

**MINUTES OF THE ZONING COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday, October 22, 2020 - 3:30 p.m.**

PRESENT: Baker, DeJoy, Edgerton, Grill, Hood, Lindeke, Ochs, and Rangel Morales  
STAFF: Bill Dermody, Samantha Langer, Allan Torstenson, and Peter Warner

The meeting was chaired by Commissioner Edgerton. He stated that the chair of the Planning Commission had determined that due to the COVID-19 pandemic it is neither practical nor prudent for the Zoning Committee to meet in person, and therefore the meeting was being conducted remotely, with all members of the Zoning Committee attending the meeting remotely and the public able to submit comments by noon on the day before the meeting and join the meeting remotely.

**Tumblefresh Laundry - 20-079-378 - Conditional use permit to increase parking maximum from 20 to 23 stalls, and floor area ratio (FAR) variance (0.3 required minimum FAR, 0.16 FAR proposed) at 1855 Suburban Ave, W of NW corner at Burns Avenue.**

Bill Dermody presented the staff report with a recommendation of approval with conditions for the conditional use permit and variance. He said District 1 submitted a letter stating concerns about the development, and briefly went over them for the Committee. There were no other letters in support or opposition.

Commissioner Baker had questions regarding the letter submitted by District 1 about competition in the area and the District Councils Community Plan. In response, Mr. Dermody said that we do not have a specific policy provision that encourages or discourages competition. A laundromat is allowed as a permitted use at this location. He said that the Community Plan calls for general intensification of uses and a shift from auto oriented to pedestrian oriented development. Staff decided to look at this development as a transition from the existing situation to the planned future. The Committee will need to judge how this transition fits with City policy.

Peter Warner, City Attorney, said that the Zoning Committee does not consider economic competition.

In response to Commissioner Syed, Mr. Dermody said that the only lot that this development is setup to share parking with is the vacant lot to the north that is not developed. There is no shared parking agreement in place or anticipated to either the east or west of this development.

Commissioner Rangel Morales stated he needed to leave the meeting.

Commissioner Grill said that there seems to be an excess of parking in the area. She asked if the applicant investigated shared parking agreements with the neighbors.

Mr. Dermody said they requested that they contact Seestedts, but he does not know the result of that conversation. He deferred to the applicant.

In response to Commissioner Lindeke, Mr. Dermody said the property was previously a display area for the car dealership to the east that closed around 12 years ago.

Brady Busselman, Civil Engineer with Sambatek, provided some history on the project. He said that their initial intent was to split the lot into approximately .7 acres occupied by the Tumble Fresh Laundromat and leaving a second parcel to the north of about 1.3 acres. However, they ran into a complication in working with the City's Engineering Department. The sanitary sewer stub to serve this site was not from a public roadway it was through a private easement and they had concerns about serving more than one lot with a sewer that was through another site. They initially submitted for Site Plan Review in February 2020 and received comments in April that indicated that they needed to work with the City's Engineering and Building department on the sewer issue. The solution after multiple meetings is to be flexible and instead of splitting this lot, they will convert it to remain a single lot with a common interest community plat to be recorded following approvals which would result in a single lot owned by a single association. Mr. Busselman said they did meet with the Southeast Community Organization early in the process and they received feedback and as a result some of the actions taken were to shift the building closer to Suburban Avenue and to add a sidewalk for pedestrian connectivity. They should have been notified through Site Plan Review in February and April. There has been history and opportunity to review and comment prior to this current meeting. Mr. Busselman said shared parking with the neighbor to the east would not be practical. The laundromat will have high capacity equipment that can hold a lot and it would be difficult for customers to walk a longer distance across a busy driveway with load of laundry. Convenience is key for the customers.

Ken Rohlf, President of Linn Companies, 7616 Currell Blvd. Woodbury, MN, said he agrees with everything Mr. Busselman said regarding shared parking. He said they did not make a specific ask of the neighbor to the east. They are in favor of committing to a shared parking arrangement with the property that will be to the north of them and welcome that as a condition.

In response to Commissioner Lindeke, Mr. Busselman said that they are proposing two bicycle stalls. He said the high capacity machines will hold around ten loads and they have been very popular at their other locations. Mr. Rohlf added that they have washer banks that range in sizes. The biggest is their super washer that can hold between ten and thirteen loads of laundry.

Commissioner Lindeke asked if they did a market analysis and noted that there are two existing laundromats within a half mile of their location. Mr. Rohlf said that they did analyze and study the area. This is a large investment both in real estate and constructing the building. Their company has been around for fifty years and they are careful in their investments. They believe that the patrons will support the business.

In response to Commissioner DeJoy, Mr. Rohlf said their general data suggests that about 20% of people place laundry and leave, but about 80% of people remain on site. They do not have an attendant that is always present. They have a service manager who visits the sites and cleaners are on site between one to four times a day depending on how busy the location is.

Elliot Stendel, Architect, was available for questions.

No one spoke in support or opposition. The public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Lindeke said that he was not convinced by the parking demand study that was submitted with the application. He also said that a lot of the businesses in this area have excess parking that is not utilized, and unnecessary parking has impacts on the environment. He is not in favor of increasing the parking stalls to 23.

Commissioner Grill said she agrees with Commissioner Lindeke and is not in favor of increasing the parking stalls to 23. She said a lot of laundromats do not have a parking lot that large and some do not have any parking at all.

