Saint Paul Planning Commission
City Hall Conference Center
15 Kellogg Boulevard West

Minutes April 15, 2016

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, April 15, 2016, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present:	Mmes. DeJoy, McMahon, Merrigan, Padilla, Reveal, Wencl; and Messrs. Edgerton, Gelgelu, Lindeke, Makarios, Nelson, Ochs, and Oliver.
Commissioners Absent:	Mmes. *Shively, *Underwood, *Wang, and Messrs. *Ward, and *Wickiser. *Excused
Also Present:	Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Allan Torstenson, Bill Dermody, Jamie Radel, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes April 1, 2016.

Chair Wencl announced that the minutes are not available at this time. However they will be ready for approval at the next Planning Commission meeting.

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Wencl had no announcements.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Donna Drummond announced the Comprehensive Plan kick off events. A flyer was emailed to commissioners with a request to forward to other individuals and groups who may want to attend. There are three events in May on the 10th, 11th and 14th. Ms. Drummond also announced that there are 39 applications to the Neighborhood STAR program. The applications are requesting over $5.8 million in assistance from a pool of $1.7 million in available funds. The Planning Commission will be providing comments to the Neighborhood STAR Board as to Comp. Plan conformance. This will be discussed at the next Comprehensive Planning Committee meeting on April 26th. Finally, last Wednesday the City Council approved without any changes the Congregate Living Zoning Amendments as recommended by the Planning Commission. This was a major study and was really great work by the Commission and lead staff Bill Dermody.

Commissioner Appreciation

Chair Wencl read a resolution thanking Commissioner Padilla for her service on the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Padilla thanked everyone and said that this was an absolutely amazing experience

working with staff and this wonderful team of commissioners. She enjoyed listening to everyone's opinions and gained mutual respect for other commissioners on a lot of issues by listening and learning. This was not an easy decision to make and she hopes that whoever takes her spot can give it their full attention. She is looking forward to her new journey and moving ahead.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the resolution honoring Commissioner Padilla. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

IV. Zoning Committee

SITE PLAN REVIEW – List of current applications. *(Larry Zangs, 651/266-9082)*

Four items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, April 19, 2016:

- Harding High School Pavement Rehabilitation – Replace pavement for two existing roads on the east and west side of the school at 1540 6th Street. (SPR#16-024539)
- Conley Parking Lot – Remove existing building and redevelop as parking for property at 1599 Selby. 201 North Snelling (SPR#16-024542)
- St. Paul Police Dept. CSM Facility (Radio Shop) – New communication services and maintenance building at 1675 Energy Park Drive. (SPR#16-024911)
- Wilson Ridge II – Three story 115 unit apartment building with 73 underground parking spaces & 177 surface spaces at 1256 Wilson Avenue. (SPR#16-025173)

OLD BUSINESS

#16-016-050 Moises Romo – Reestablishment of nonconforming use as a triplex. 419 Sherburne Avenue between Arundel and Western. *(Tony Johnson, 651/266-6620)*

Commissioner Reveal announced that this case was laid over to May 5.

#15-138-929 Mike and Joelle Olson – Establishment of nonconforming use as a triplex. 897 Goodrich Avenue between Victoria Street South and Milton Street. *(Jamie Radel, 651/266-6614)*

Commissioner Ochs said the Olsons have made a significant effort to try to prove that their property was being used as a triplex, and it seems they were unaware of the illegal status of the third unit at the time of purchase. He questioned the harm of approving their application to establish legal nonconforming status as a triplex, suggesting that it meets the policy of adding density and more amenities that are beneficial for the city.

Commissioner Reveal said that the Planning Commission must determine whether or not this application meets the legal requirements for establishment of legal nonconforming status as a triplex. Both staff and the Zoning Committee found that required findings are not met.

Commissioner Thao asked whether an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) could be added as a third

unit on this property if the ADU ordinance under discussion for the Central Corridor was applied citywide.

Jamie Radel, PED staff, said that the ADU ordinance would just apply to one-family homes. Minneapolis allows ADUs with duplexes, but that is not how the ADU ordinance for the Central Corridor is currently drafted.

