting, but the overall intent of plan will stay the same. This is prompted by a Pick n Save sign permit that did not meet the color requirements.

Planner Reichertz explained that previously if a sign did not meet the specifications of a shopping center signage plan, like this one, the applicant would need to go to Plan Commission for a special exception. Staff stated that there has been recent discussion of a change in policy direction by Plan Commission to change the overall plan rather than review exceptions on a case by case basis. Mr. Homburg asked if any sign color would be allowed under the new plan. Staff said yes, and that each tenant's sign would have to be approved by the landlord. Mr. Homburg asked the Commission if the City should be deviating from the uniform color standards that have directed signage for the last 20+ years.

Mr. Jonson reported that it was a common trend 20 to 25 years ago for signs in shopping centers to be regulated by municipalities for color consistency. However, this consistency requirement has caused many variance requests, and people had a difficult time distinguishing tenant from tenant. It also deterred large national chains from choosing to locate in those regulated centers, which hinders development. Mr. Johnson stated that over the years municipalities have been relaxing the requirements. Chair Busse clarified that the revised plan still limits size and because the landlord is responsible for approving signs, he/she will have an interest in something aesthetically pleasing.

Reichertz added that this was a policy direction discussed by the Plan Commission multiple times, specifically when the Air Force tenant came into Pier 37, and one other signage plan for South Towne Mall has already been amended in a similar fashion.

A motion was made by Ms. Thomas and seconded by Mr. Stein to approve the signage plan as proposed.

The motion carried.

Unfinished Business

A. Plan Commission Review and Recommendation to City Council on Recodification Summary by General Code Regarding Land Use Legislation Sections of the Monona Municipal Code of Ordinances.

Planner Reichertz reviewed direction from the Plan Commission to address the issues with grading and impervious surface related to redevelopment of single family homes. Staff discussed with the City Attorney and attempted to address some of the requests from the previous meeting, specifically the Plan Commission's desire to carve out an area where exceptions could be reviewed by Plan Commission and to specifically tie in the height of a structure to the grading/elevation of the lot. She reviewed the revisions to definitions to height, lot coverage and impervious surface.

Reichertz reviewed draft ordinance language with new standards for grading and impervious surface. For grading, it would require the first floor elevation to be no more than 2 feet above the adjacent street grade, with an allowance after Plan Commission review to eight feet. She stated that the ordinance as drafted was based on the Plan Commission request for something that is measurable and uniform for the community, that ties structure height to grade, incorporates a specific impervious surface limit, and allows some flexibility at the Commission level. However, it is clear that as written, too many existing structures will become non-conforming and the regulation may be too broad, negatively impacting properties that are not the cause of concern. She said this is a starting point for discussion. Planner Reichertz explained the issues within the grading requirements due to the topographic variability in Monona by showing photos of homes constructed at different grades throughout the community.

Ms. Thomas stated that it is easy to set standards when all the land is leveled and flat, but asked how one sets fair standards when there is a variety in topography? Mr. Homburg stated that if we use the street grade as a measurement point, tear downs would not be compliant on the properties that staff demonstrated. The grades have to be defined via adjacent property grades as well as blending into the neighborhood. However, he pointed out issues with this as well, on streets with steep grades such as Baskerville. Ms. Thomas asked what exactly the problem is that they are trying to solve. Is it an issue of runoff, or shade caused by a taller structure? Chair Busse asked if there is already a runoff requirement.

Mr. Stein commented that according to previous Plan Commission meeting minutes, they wanted to write the ordinance in a way where applicants would need to come to the Commission for approval since there are approximately five new homes constructed per year. Ms. Thomas said there are more than five if you count substantial remodeling. Staff noted that with the additions and remodeling, substantial grading changes may not be an issue.

Ms. Fox stated that some of the properties clearly did not alter the elevation. She asked if the development concerns are more related to aesthetics and runoff, and if the grade changes are in the building permit phase. Ms. Fox also said that the main issue is when they raise the entire grade, rather than excavate down. Mr. Homburg stated that if the site plan goes to the building inspector

and he questions if it will negatively affect the neighbor that could be grounds for Plan Commission review.

Ms. Thomas stated that she is inclined to agree with Mr. Stein and that if it is only five new homes a year the only way to logically deal with the issue is to bring it to Plan Commission. Chair Busse commented that if the developments came to Plan Commission they could still the conditions similar to as they are written in the draft ordinance.