In response to Commissioner Grill, Mr. Dermody said there is not on-street parking on Suburban Avenue.

Commissioner Baker moved approval of the conditional use permit to increase parking maximum from 20 to 23 stalls, and floor area variance subject to conditions. Commissioner DeJoy seconded the motion.

Commissioner Lindeke said that parking lots built for retail in the City are often over built on purpose to symbolize accessibility without doing anything. Parking lots all over the City are never at full capacity. Turn over at laundromats is much higher and he is not convinced by the parking study submitted and noted that parking studies are often flawed.

Commissioner Baker said that one of the Committees ways to assess parking is through having a parking demand analysis of the property and the applicant has provided one. He said that laundromats in this area are useful and needed, and need to provide space, accessibility, and new technology for the community.

Commissioner Edgerton asked the staff opinion of the parking analysis that was prepared and submitted by the applicant.

Mr. Dermody said he believes that parking studies tend to be flawed, but at this point we do not have any other information to provide and staff has no reason to doubt the study. There is extra sensitivity to the amount of parking given the direction this area is intended to go, but this area was developed in the 1960's and is currently auto-oriented. For businesses to do well at this point, there is a reliance for most people to use vehicles.

Commissioner Grill said that the Comprehensive Plan and local Area Plans are looking to improve this area from the current auto-oriented use and make it a more transit- oriented. This use's additional parking does not help us in that direction. Twenty parking spaces is already a lot and to go over maximum parking stalls is something she struggles with and will not be able to support. She noted that there is a transit stop outside of this location and bike parking will be available that was discounted in the documents submitted.

Commissioner DeJoy said that the location of the laundromat is across the street from several apartment buildings, but it is unlikely that people will be carrying their laundry across the street – they will most likely be using vehicles. She would be opposed if this were to increase from 20 to 30, but she does not see an issue for three additional spaces. It is a business that requires people to use cars to unload their laundry. The other laundromat in the area that was mentioned

in District Council's letter is on the other side of I-94 and in a neighborhood that has a lot of multiunit housing and she believes there is room for both businesses.

The motion failed by a vote of 3-4-0.

Commissioner Lindeke said that Finding 4(a) was not met because the requested conditional use, surface parking that exceeds 20 spaces, is contrary to plan elements that encourage pedestrian-oriented development and discourage auto-oriented uses.

Commissioner Lindeke moved denial of the conditional use permit to increase parking maximum from 20 to 23 stalls due to Finding 4(a) not being met, and approval of the floor area ratio variance (0.3 required minimum FAR, 0.16 FAR proposed). Commissioner Grill seconded the motion.

Commissioner Baker stated his concerns with finding that we have a flawed traffic study. This is something we have asked of applicants to submit in the past and we as a Committee use the information submitted. Now it seems to be we are picking and choosing what we like and what we do not like. He wants to make sure that the Committee is cognizant of the people in the neighborhood and what they potentially need and how they are likely to get to and from the laundromat.

Commissioner Edgerton said he is uncomfortable with voting against the parking increase. We rely on traffic/parking studies like these and if we have expertise in an area, we can question it, but in this case, he doesn't feel qualified to question the parking study. It is difficult to go against the parking study without any other basis or expertise. We historically have relied on these studies submitted by the applicants. He said that we need to also consider the needs of those who would use the facility. It is not always convenient to go to the laundromat using transit and people will be using vehicles.

Commissioner Lindeke said he is an expert in this topic and has a Ph.D. in Urban Geography and parking studies are different than traffic studies. The Institute for Transportation Engineers (ITE) puts together parking demand studies, and the correlation between land use and parking demand is extremely small. The study submitted to us states clearly that the ITE does not have guidance and instead what we are seeing is anecdotal information from the other establishments of this business. His inclination in this instance is to go with the parking maximum allowed by the Zoning Code because the data the provided did not make a case for 23 parking spots.

Commissioner Grill said that when we talk about these issues we are talking about the future. The more parking that we build the more parking we will have potentially for decades. Every spot that we add is something to consider. She thinks the maximum in Saint Paul has always seems high and thinks only keeping the parking at the maximum is an area of compromise.

Mr. Dermody stated that Finding 3 in the staff report addresses the parking study and Commissioner Lindeke's motion did not change that Finding. Finding 3 in the staff report accepts the parking study and the stated demand for 23 vehicles.

Commissioner Lindeke and Commissioner Grill accepted changing Finding 3 to state that the application contains a trip generation and parking demand analysis that does not demonstrate a need for 23 parking spaces for the laundromat use as a friendly amendment.

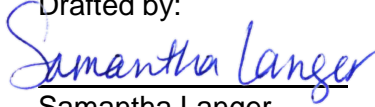
Commissioner Hood for reasons stated by Commissioner Lindeke.

Commissioner Syed for reasons stated by Commissioner Lindeke.

Commissioner Grill for reasons stated by Commissioner Lindeke.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 4-3-0.

Adopted                      Yeas - 4              Nays - 3 (Baker, Edgerton, DeJoy)      Abstained - 0

Drafted by:  
  
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Recording Secretary

Submitted by:  
  
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Approved by:  
  
Dan Edgerton (Nov 23, 2020 10:53 CST)  
Dan Edgerton  
Chair









# 20-079-378 Tumblefresh Laundry minutes-BD

Final Audit Report

2020-11-23

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