Commissioner Nelson noted letters from neighboring property owners against legalizing a third unit. While reasonably providing for nonconforming uses that were conforming prior to current zoning, he pointed out that the intent of the zoning code is to bring nonconforming uses into conformance with the rules of the district.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Reveal moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to deny the establishment of nonconforming use. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

NEW BUSINESS

#16-020-352 HRA (952 Farrington) – Rezone from B2 Community Business to T2 Traditional Neighborhood. 952 Farrington Street between Front and Stinson. *(Jamie Radel, 651/266-6614)*

MOTION: ***Commissioner Reveal moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the rezoning. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

Commissioner Nelson announced the item on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, April 21, 2016.

V. Neighborhood Planning Committee

District 1 Community Plan – Approve resolution recommending plan adoption to the Mayor and City Council. *(Bill Dermody, 651/266-6617)*

Bill Dermody, PED staff noted that the recommended changes from the previous round have been incorporated into the document. The Neighborhood Planning Committee is recommending that most of the public comment and requests be made as changes in the document with the exception of the two conflicting comments regarding Totem Town where no changes in either direction that were requested are recommended by the committee. Totem Town is recommended for a public process to determine what to do with it and also there is no recommendation for a moratorium to be put in place.

Commissioner Lindeke asked what Totem Town is.

Mr. Dermody said that Totem Town is a teen reformatory corrections facility, a residential facility in a wooded area on the east side of Saint Paul north of Battle Creek Park. The Highwood Development Policies, which are not part of the Comprehensive Plan but were adopted by City Council, says that it should be a park. The question is whether to accept the Highwood Development Policies, which is what one piece of testimony requested, or have a new public process, which is what the Neighborhood Planning Committee, staff, and District 1 have recommended. District 1 actually wanted to go one step farther and introduce a moratorium on development. The property is owned by Ramsey County, which intends to close it at some point

in time in the next few years, and it could be up for sale. Ramey County has not made any statements as to what it wishes to do with the property.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Oliver moved on behalf of the Neighborhood Planning Committee to approve the resolution recommending that the District 1 Community Plan be adopted by the Mayor and City Council. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

District 6 Plan Amendments – Release amended North End District 6 Plan for public review and set a public hearing on May 27, 2016. *(Jamie Radel, 651/266-6614)*

Jamie Radel, PED staff gave a brief presentation which can be seen on the web page at: http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission

MOTION: ***Commissioner Oliver moved on behalf of the Neighborhood Planning Committee to release the amended District 6 Plan for public review and set a public hearing on May 27, 2016. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

District 6 Natural Resources Inventory – Informational presentation by Mark Doneux, Administrator, and Nate Zwonitzer, Urban Best Management Practice Specialist, Capitol Region Watershed District.

Mark Doneux, Administrator with Capitol Region Watershed District, presented on the first natural resources inventory they have done with the City of Saint Paul and District 6. They wanted to do this plan to document the existing natural resource conditions that are in the area. They wanted to identify particular areas that would be important to protect or improve. They also wanted to develop management strategies that would align with land use plans and development plans in order to inform future land use and development decisions.

Nate Zwonitzer, Urban Best Management Practice Specialist with Capitol Region Watershed District, talked about the history of the project area and the findings of report.

Mark Doneux and Nate Zwonitzer's power point presentation can be seen on the web page at: http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission.

Commissioner Reveal asked if anyone in the City is actively investigating and negotiating with railroads to get them to vacate low use or no use properties.

Mr. Doneux said they are not actively pursuing rail line corridor acquisitions.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, is not aware that there is anyone who has that as part of their work program. She said the City works with the railroads as individual situations come up where it makes sense to look at another use for a rail line. The most prominent one right now that the City is looking at is the CP rail spur into the Ford site. There are probably staff people in the Parks Department who could speak more about that and what those opportunities might be.

Commissioner Reveal said it might be worth thinking about. Also, where is the responsibility for implementing some of these ideas? Who takes the lead in figuring out whether these acquisitions are feasible and how to get them funded and done.

Mr. Zwonitzer said that they did have some strategies identified in the plan. It could be land owner cooperation, education and outreach which is something they do a lot of. There could be opportunities for strategic acquisition or easements or developing policies that reinforces some of these strategies.

