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

Minutes March 24, 2017

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, March 24, 2017, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.


*Excused

Also Present: Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Joe Spencer, Mayor’s Office, Reuben Collins, Public Works, Ross Currier, Kady Dadlez, Tony Johnson, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes February 24th and March 10, 2017.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Thao moved approval of the minutes of February 24, 2017. Commissioner Gelgelu seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

and

**MOTION:** Commissioner Thao moved approval of the minutes of March 10, 2017. Commissioner Lindeke seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

II. Chair’s Announcements

Chair Reveal announced that there is one remaining position open on the Zoning Committee which needs to be filled right away. If interested contact her, Commissioner Makarios or Donna Drummond.

Also, the school district is updating it facilities master plan and is looking for a commissioner to participate in two 2-hour meetings on April 13th and May 4th. She asked for interested commissioners to let her know.

Finally, the Planning Commission frequently has informational briefings. She asked for suggestions for future presentations.

III. Planning Director’s Announcements

Donna Drummond said that a photo of the commission will be taken after the public hearing
IV. **PUBLIC HEARING:** Update to the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan — Item from the Transportation Committee. *(Reuben Collins, 651/266-6059)*

Chair Reveal announced that the Saint Paul Planning Commission was holding a public hearing on the Update to the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan. Notice of the public hearing was published in the Legal Ledger on March 9, 2017, and was mailed to the citywide Early Notification System list and other interested parties.

No one signed up to give testimony. A resolution from the Heritage Preservation Commission was submitted today which will be part of the written testimony.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Lindeke moved to close the public hearing, leave the record open for written testimony until 4:30 p.m. on Monday, March 27, 2017 and to refer the matter back to the Transportation Committee for review and recommendation. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

**Brief Intermission:** Group photo taken of the full Planning Commission.

V. **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, March 21, 2017:

- 6-Story Mixed Use Development — 128 Residential Units, 1,800 sq. ft. Commercial, 203 Structured Parking at 246-286 Snelling Avenue South. Thomas Hayden-LeCesse Development Corp. SPR #17-016413

**OLD BUSINESS**

#17-000-688 Dearing Mansion Bed & Breakfast — Revocation or modification of a conditional use permit (Zoning File #14-326-683) for a bed & breakfast residence with 4 guest rooms due to noncompliance with conditions for this use. 241 George Street West, between Charlton and Waseca. *(Kady Dadlez, 651/266-6619)*

**MOTION:** Commissioner McMahon moved the Zoning Committee’s recommendation to approve the modification of a conditional use permit subject to additional conditions. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

**NEW BUSINESS**

#17-014-925 Rift Valley Transportation — Determination of similar use for office, parking, and light maintenance for a passenger van transportation company. 1033 Thomas Avenue, NE corner at Oxford. *(Tony Johnson, 651/266-6620)*

**MOTION:** Commissioner McMahon moved the Zoning Committee’s recommendation to
The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Commissioner Makarios announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on March 30, 2017.

VI. **Palace Theater Opening** – Informational presentation by Joe Spencer, Director of Arts and Culture, Mayor’s Office.

Joe Spencer, Director of Arts and Culture, Mayor’s Office, gave a power point presentation which can be seen on the web page at: http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission

Commissioner Thao asked how much of the previous structure were they able to preserve.

Mr. Spencer said all of it. Their approach for the project was to fix items needed to meet code requirements for health and safety but otherwise leaving the space as is. In the 1940s the theater was thought to be out of date, and in order to compete with modern movie houses they had to give it a fresh new look. They did a terrible job of plastering over the top of the original 1916 design, so they peeled back everything from the 1940 and what was left they stabilized and kept.

Commissioner McMahon asked about what the public access is and how it will look in the future.

Mr. Spencer said according to the operating agreement, community organizations get access to the theater without a rental fee but they have to pay for whatever direct expenses the operators have to open the doors. We do not know what those costs are going to be, but generally speaking the rental fee is going to be in the $5,000 to $7,000 range. Because of the size of the venue it does require a fair amount of staff just to open the doors. They will be monitoring costs to determine that community groups, such as high schools or the Winter Carnival, are only charged actual costs.

