

Minutes of the City of Ashland Plan Commission

A meeting of the Plan Commission was called to order on **Tuesday, January 16th, 2018** at 6:30 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Mayor Lewis, David Mettille, Ernie Bliss, John Beirl, Mike Amman, Katie Gellatly, Charmaine Swan

EXCUSED:

STAFF: April Kroner, Megan McBride

OTHERS:

MEETING AGENDA ORDER

1) Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Lewis called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

2) Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the Agenda by John Beirl. Seconded by David Mettille. Passed unanimously.

3) Consent Agenda

Motion to approve minutes from December 5th by Ernie Bliss. Seconded by Katie Gellatly. Passed unanimously.

4) Public Comment

No public comments.

5) Action Items

a) Site Plan and Public Art Permit for a pergola and life-sized checkerboard in Otis Park

Megan McBride provided background on the proposed project.

Katie Gellatly asked if the checkerboard would be painted directly on the surface of the concrete.

Megan McBride confirmed that the checkerboard would be painted directly on the concrete.

Mayor Lewis asked what the purpose of the pergola would be in that location.

April Kroner explained that it would be for photo opportunities, and as a place-making feature in the park.

Motion to approve by Ernie Bliss. Seconded by John Beirl.

David Mettille asked if the city would be asked to install electricity in that park to power the lights, as the existing outlets did not work when they attempted to place lights in the park for Christmas time. He suggested that staff discuss this with the applicant and Public Works to determine if the Christmas lights included in the plan will be possible.

Passed unanimously.

b) Public Hearing and Consideration of a Conditional Use Permit request to operate a child care facility at 417 9th Ave W

Motion to go into Public Hearing by David Mettille. Seconded by Katie Gellatly. Passed unanimously.

Kathy Beeksma, director of the City of Ashland Housing Authority (the adjacent property owner), provided comments prior to the meeting in support of the child care facility.

Gary LaPean explained the proposed project, contextualizing that the identified need for child care in combination with the vacancy of his building were factors that prompted his involvement. He provided preliminary design plans for the interior lay out of the building for the Plan Commission. He explained that details related to parking and traffic flow are still being worked out with the architect, but the design plans are being guided by city and state codes to ensure compliance. He stated that AADC is supporting the project, and will be underwriting the responsibility of the lease for three years until the facility can generate cash flow.

Betsey Harries explained that the AADC board is very supportive of this project as a means of addressing the significant shortage of childcare in the area, particularly for infants. AADC will be the fiscal agent which will make them eligible for grant funding as a non-profit to help with startup costs.

Mike Amman asked what the viability of this project is, and if the startup is reliant upon certain grant funding coming through.

Betsey Harries explained that they will primarily utilize grant funding for these costs, as well as fundraising. AADC has committed to making sure this project happens. She said that a feasibility study and business plan have been completed, funded by a technical assistance grant. The feasibility study indicates that this will be a viable project. Once the child care facility becomes stable and sustainable it will become its own non-profit.

Mayor Lewis asked what the anticipated opening date would be.

Betsey Harries said that they are hoping to open this fall.

Gary LaPean highlighted the collaboration between himself, AADC, and the Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board. He also said that new regulations can deter people from starting private child care centers, further limiting the number of available child care providers in the area.

Mari Kay-Nabozny explained that they reached out to local child care providers to determine needs and ensure that the new facility would not compete with private businesses. She noted that several providers they spoke with said that they would be retiring from child care in the next few years, which would increase the current shortage. Therefore, they'd like to get the center going prior to this. The property also provides opportunity for future expansion if needed.

Gary LaPean emphasized the issue of lack of available infant care in the area, which creates challenges for new parents. He also explained that he will be actively seeking a tenant for the unused portion of the building, and if it still available when the center considers expanding the remainder of the building will be offered to the EverGrow facility.

Ernie Bliss expressed concern about an active business going into the back portion of the building and creating traffic that could compromise the safety of children.

Gary LaPean explained that parking could be restored on the south side of the building to direct traffic away from areas where children will be.

Megan McBride went through the evaluation of approval criteria detailed in the staff report, leading staff to recommend approval with the condition that the applicant submit a final parking plan to staff for review.

Mayor Lewis brought up a concern that was expressed to her about the traffic that will be generated, particularly at peak drop-off times.