Commissioner Lindeke used to live near this neighborhood on Western Avenue. In the light industrial area there are these little pocket wetlands and natural areas along side of industrial or large automobile salvage businesses. These land uses that seem incongruous can work together to control pollution and work in harmony together. This is really important work and he is glad to see them doing it in areas that are often very much overlooked by everybody.

Commissioner Thao asked how often these inventories are done and what is the impetus for them?

Mr. Zwonitzer said that this is the first one they have done at this detail and this kind of scope. It is something that they are interested in doing more regularly and on a larger scale. This was almost kind of a test area to see how to do an inventory like this in an urban area and how it fits into the planning process.

Commissioner Ochs asked how they determined that there was a historical wetland.

Mr. Zwonitzer said that there is a national wetland inventory that includes areas that were discovered historically and documented and put into data bases. So we can access those data bases and overlay that information on top of current conditions to see where that overlap is.

Commissioner Ochs asked if they are using the (NWI) National Wetland Inventory.

Mr. Zwonitzer replied yes, and when they were out there they found some areas they were not expecting to see such as little pockets of wetland features and plants in the middle of a field of dry prairie plants. These were not in standing water but it was very clear that the water table was very close to the surface otherwise those plants would not have been there.

Commissioner Ochs asked if the watershed district has any tools or programs that would help property owners restore these gems and any government incentives to allow them to do that. Most of it is abandoned and neglected land that was not developed so how can we get land owners to value these resources?

Mr. Zwonitzer said that they have several grant programs available. These are primarily focused storm water management and water resources but they don't limit it to just those. If there was an interest and an opportunity to provide high quality habitat by an interested land owner they would definitely work with them to develop a plan and eventually provide funding to implement that plan.

Commissioner Edgerton said natural resource inventories are done in places across the metro area and state. A lot of times they are in areas that have more open space, so this is unusual in that way because this is a natural resource inventory in a very urban area with different kinds of challenges. In some of the other inventories they are looking at preserving large spaces for habitat and wild life corridors, but here it is broken up a lot. In Saint Paul we have to look at it differently because it's so developed and if we can create some connections between these areas

that would be great. These small areas provide great value in a different way because unlike northern Minnesota there are a lot of people here to benefit from this. We have to look at them differently and realize that it's not some large native area but these little areas that can be preserved for both wild life habitat and for the people that are all around. How do we coordinate with the watershed district in terms of planning and zoning to preserve these areas?

Ms. Drummond said that there is an opportunity here to do a more in-depth area plan that would look at how to maximize these natural resources with potential land use changes or future development. That is something staff has thought about. It is not officially on the work program yet but building off of this study would be a great next step. It is difficult because a lot of these properties have not been developed because they have these wetlands and it would take some work to develop them, which is good for the city in that they are still preserved. But those property owners do have property rights under zoning, and getting the resources to either acquire some of these pieces or potentially working with property owners for some kind of land donation would be possible strategies. There may be a tax write off for that kind of donation. Exploring strategies like that more in-depth would be a good part of that study.

Chair Wencl noted the problem with buckthorn removal, given her experience as a property owner who has spent a considerable amount of money trying to eradicate buckthorn on her property. Some of the buckthorn became almost established trees take up a large amount of space. This is likely a problem for some of these areas and are you identifying that?

Mr. Zwonitzer said they have identified the locations where buckthorn is an issue. It can completely overrun the under story of vegetation. Buckthorn is very difficult to eradicate and it takes years of being very persistent to get rid of it. There are some other invasive species that are showing up too. Japanese knotweed has been identified in a few locations. That is just as difficult to eradicate and just as aggressive. It is something to definitely keep an eye on and try to get on top of them before they become a much larger issue.

Commissioner DeJoy asked if the study was available online?

Mr. Zwonitzer believes it is on the web site, but if not he will make sure it is on their web site.

Commissioner Reveal said that she did not see any maps of ownership to determine whether lands in the study area are public or private.

Mr. Zwonitzer does not think they looked at that and he believes she is right that there is very little if any public land. It is mostly right-of-way public land.

Commissioner Reveal would like to see zoning and ownership information when looking at a study such as this.

Commissioner Edgerton said that the City is updating the Comprehensive Plan and it is a normal thing for communities to have a natural resource inventory done at the start of a comprehensive planning process and then factor that information into its planning. We should keep that in mind as we move forward with the Comprehensive Plan update.

