

**Saint Paul Planning Commission
City Hall Conference Center**

Minutes January 20, 2023

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the city of Saint Paul was held Friday, January 20, 2023, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present: Mmes. Grill, Kantner, Mitchell, Presley, Starling, Thomas, Underwood, and Messrs. Rangel Morales, Hackney, Holst, Hood, Reilly, Risberg, and Tagihoff.

Commissioners Absent: Messrs. Khadar, McMurtrey, and Moore.

Also Present: Luis Pereira, Planning Director; PED staff Kady Dadlez, Karoline Finlay, Bill Dermody, Josh Williams, Allan Torstenson, and Marilyn Rosendahl; DSI staff Ross Haddow, Tia Anderson, and Andrew Hogg.

I. Approval of minutes from January 6, 2023, Planning Commission meeting

Minutes were approved unanimously.

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Rangel Morales announced that there is an open call for committee chairs and committee members.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Luis Pereira said the PED Leadership team will be participating in some strategic workshops, reviewing the department mission statement and discussing department priorities with an eye to aligning them across department divisions. The preliminary Planning Commission work plan will be discussed at the annual meeting to take place in two weeks on February 3, 2023.

IV. Public Hearing: River Corridor & Floodplain Overlay Zoning Amendments - Item from the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee. (*Allan Torstenson, 651-266-6579*)

Allan Torstenson gave a brief staff presentation with background on the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) and the proposed zoning amendments ([Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Zoning | Saint Paul Minnesota \(stpaul.gov\)](#)). He noted that the new MRCCA overlay zoning districts are set by the new state MRCCA rules and most of the language in the draft ordinance is also mandatory, set by the MRCCA rules. The city can adopt ordinance language that is more restrictive than the state MRCCA rules, but not less restrictive.

Chair Rangel Morales read the rules of procedure for the public hearing ([Sec. 394.26 MN Statutes](#)). Notice of the public hearing was published in the Saint Paul Pioneer Press on Tuesday, January 10, 2023 and sent to the citywide Early Notification System list of recipients and other interested parties.

Twelve members of the public spoke.

1. **Kiki Sonnen, 1758 Hewitt Ave., St. Paul.** Ms. Sonnen spoke in favor of the proposed amendments, especially the requirement for bird-safe glass, and said the bird-safe glass requirement should be expanded to cover all glass on big buildings.
2. **Deb Alper, 1835 Fairmount Ave., St. Paul.** Ms. Alper spoke in favor of the proposed amendments, the bird-safe glass requirement and building height limits. Keeping the river corridor and city attractive adds value to the city and helps build the tax base.
3. **Tom Dimond, 2119 Skyway Dr., St. Paul.** Mr. Dimond is in favor of the proposed amendments and spoke about the importance of protecting river views from Kellogg Boulevard. The city had the vision to remove a whole set of buildings to open up views of the river from Kellogg Boulevard, and there was a plan to do much more. The area across from the City Hall and Court House was a park. The Civic Center Ramp and old Ramsey County Jail were built below the grade of Kellogg Boulevard to maintain river views from Kellogg Boulevard. Nothing should be built above the grade of Kellogg Boulevard on the river side of Kellogg Boulevard.
4. **Colleen O'Connor Toberman, Friends of the Mississippi, 101 E. 5th St., St. Paul.** Ms. O'Connor Toberman supports the proposed amendments, which are very thoughtful and comprehensive. She feels that the requirement for bird safe glass could be stronger and that the glass/window size minimum for bird-safe glass requirements to apply should be eliminated. Connecting downtown to the river is a priority. It's correct to limit height in the urban core, but absolute height limits could be eliminated to alleviate concerns provided a conditional use permit (CUP) is required. Keep the CUP requirement.

In response to a question by Commissioner Reilly about what other cities are doing, Ms. O'Connor Toberman said St. Paul's downtown bluff is unique. Other cities have CUP requirements. Some requirements are imposed by the MRCCA Rules and some are optional. Minneapolis didn't add specific height limits in the urban core, but they don't have a downtown bluff like St. Paul.

5. **Trista MatasCastillo, Ramsey County Board of Commissioners Chair, 15 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul.** Commissioner MatasCastillo passed out a brochure describing the proposed RiversEdge project and asked the Planning Commission to reconsider the staff recommendation. The County agrees with the testimony so far, but it is also critical to build housing and our tax base. Ramsey County needs thirty-five thousand housing units. She said the RiversEdge project starts with a park and a cap over the railroad that would provide access to the river and referred to renderings of the project. The County is asking that the City not restrict building heights in the downtown core. The County agrees with the bird-safe glass requirement.