Gary LaPean explained that he had as many as seventy-five people working on the site, as well as semis coming and going and customers, and never experienced issues with traffic flow.

April Kroner explained that the reason staff recommended the parking plan be submitted for staff review is to ensure that traffic can flow most efficiently through the site.

Gary LaPean assured that they want this project to go through and will work with staff to ensure their plan meets all standards.

Dale Kupczyk expressed that he is strongly in favor of this project. He also pointed out that drop off times will likely be staggered for parents who work in various job sectors, which should help mitigate traffic impacts.

Betsey Harries highlighted the collaboration and cooperation that has occurred beyond the work done by AADC and Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board, as New Day Shelter and UW Extension have also been involved in partnering to make this project happen.

Motion to go out of Public Hearing by David Mettille. Seconded by Katie Gellatly. Passed unanimously.

Motion to approve Conditional Use Permit by Ernie Bliss. Seconded by David Mettille.

Ernie Bliss said that this development would help address the community need for child care, and that if the developer is willing to work with staff to ensure the most efficient layout of the parking lot he saw no issues with this project.

Katie Gellatly explained that her only initial concern was efficiency of the parking lot at peak drop-off times, so she liked the condition that the developers would continue to work with Planning and Public Works staff. She also noted that the project involves repurposing an existing building which is in line with the city's Comprehensive Plan.

Mari Kay-Nabozny explained that there is a requirement that 50% of families served by the day care be persons of low- and moderate income (LMI).

Passed unanimously.

c) Public Hearing and Consideration of a Conditional Use Permit request to operate a parking lot as a principal use at 717 Main St W

Motion to go into Public Hearing by Katie Gellatly. Seconded by Charmaine Swan. Passed unanimously.

Mark Gutteter explained the need for additional parking, particularly in our northern climate. The Deepwater Grille already experiences shortage of parking, which will be intensified with the addition of the new hotel. He said that the construction of a parking lot on this site would not inhibit it from future development into something that is more in line with the city's vision for the downtown. At this time he believes that a parking lot is the highest and best use of this lot and will ultimately help downtown Ashland.

April Kroner went through the evaluation of approval criteria detailed in the staff report, leading staff to recommend denial of the proposed parking lot based on the priorities and vision of the Comprehensive Plan and the inclusion of this lot in the TIF district in hopes of incentivizing the highest and best use of the property.

John Beirl acknowledged that the Comprehensive Plan identifies ample parking in our downtown, and asked if the Planning Administrator personally feels there is ample parking in that area of the downtown.

April Kroner said she does, explaining that the intent of a downtown is to be walkable and pedestrian oriented. Part of the challenge will be shifting behavior and expectations that people will always be able to park adjacent to their destination and promote the walkability of our downtown.

John Beirl pointed out that our climate does not always facilitate the walkability of our downtown.

Ernie Bliss said that practicality must also be considered, particularly during winter months and for residents who have difficulties walking.

April Kroner identified potential opportunities for shared parking, and highlighted the on-street parking in the vicinity of the restaurant. Additionally, the Hair Affair parking lot is currently underutilized, but could be a good location for employees or guests to park. Our current Comprehensive Plan recommends promoting walkability and not locating additional parking lots directly on Main Street. She also explained that the plan for the parking lot that was submitted to staff for review does not take into account the encroachment from the adjacent property, required setbacks and other UDO standards, and would add an additional curb cut directly adjacent to the McDonald's entrance which Public Works staff recommended against doing for traffic and safety concerns.

Katie Gellatly asked if there is currently a curb separating the proposed lot from the McDonald's parking lot, expressing concerns of the fronts of cars hanging out into the existing McDonald's lot.

Mark Gutteter confirmed that there is a curb separating the McDonald's lot from this site. He also explained attempts he has made to facilitate shared parking arrangements and explained why each is not a viable option. He said that he is not concerned about parking shortages in the summer as people will be more willing to walk, but for events such as Book Across the Bay or other winter events when the hotel will be full and restaurant will be busy this new parking lot will be necessary. His concern was that lack of parking would deter people from coming to his businesses.

Charmaine Swan asked if the Comprehensive Plan identified locations in our downtown where we may have parking shortages even if our downtown as a whole has sufficient

parking. She also asked if public comments were received related to parking during the Comprehensive Planning process.