Commissioner Oliver announced the item on the agenda at the next Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting is on Wednesday, April 20, 2016.

VI. Transportation Committee

Street Design Manual & Complete Streets Action Plan – Release draft for public review and set a public hearing on May 27, 2016. *(Anton Jerve, 651/266-6567)*

Bill Dermody, filling in for Anton Jerve, gave a presentation, which can be viewed at: http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission

Commissioner Nelson noted a parking conflict with pedestrians at the new Whole Foods at Selby and Snelling. He suggested we need to work on enforcement in situations like that, and with walkway clearances around outdoor cafés.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, said that in general in terms of enforcement a lot of City requirements get enforced by people in the community noticing something is wrong and complaining, because there just is not enough staff to proactively go out to look for problems. The way to register a complaint or concern that should be checked out is to call the City's information and complaint number at (651)266-8989; it will then get routed to the right staff person to check it out.

Commissioner Lindeke said that he downloaded the Saint Paul Connect app on his smart phone, which is easy to use. He used it to take photos and report cars parked in bike lanes on Como Avenue.

Commissioner Edgerton asked how the Street Design Manual looks at traffic counts around schools at pick-up/drop-off times.

Commissioner Ochs said that he has had some experience with JJ Hill School on Selby Avenue. He was concerned about safe routes to school and how the buses were doing their drop-offs. The process started with the school administrator and school staff and then branched out to bring the Public Works Department to see how they could help. They had their own small community planning process, with a design charrette, and then began to work outward to see what kind of resources were available. As a result he did not get his full vision realized, but there were some good improvements in how traffic management was handled around the school.

Ms. Drummond added that when a school is newly built, during site plan review they look at things like stacking and drop-off, though a lot of these charter schools go into existing buildings so there is no review. In the case of existing sites, pursuing something like what Commissioner Ochs did would probably be the way to go.

Commissioner Edgerton said that the RSVP (Residential Street Vitality Program) will be redoing his street so there is going to be more chaos coming this year. Does RSVP have a built-in process to ensure that Complete Streets concepts are incorporated and that we are looking for opportunities for bike lanes and for pedestrians? What is the process for doing that?

Mr. Dermody said they do have a review internally with Public Works staff. Anytime there is a reconstruction or restriping through Public Works, we now systematically look at opportunities for improving the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Chair Wencl said being in Naples, Florida for two months and seeing the bikes and streets there she feels we are a little ahead of them. They don't really use the term "complete streets" – and actually we are ahead of them in terms of providing for bike lanes. Chair Wencl said that she would not ride her bike on their streets.

Commissioner Merrigan asked about why we are scheduling two public hearings on May 27th and whether there is some urgency.

Ms. Drummond replied that the Planning Commission bylaws say that the Planning Commission shall have no more than two public hearings at a meeting. In this case there probably will not be a lot of testimony at either one of these hearings. With the June 10th meeting tentatively scheduled for a public hearing on the Snelling Midway Master Plan and stadium site plan, any delay in the May 27 hearings would actually set them back a month.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Lindeke moved on behalf of the Transportation Committee to release the plan for public review and set a public hearing on May 27, 2016. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

Commissioner Lindeke announced the items on the agenda at their next meeting on Monday, April 18, 2016.

VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Commissioner Thao reported that at their meeting on Tuesday they talked about the engagement process for the Comprehensive Plan update and the Snelling Midway Master Plan and stadium site plan for a June 10th public hearing. That will be on the next Planning Commission meeting agenda. Commissioner Thao also announced that the Neighborhood STAR applications will be on the agenda at their next meeting on Tuesday, April 26, 2016.

VIII. Communications Committee

None.

IX. Task Force/Liaison Reports

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

Commissioner Merrigan would like to request that when memos or staff reports are reissued and some of the language is changed that there actually be strike-outs and underlining, so they can tell what changes were made. That will make it easier to see what the changes are.

XII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:58 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary
Planning and Economic Development Department,
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Drummond

Donna Drummond
Planning Director

Approved May 13, 2016
(Date)

Daniel Ward II
Secretary of the Planning Commission

Planning Team Files\planning commission\minutes\April 15, 2016