In response to a question by Chair Rangel Morales about how the proposed height limits conflict with the County's vision for the RiversEdge project, Commissioner MatasCastillo passed out additional handouts comparing existing building heights, proposed Riversedge building heights, and the proposed new MRCCA building height limits.

Commissioner Mitchell requested information on RiversEdge project community engagement, and Commissioner MatasCastillo said they would compile that information for the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Reilly requested information about engagement with the Native American community, and Commissioner MatasCastillo said Ramsey County has a relationship Native American tribes.

6. **Joe Spencer, St. Paul Downtown Alliance President, 401 Robert St. N., St. Paul.** Mr. Spencer spoke about the reputation of downtown St. Paul being a ghost town after 5 p.m., which isn't true anymore. Downtown St. Paul has doubled its population in the last ten years. It is a world class destination. The Downtown Alliance's vision is for a place that is alive with people and has a goal to triple the downtown population to 30,000 residents. Building housing on surface lots and projects like RiversEdge are important for increasing the downtown population. He is concerned about the height limits for downtown and asked that the height restrictions be reconsidered.

In response to a question by Commissioner Kantner, Mr. Spencer said the Friends of the Mississippi suggestion to eliminate absolute height limits but keep the CUP requirement might work depending on the details.

7. **Josh Olson, Ramsey County Community and Economic Development.** Mr. Olson said the draft ordinance would create net new height restrictions downtown. He noted the existing height limits and said they would need to come to the city for action on that to move forward, but the proposed new height limits would be a substantial deviation from the existing height limits. He said that Ramsey County has a working relationship with the City and has for many years been trying to figure out what's possible. The County took down the old jail and West Publishing buildings, opening up views of the river.

Mr. Olson said the AECOM RiversEdge concept still needs a lot of work. Community engagement is a work in progress for the County, and they are working on engagement with the Native American community, too. A development proposal for the site from a tribe was considered but the county went with the AECOM proposal because it's a broader vision.

In response to questions by Commissioner Hood about the number of housing units and project phasing, Mr. Olson said housing is the strongest market for the project and that buildings 1A and 1B would be first. Tower 1A would be 400+ units of rental housing and Tower 1B could be rental or ownership housing. The other two towers are proposed to be more commercial, a mix of uses to be determined. They would like to attract office space, but that's more speculative. He noted market disruptions and said AECOM has been slow to attract new office space both pre- and post-pandemic. Likely there will be smaller tenants. The project would not go forward if they were limited to a building height of 200 feet; the County would have to re-envision the project and their relationship with AECOM.

Commissioner Reilly asked if Ramsey County would share their community engagement and stakeholders list. Mr. Olson said the stakeholder's group includes district councils, BOMA, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Alliance, Friends of the Mississippi, Metropolitan Council, and other government stakeholders. Commissioner Reilly asked for more clarity about the stakeholder groups when they come back to the Planning Commission in the future.

Commissioner Hackney said he is a downtown resident and asked about the feasibility of commercial space since there's a lot of vacant commercial space downtown, designing the buildings to fit the downtown context, and commercial being a better fit elsewhere downtown.

Mr. Olson responded by saying that AECOM is doing a feasibility study, but the buildings would not be built if they were limited to a building height of 200 feet.

In response to a question by Commissioner Kantner about bird-safe glass, Mr. Olson said that would be up to the developer to address. There have been some crazy architectural proposals and the developer would come to the Planning Commission to receive input on design.

8. **Rick Howden, Ramsey County Community and Economic Development**, discussed how they have addressed outreach and inclusion concerns. 2020's Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion Vision Plan along with CEI and NEOO Partners have reformed how the County handles the community engagement process. The County has more opportunities to work with communities in designing the park. Bold access to the river is a priority for Ramsey County commissioners.
9. **Dawn Georgiogff, 932 Fairmount Ave., St. Paul**, testified in favor of the proposed amendments, especially the requirement for bird-safe glass.
10. **Meg Grove, 2198 Goodrich Ave., St. Paul**, noted the University of St. Thomas announcement this week about development of a new facility and urged the Planning Commission to do what it can to not allow that type of development.
11. **Kathy McGuire, 2203 Fairmount Ave., St. Paul**, said she is a member of the Mac-Groveland Community Council. She asked why the MRCCA proposal was not sent to the community council. Their executive director was told it was not likely to affect the Mac-Groveland area much. She feels that there is constant over-development in the city and that it doesn't make sense due to population decline. She mentioned the city comprehensive plan talking about keeping aging people in place. She asked for the most restrictive ordinance language and postponing a decision on the ordinance until the University of St. Thomas details are worked out. In response to a question from Commissioner Starling, Ms. McGuire said more people are leaving the Twin Cities than are moving in, and she thinks the Met. Council's projections are high.
12. **Winston Taylor, 1712 Palace Ave., St. Paul**, said he is a lover of cities and noted that Chicago had the foresight to preserve its lakefront. St. Paul is at a crossroads. It's in our best interest to protect our riverfront. St. Paul needs to "wake up," take a cue from Minneapolis and have the courage to limit development along the riverfront for the long-term public good versus short-term private profit.