April Kroner said that a parking analysis was done which typically focuses on the numbers and does not include input about perceptions related to parking.

Mark Gutteter clarified that the conceptual design for the parking lot that was submitted to staff was very preliminary because he did not want to invest significant amounts of money in formal plans if the use would not be approved. He said that he would work with an architect and city staff to develop a plan that promotes efficiency and safety. He also suggested that a buffer could be placed along Main Street such as a small park with seating to ensure that the site is still attractive.

April Kroner explained that the staff recommendation for denial is based on the principals of our Comprehensive Plan, and that the Plan Commission can go along with the recommendation or recommend approval with the condition that the parking lot be designed to meet UDO standards and be submitted for approval by staff or Plan Commission.

Dale Kupczyk spoke in favor of the proposed parking lot, explaining that it would help the Deepwater and be a positive for both local and visiting customers. He also pointed out that many people will not park in a lot owned by another business or know to do so.

Randy Larson spoke in favor of the proposed parking lot, saying that particularly for hotel patrons who will be carrying bags nearby parking is important.

April Kroner clarified that there are seventy parking spaces that will be built as part of the hotel project.

Betsey Harries expressed support for the proposed project. She noted that parking needs in our downtown are not uniform, nor are the areas that are thriving and create greater parking demand. This area is one that has been growing and received more interest and activity. She said that the Comprehensive Plan should guide our planning practices, but also leave room for thoughtful decision-making for special circumstances such as this.

Motion to go out of Public Hearing by David Mettille. Seconded by Mike Amman. Passed unanimously.

Motion to approve Conditional Use Permit with amended conditions by John Beirl. Seconded by Ernie Bliss.
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John Beirl said that he does see a shortage of parking in this area when the restaurant is busy. He said he understands that this lot was just included in the TIF district and therefore the city would like to see development that would contribute to our tax base, but questioned if creating a parking lot would prevent future redevelopment on the site. He also recognized that the property owner has attempted to establish shared parking agreements with neighboring businesses and has been unsuccessful. He noted that our downtown struggles to recruit and retain businesses, and that any regulations we currently have that may stifle successful businesses in the downtown should be reviewed.

April Kroner clarified that her recommendation for denial was based on her responsibility as a professional planner, as best practices for downtowns discourage

parking lots directly on Main Street and encourage promoting walkability and utilizing on-street parking.

Katie Gellatly noted that the applicant indicated willingness to redesign the layout of the proposed parking lot to meet UDO standards and take into account staff recommendations. She asked if April Kroner is aware of any models or would have suggestions that are a combination of parking lot and green space to better integrate it into the downtown. She asked if staff would work with the applicant to redesign the parking lot if approved.

April Kroner explained that there are ways to make it be more aesthetic, but these would still not add property tax value. Since this lot was included in the TIF district the desire would be to encourage development that would create additional tax base.

Katie Gellatly pointed out that the applicant already owns the lot the parking area is being proposed on, so from the perspective of a business owner she understands the frustration of the applicant owning a lot that could address their parking shortage but potentially not being able to do so if not approved by the city.

Mike Amman noted that more parking spaces than rooms were provided for the hotel project, and that the hotel will also likely not always be at maximum occupancy. Therefore, during times of the year when tourism is slower there will likely be plenty of vacant spaces for restaurant and hotel guests.

April Kroner explained that there will be approximately 70 parking spaces for the hotel, with an additional 10 located behind The Alley restaurant.

Mike Amman asked how many spaces there are in the Hair Affair parking lot to the west of the building.

April Kroner said that there are approximately 30 spaces in total.

Mike Amman asked how often this parking lot is full.

April Kroner said she has not seen it full in the past. She also suggested that restaurant and hotel staff be directed to park further away to allow more on- and off-street parking for guests once the hotel opens.

Mike Amman pointed out that underutilized parking currently exists in the Hair Affair parking lot as well as on-street which are within a block of the restaurant/future hotel. He explained that he does not want to give up a prime piece of developable land if there is not truly a need.

Charmaine Swan reflected that the most vibrant downtowns she knows do not have many parking lots and are more focused on walkability than providing nearby parking.

