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

Minutes January 27, 2017

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, January 27, 2017, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.


Excused

Also Present: Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Martin Schieckel, Director of Economic Development, Lucy Thompson, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Swearing in New Commissioners Aquanetta Anderson and John Reich.

New Planning Commission members Aquanetta Anderson and John Reich were sworn in by Sheri Moore, City Clerk.

II. Approval of minutes December 30, 2016.

MOTION: Commissioner Thao moved approval of the minutes of December 30, 2016. Commissioner Oliver seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

II. Chair’s Announcements

Commissioner Reveal, the Commission’s First Vice-Chair, chaired the meeting.

Report of the Nominating Committee and Election of Officers.

Commissioner Ochs reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee. The committee offered the following slate of officers: Elizabeth Reveal for Chair, Terri Thao for First Vice-Chair, Kyle Makarios for Second Vice-Chair, and Melanie McMahon for Secretary.

First Vice-Chair Reveal called for nominations from the floor. There were none.

MOTION: Commissioner Underwood moved to approve the slate of candidates. Commissioner Edgerton seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.
IV. Planning Director’s Announcements

Donna Drummond announced that the City Council approved the Outdoor Commercial Uses Zoning Code amendments that were recommended by the Planning Commission. The City Council also approved the appointments of three new planning commissioners who will be sworn in next month. They are Luis Rangel Morales, Tats Tanaka, and Lue Vang, and commissioners McMahon, Ochs, Oliver, Revee, and Underwood were reappointed. The Planning Commission’s annual report will be presented at the next Planning Commission meeting. The Communications Committee will be meeting directly after this meeting to finalize that. Also, Ms. Drummond will give the annual report of the planning director on 2016 Accomplishments and 2017 Projects.

V. Commissioner Appreciation

Honoring Commissioners Merrigan, Ward and Wickiser for their service on the Planning Commission.

Chair Reveal read a resolution thanking Commissioner Merrigan for her service on the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Merrigan said that we all serve at the request of the Mayor. He has a strong vision for the future of the city, which gave us particularly hard work to do at critical sites in the city. She thinks the planning commissioners that she has worked with brought their very best to every meeting to look at those issues and ask tough questions. She also acknowledged the hard work of the planning staff which has been asked to do more with fewer resources over the years. She feels there is a good balance now of new commissioners and older ones who have the institutional memory, and will bring these assets to committee discussions and the framing Planning Commission recommendations. Commissioner Merrigan also thanked Donna Drummond for staffing the commission and leading the planning staff. It’s been an honor for her to serve with all of the commissioners and she has learned a lot from each person. Only the future will determine which of our efforts will bear fruit and which will not. It’s been a pleasure for her and she looks forward to seeing what kind of city we have helped to build together.

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

Commissioners Ward and Wickiser were not able to attend their last meeting, so Chair Reveal did not read their resolutions but thanked them for their service on the Planning Commission.

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

and

MOTION: Chair Reveal moved approval of the resolution honoring Commissioner Wickiser. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.
VI. **Zoning Committee**

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

One item came before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, January

- SPR Committee – Internal Workshop: Site Plan Improvement Project, SPR Submittal Requirements and Checklists

**OLD BUSINESS**

#16-103-701 Hlee and May Xiong – Rezone from R2 One Family Residential to RM2 Multiple-Family Residential. 1475 Ames Avenue, NE corner Barclay and Ames. *(Bill Dermody, 651/266-6617)*

*This application has been withdrawn by the applicant. No further action by the Planning Commission is needed.*

#16-103-741 Hlee and May Xiong – Conditional use permit for a 40 unit assisted living and memory care facility. 1475 Ames Avenue, NE corner Barclay and Ames. *(Bill Dermody, 651/266-6617)*

*This application has been withdrawn by the applicant. No further action by the Planning Commission is needed.*

Commissioner McMahon announced that the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, February 2, 2017 has been canceled.

VII. **Comprehensive Planning Committee**

**2040 Comprehensive Plan Update-Process and Timeline** – Informational presentation by Lucy Thompson, PED. *(Lucy Thompson, 651/266-6378)*

Lucy Thompson, PED Planner who is overseeing the staff team working on the update of the Comprehensive Plan, presented a timeline for Planning Commission review and recommendation for adoption of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) is the steering committee for the effort; so much of the timeline is the schedule of CPC review of the various chapters. The Transportation Committee, Parks Commission and Heritage Preservation Commission will also review and comment on specific chapters. CPC review of chapter content will start in May. The final document is due to the Metropolitan Council on December 31, 2018.

Commissioner Mouacheupao asked whether graphic designers for the document are being solicited through an open bid process.