The Commission discussed if it was appropriate for developments to be brought to Plan Commission for review. Mr. Stein said he would be ok with it. Ms. Fox stated she was ok with it coming to this body if they had general guidelines for developments. She also expressed her concern that it will continue to be a problem if the Commission does not address it. Chair Busse stated that he does not have a problem with developments coming to Plan Commission.

Ms. Fox said that aesthetics are also an issue of concern. Ms. Thomas stated that Plan Commission cannot get into issues of aesthetics. There was further discussion on if the community concern was more about aesthetics or grading. Ms. Fox clarified that she is referencing aesthetics in terms of grading and not color or style.

Planner Reichertz asked for additional direction on how the Commission would define new construction, or those projects that would be reviewed by Plan Commission. There was discussion about regulating based on the percentage of the structure's square footage or footprint that was changed. Mr. Stein asked if the square footage would also include the basement. Chair Busse clarified that the square footage be based on the building footprint. Mr. Stein cautioned that the Commission should not just grab a random percentage. Chair Busse asked if they want a small number so the development errs on the side on coming to Plan Commission. Mr. Homburg said that we want to encourage remodels.

The Commission discussed the draft impervious surface language.

Mr. Homburg explained how impervious surface requirements are window dressing for addressing water quality issues in this case. He also explained how this regulation is difficult in Monona given the large amount of substandard lots. He said in his neighborhood the properties are more than 70-75% impervious already. He said one argument for impervious surface limits with regard to water quality is that it promotes infiltration; however it may be not be as valid in Monona where there is a large amount of clay soil, depth to bedrock, adjacency to the lakes, and shallow ground water tables. He questioned whether we should be regulating impervious surface for the purpose of aesthetics.

Mr. Stein said that Mr. Homburg made some valid points, but that other zoning standards are enforced for aesthetic purposes such as avoiding tall houses. Also reducing impervious surface can slow runoff rate before it gets to the sewer system or lake. Mr. Stein stated that there is merit in having a limitation. Ms. Fox stated that one of the exceptions listed for maximum impervious surface is substandard lots and suggested that maybe developments go to ZBA if it is 75% impervious or if there is another agreed number. Ms. Fox gave the example of the stretch of developments on Tonyawatha and how destructive it is for the character of the street.

Chair Busse asked the Commission if the proposed maximum impervious surface requirement should be removed completely. Mr. Homburg said yes because Monona has too many small lots and Monona already has strict development standards that we are trying to ease in order to attract more families. Ms. Fox said she needs to think about it more and see the rationale for implementing requirements in other communities. Chair Busse stated that without restrictions there would be nothing to stop someone from building a tennis or basketball court in their street yard. Mr. Homburg

said that is their choice. Chair Busse wants to bring this discussion back for when more Commission members are present.

Planner Reichertz said she will investigate other comparable communities to see how they address these issues on substandard lots and for lakeside developments. Ms. Fox brought up the example for Boulder, Colorado and their impervious requirements.

B. Review and Approval of 2017 Planning Department Operating Budget.

Planner Reichertz explained that the annual operating budget needs committee approval and explained the line items.

A motion was made by Ms. Thomas and seconded by Mr. Stein to approve the budget as recommended.

The motion carried.

Reports of Staff and Commission Members

A. Staff Report Regarding Status of Development Project Proposals.

The next meeting is October 10, 2016. Applications include a required floodplain map revision for a MMSD pump station, and an application from Taco Bell for architectural revisions that are potentially inconsistent with Pier 37 architectural standards.

B. Plan Commission Requests for Information Concerning Development Projects.

Mr. Homburg asked about the status of Qdoba's drive-thru menu board, which needed special Plan Commission approval. Planner Reichertz stated that the drive-thru was not working well operationally, so they removed the menu board and will keep the drive thru lane and window for call in orders for pick up. Mr. Homburg also stated that there are sandwich board signs all over the city on private residential properties. He said if it is okay for them to have them, then perhaps we should consider allowing them for businesses when we look at the sign code revisions.

Adjournment

A motion by Mr. Stein, seconded by Ms. Fox, to adjourn was carried. (8:14 pm)

Respectfully submitted by:
Sonja Reichertz, City Planner