David Mettille acknowledged the need for closer parking for people who are older or have mobility issues, but the new proposed parking lot would not address this issue more effectively than parking that already exists. As the downtown ward councilor, he noted that he is also very aware of the agreements that were made with the creation of the TIF district to encourage appropriate development in the downtown. He agreed that a redesign of the site would be necessary, and recommended that conditions be added that the new design will avoid additional curb cuts on Main Street and will also address egress issues of using the existing vacated alleyway. He explained that the vacated alleyway would need significant repairs if it were to be utilized for guest parking.

Mark Gutteter explained that the people who own the alleyway currently do not have any incentive to repair it, but he would have a vested interest in making repairs if it was determined as the egress point for the parking lot. He stated that the underutilization of the Hair Affair parking lot is a frustration for him as well, as many of his customers park in the co-op parking lot which is not guaranteed to always be an option.

Mayor Lewis recognized and appreciated the applicant's willingness to work with the city to ensure the best layout for the parking lot would be achieved.

Passed 5-2, Charmaine Swan and Mike Amman opposed.

d) Public Hearing and Consideration of a Conditional Use Permit to allow Light Manufacturing at 419 3rd Ave E

Motion to go into Public Hearing by Katie Gellatly. Seconded by David Mettille. Passed unanimously.

Randy Larson explained that the tiny home project previously approved as a conditional use on this site likely will not occur, making the space that World Class would be interested in available. He also noted that this development would provide opportunities for future expansion of his own business in the industrial park.

Bob Peltonen, owner of World Class Precision Products, explained the type of light manufacturing that would occur on site and explained that there are some complications with their current location in Bayfield that has prompted them to explore other options. He said that this site is by far the best option for them.

Charles Beedlow with World Class Precision Products explained that logistically this location is highly suitable for their needs, particularly in retaining and growing their labor force. Many of their current employees commute from the Ashland area, and the smaller population in Bayfield poses challenges for employee recruitment. He noted that the shift in this neighborhood from heavy to light manufacturing is in line with Ashland's Comprehensive Plan and would greatly reduce noise in the neighborhood. To avoid any traffic concerns for neighbors, trucks would use the Ellis and 6th Street entries and would not utilize any on-street parking.

Mayor Lewis asked if there would be any emissions from the site.

Bob Peltonen said that there will be no emissions and no hazardous materials used.

April Kroner said that during her tour of the facility she observed that the machinery is very quiet, allowing for normal conversation within the building. Therefore she does not see any potential noise issues for neighbors.

Katie Gellatly asked if there will still be semi trailers coming to the property.

Charles Beedlow explained that they receive approximately five deliveries per day, the traffic from which would be directed to utilize the Ellis or 6th St entrance to the site.

Mayor Lewis pointed out that 6th Street East will be reconstructed this summer.

April Kroner said that the Ellis entrance could be used during this time.

Bob Peltonen said that he does not have any concerns about this. He also noted that the company has a strong customer base, and that the light manufacturing they do is predominately for recreational equipment. He said that they will have a much better chance of attracting employees from the surrounding Ashland area to meet their workforce needs.

Charles Beedlow explained that they also have an established relationship with WITC's machine operation program.

April Kroner went through the evaluation of approval criteria detailed in the staff report, leading staff to recommend approval with the proposed conditions.

Betsey Harries spoke in favor of this proposed use, stating that it exemplifies the type of light manufacturing that is beneficial to the local economy without negative environmental or neighborhood impacts.

Dale Kupczyk seconded comments made by Betsey Harries, and stated his support for the proposed use.

Motion to go out of Public Hearing by David Mettillie. Seconded by Ernie Bliss. Passed unanimously

Motion to approve Conditional Use Permit by John Beirl. Seconded by David Mettillie.

Mike Amman said he feels this is an appropriate use for the building.

Passed unanimously.

6) Discussion Items

April Kroner explained that an agenda item for "discussion items" will be included in all future Plan Commission agendas. The intent of this is both for staff to be able to bring items forward for discussion, and to also allow Plan Commissioners to bring topics forward for discussion related to the UDO, Comprehensive Plan, or other planning items.

Charmaine Swan asked that an item be added to the next agenda to discuss bike plan implementation.

7) Announcements / reports / comments / questions

8) Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Ernie Bliss. Seconded by Mayor Lewis. Passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30p.m. Minutes by Megan McBride.