Ms. Thompson said the City is working with Goff Public, who is already under contract with the City for the Vibrant Spaces and Places work, to identify appropriate subs who can assist with Comp Plan format, organization, layout, design, consistency of content and tone, etc.
Commissioner Edgerton asked about the relationship between area/neighborhood plans and the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Thompson said that the Comprehensive Plan has the 6 overarching chapters: land use, parks and open space, transportation, housing, preservation and water resources. These chapters address policy at a very high level, and are intended to guide City action for 10-20 years. District council plans, small area plans, master plan and other neighborhood plans, as well as broader documents like the Central Corridor Development Strategy and Great River Passage Master Plan, are adopted as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan, but are not being updated at this time. Only the 6 overarching chapters are being updated at this time.

Chair Reveal added that new area plans are regularly being written and/or recommended by district councils; these will continue to be proposed and to come through the Planning Commission for recommendation to the City Council. The Planning Commission’s role will be to determine whether these plans are consistent with the broader policy in the 6 chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Edgerton noted that it is critical that the Planning Commission have a good amount of rigor in ensuring that these area plans are consistent with the overall Plan.

Commissioner Ochs asked if there is a template that the districts or any of these other plans must follow to meet the requirements of the Comp Plan.

Ms. Thompson said yes, there is a small area template.

Commissioner Lindeke suggested using the City’s Street Design Manual as a good model for how to present information.

Commissioner Merrigan said that, in previous meetings, the Commission had talked a little about food justice as an issue; she noticed that it did not come up necessarily in any of the public comment. She wondered how it will be incorporated in the Comp Plan.

Ms. Thompson replied that food justice, access to healthy food and community health are issues that will be addressed throughout all the chapters. Since the Comp Plan is a physical development plan, staff and the Commission will need to think about how these issues are impacted by or can impact the physical form of the city – for example, supporting higher-density, mixed-use development served by transit, biking and walking facilities means people have access to a wide array of services within close proximity to where they live.


Martin Schieckel, Director of Economic Development, in PED gave a power point presentation which can be seen on the web page at: http://www.slpaul.gov/planningcommission.

Mr. Schieckel also distributed a sheet titled: 2016-2018 Economic Development Strategy-Summary
Commissioner Gelgelu asked about support for the service providers providing technical assistance to small businesses. In the city of Minneapolis they have B-TAP (Business Technical Assistance Program) supporting the service providers to provide technical assistance to businesses in that city. In October or November of 2016 a consultant was hired to talk to some of the service providers in the City of Saint Paul.

Mr. Schieckel said that we generally rely on our partners, Neighborhood Development Center (NDC) is a good example, to provide direct assistance to small businesses. They have a lot of programs to help small business, and entrepreneurs develop business plans. We try to refer them out but what he has discovered is that we provide business technical assistance through our interactions. We often receive phone calls from someone who is just starting out and does not know where to go or what to do and a 10 or 15 minute phone call will help focus them in on next steps and save them a lot of time. When we do specific loans or projects with a business we work very closely with them to make sure they get what they need. We also provide assistance helping businesses navigate the City as a whole, for example a lot of small businesses when they start up have to work with the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) to get licenses or permits. We don’t provide funding to these neighborhood organizations that do the technical assistance as they typically get the funding from other sources but we are often in partnership with them as a financing tool.

Commissioner Thao asks what these organizations are doing about cooperative development. She hopes that’s going to be a possibility in the strategy here. It’s a broader idea of community wealth building to support co-ops and social enterprises. How explicitly are we tracking wages? We know that often times people, particularly in communities of color, are paid lower wages, so are we tracking those metrics as well?

Mr. Schieckel said we are certainly mindful of wages. When we came up with goals and metrics, wages are a tougher thing to track as a metric. We really had a robust discussion about wages when we were developing the Job Opportunity Fund, so even though it ultimately lost funding at City Council for this year, it was intended to be a tool that was going to provide loans to small businesses that were creating jobs. To the extent that they met their job creation goals we were prepared to forgive a portion of their loan. We talked about whether we should be setting some kind of a wage standard and what they decided to do was to stay within the City’s already existing living wage ordinance. You mentioned co-ops and we have had some discussions with people in the co-op community about some new models. We are mindful of it but we don’t have any specific initiatives in place to promote it but there are some good examples of where it has been successful.

Commissioner Thao asked about additional financial tools the City would be employing to support these different initiatives.

Mr. Schieckel said the $2 million Job Opportunity Fund was an attempt. Some of the initiatives they had planned on doing got caught up in the street assessment budget issue that occurred at the end of the 2016 budget process. Not only the Job Opportunity Fund, but we also had money for parking initiatives that got put into this budget contingency fund. However, one of the biggest programs for economic development continues to be the STAR Program which does over $2 million worth of small business loans and grants each year. We have other resources available on an as needed bases. He encourages any business that is in need to contact PED or any of our economic development partners to explore assistance that can be provided.
Commissioner Ochs commented on the slide that compared our unemployment rates with outstate Minnesota. These are quite different areas. Would it be better to compare to other metropolitan regions? He also asked about different types of job assistance to address unemployment, and the role of education in this.