MOTION: *Commissioner Holst moved to close the public hearing, refer the matter to its Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee, and hold the record open for additional written testimony until 4:30 p.m. on Monday, January 23, 2023. Commissioner Hackney seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.*

V. Zoning Committee

~~#22-126-621-1135 Geranium Ave. E. CUP – Conditional use permit for supportive housing facility serving 81 residents 135 Geranium Ave. E., NW corner at Agate Street RM2, District Council 6, Ward 5 (Marilyn Rosendahl, 651/266-6606)~~ **MOVED TO JANUARY 26, 2023 ZONING COMMITTEE MEETING**

Commissioner Reilly reported that the neighbors wanted more information regarding the conditional use permit. The applicant in the matter agreed to their request. The neighborhood council (NENO) has a land use meeting scheduled for January 24, 2023. The Zoning Committee voted unanimously to move this matter to their next meeting on January 26, 2023.

#22-126-697 1109 N. Hazel St. CUP – Conditional use permit to expand adult care home from 24 to 54 guest rooms, with modification of the minimum lot area. 1109 Hazel St. N., SW corner at Jessamine Avenue. District Council 2, Ward 6. (Bill Dermody, 651/266-6617).

Commissioner Reilly gave the report. The application for a conditional use permit is for a home for Hmong elders. The CUP is necessary to facilitate how they want to live with each other as it is different from the

traditional nursing home setting. The Zoning Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the conditional use permit.

MOTION: *Commissioner Reilly moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

VI. Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee

Proposal for a commercial development district at 1079 Rice St. (*Marilyn Rosendahl, 651/266-6606*).

Commissioner Presley gave the report. There is a staff recommendation to approve the creation of a commercial development district at 1079 Rice St. The facility's owners would like to create an event center at this location. A liquor license cannot be applied for unless there is a commercial development district. Ross Haddow from DSI reported to the commissioners. Ross Haddow stated that this is a multi-faceted process. A commercial development district is required for a non-restaurant to get a liquor license. The owner of the building does not have the cash flow to bring the on-site kitchen up to code. He also reported that prior to a City Council hearing there would be a twenty-day comment period for the public. This is to address Commissioner Mitchell's concern regarding the state of events on Rice Street. Commissioner Holst gave some background of the area as well. Commissioner Holst stated that this address used to be the location of the "Klub Haus." The Klub Haus was an event center for weddings, celebrations, and funerals. The previous owner was "grandfathered" in with his license. He has since passed away. The venue is now called the "Hi-Hi." The current use is like the Klub Haus. The current owner has the support of the neighborhood. Commissioner Underwood commented that she enjoyed the "Hi-Hi." recently.

MOTION: *Commissioner Presley moved to approve the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee's recommendation to find the commercial development district at 1079 Rice Street as consistent with the comprehensive plan.*

VII. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Risberg reported that Transportation Committee has two information items on its agenda for the next scheduled meeting on Monday, January 23, 2023. The information items are: 1. EV Carshare Update and 2. The 2023 Scooter Sharing. These informational items are on the Transportation Committee webpage and available for anyone to review.

VIII. Communications-Nominations Committee

Commissioner Underwood reported that the committee met this morning before the Planning Commission meeting.

IX. Task Force/Liaison Reports

Planning Commission Chair Rangel Morales asked if there were any task force reports. Commissioner Underwood reported that the Riverview Task Force has a meeting scheduled for February. Commissioner Mitchell reported that the Community Engagement has a meeting scheduled for February 8, 2023.

X. Old Business

XI. New business

XII. Adjournment

10 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by
Karoline Finlay, Planning Commission Secretary
Planning and Economic Development Department,
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,

Approved February 3, 2023

(Date)



Luis Pereira

Planning Director



Luis Rangel Morales
Planning Commission Chair