Mr. Schieckel said we are comparing changes at the state level with changes at the local level as one way to benchmark. We don’t want to be caught up missing our goal because there are broader factors at play, so we pegged it to the state. With regard to the second metric, we don’t provide job training; we are no longer in that business in PED. A lot of achieving the goals of reducing that disparity has to do with job training. Although PED doesn’t do that in particular we are mindful of the fact that that is a necessity. These metrics are not a science where we say if we do XYZ, we’re going to get this particular answer. It’s more a way of taking stock of how are we doing generally; how is the world of our various initiatives doing in terms of accomplishing the goals. The challenge of what you described with the job training and the job readiness is a key issue which Ramsey County does for our area and it’s a challenge that we recognize.

Commissioner Ochs asked about links and communication between education and training providers and what businesses need.

Mr. Schieckel said in general the City as a whole is recognizing the need for the departments to communicate more effectively. He has been with the city for 20 years and in just the last few years there has been more direct connections between DSI and PED for example. He also cited the work on the 8-80 Initiative that resulted in better cross-departmental collaboration, particularly between Parks, Public Works and PED. The Economic Development Strategy is not designed to address what everyone should be doing to advance economic development but what should the Economic Development Division of PED focus on in particular to advance economic development more generally.

Commissioner Mouacheupao made a suggestion that in terms of connecting all of the different departments to tap into the City’s artist in residence, Amanda Lovely. Mr. Schieckel said PED works with her a lot.

Commissioner Mouacheupao said another point of consideration related to supporting service providers that are working with small businesses and entrepreneurs may be to think about a more coordinated effort beyond just referring to these organizations. Something that is really unique to the Twin Cities, particularly Saint Paul, is that we have an abundance of service providers that are working with culturally specific small businesses. If the City is not thinking more intentionally about how to support those organizations then those are assets we will continue to struggle with. Finally, it would help to be clear about how we define a small business. The federal SBA defines small businesses as 500 employees or less. Many small immigrant businesses in the city are micro entrepreneurs or small family businesses that need different kinds of support. It would be really helpful to be clear about what a small business is.

Mr. Schieckel had to leave for another meeting.

Chair Reaveal announced that they would continue the discussion.

Commissioner DeJoy wanted to talk about the training and education. If the goals are to attract companies with high quality jobs and we need to have a workforce that has the skills for those
jobs. She knows that it is not PED’s job to do training and education but if we have a goal to reduce disparity how are we going to do that? Certain employment sectors are experiencing high growth like the medical field and technology. These are jobs that require training. How do you bridge that gap, maybe tapping into all the colleges and universities we have to provide the education and training needed for people to get jobs in those growing fields.

Commissioner Edgerton said that there are two things that he did not see or hear about in this presentation. One relates to universities serving as incubators for start-ups. He cited the example of Epic at the University of Wisconsin. We don’t see enough of that sort of thing coming out of the University of Minnesota. These start-ups can be a great source for jobs. The second thing is regulatory simplification. He knows of one business trying to get started but it has been slow due to regulations. Part of it might be simplifying the regulations or part of it might be having staff serve in a role to help walk people, especially new start-ups, through the regulatory steps.

Donna Drummond, Director of Planning, mentioned that the Department of Safety and Inspections (DSI) is actually in the middle of looking at their processes and figuring out how can they make all of the regulatory processes smoother for businesses in particular. DSI wants to beef up their project facilitator staff and the role of that staff in helping people through all the various steps. This includes approvals in other departments, such as PED if it is zoning or Public Works if it’s related to public infrastructure or right-of-way issues.

Commissioner Lindeke mentioned housing as an issue. CURA, which is the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs had an research study that came out earlier this year about gentrification in the Twin Cities. One of the things he took away from it was an interesting analysis of rental housing conversations and increased displacement of lower-income renters. Real incomes for people of color in Saint Paul and Minneapolis have been going down in the last couple of years. So even though the rental market is growing the problem is that people of color are not keeping up with rising rents in general. That is why it is so important to fill that gap and change the dynamics between white and people of color on wages and jobs.

Commissioner Ochs said it’s a challenge to get the private business community to care about housing and how it is an important element for supporting the workforce. A number of property owners say they don’t want to deal with Section 8, for example, and they convert affordable units because they can make more money. How can we make it worthwhile for private sector to invest in affordable housing?

IX. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner Ochs announced that Alternative Financial Establishments would be considered again at the next Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting on Wednesday, February 15, 2017.

X. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Lindeke announced items on the agenda for the next meeting is on Monday, January 30, 2017.

XI. Communications Committee

Commissioner Thao announced that they will be meeting directly after this meeting today to
review the annual report.

XII. Task Force/Liaison Reports

No reports.

XIII. Old Business

None.

XIV. New Business

None.

XV. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:18 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by
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Respectfully submitted,

Donna Drummond
Planning Director

Approved 2/24/17
(Date)

Melanie McMahon
Secretary of the Planning Commission