Commissioner Lindeke asked about the loan and repayment for financing the renovation.

Mr. Spencer said that it is actually a loan from the City to the HRA. It will be paid back through two main sources. The biggest one will be the facilities fee on each ticket that will come back to the City to pay down the loan over 30 years. In addition there is a net revenue sharing provision in the use agreement.

Ross Currier, PED staff, added that due to the state bond requirements the money from the facility can only go to the loan, it cannot be used for anything else. If the operator exceeds those projections it will just pay the loan off sooner than 30 years.

Commissioner Edgerton wanted to know if the City owns the theater and is that intended to be a long term plan.

Mr. Spencer said the City owns the property and the state requires that we retain ownership for 150% of the useful life. The use agreement requires that all of the maintenance, upkeep and management is the responsibility of the operator.

Commissioner Edgerton asked about any economic analysis that was done to determine the benefit to the city and the downtown.
Mr. Spencer said assuming 150,000 visitors each year then we know through arts economic impact studies that each visitor spends about $30.00 in addition to the cost of admission. So they are anticipating tremendous economic activity in the neighborhood around there. The impact to the surrounding neighborhood of cleaning up a vacant blighted property in the center of downtown will help leverage redevelopment downtown. The Port Authority will tell you that it has been a big help as they build out the old Macy’s building for example.

Mr. Currier noted that they have already received feedback from nearby businesses about how busy they are on nights that there is a show at the Palace Theater. He stood outside on 7th Place both Friday and Saturday night and he heard people say “wow, I didn’t know that this was even here”. The economic impact is going be well beyond their initial expectations.

Commissioner DeJoy asked for more information about the operator agreement and the length of that agreement.

Mr. Spencer said that it is a 15 year use agreement. That was a limit the state imposed, but there is a general expectation and it was structured in such a way that there is incentive to come back at that point to sign on for another 15 years.

Commissioner Ochs asked whether surrounding businesses are changing their operating hours or new businesses opening up.

Mr. Currier said that they have heard from one of the surrounding businesses that they are considering opening at night when the Palace has a show going on. There are only a few vacant spaces that they hope will fill in.

Mr. Spencer added that the Afro Deli and Eclipse Records are already extending their hours as a result of it.

Commissioner Ochs asked how far out the theater is booked and how many shows will there be per month?

Mr. Spencer said that the use agreement has a minimum in the neighborhood of about 50 shows a year and they anticipate that is the floor. Right now they are booked into October. There are 25 announced shows and there are 40 holds that have not signed the contract yet. So if even half of those signed contracts come through they will be in really great shape, especially for the first year.

Commissioner Thao asked about upkeep of the building while it was vacant and why it became so deteriorated.

Mr. Spencer replied that the Port Authority owned the whole block at one point and under Norm Coleman’s administration there was a conversation about demolishing the whole block and using it as parking for the Travelers Company and holding it as a potential expansion site for Travelers. That did not happen due to Councilmember Chris Coleman, who fought for the block and its historic value and potential value. At that point nobody wanted this old theater, but the apartment buildings that surrounded it were thought to be valuable and at that point the Port Authority sold the property to the Kelly Brothers with a condition of sale that they had to take the theater. So the
Kelly Brothers had keys to it, and by all observation it was something less than dry storage for
them over those many years.

Commissioner Perryman said that a friend of his reached out to Joe Spencer about a community
event and came back with an estimated cost of $15,000 to open the doors. This type of cost is
very expensive and he wondered about any sources to help pay for that.

Mr. Spencer said he would be eager to see a breakdown of those cost estimates to see what the
true costs are.

Commissioner Perryman said the costs were $7,500 for the sound and lights, $3,000 production
staff, $4,000 house and staff security and then $3.00 each ticket, royalty cost for catering different
things etc.

Mr. Spencer said those are things they want to look at and make sure the operators are following
the contracted amount. But in addition they do have the Cultural STAR Program which often
will help support community groups or smaller art organizations to have access to the Ordway or
to the Fitzgerald or other venues in town. If they are honoring their contractual agreement then
the Cultural STAR program would be a great tool to support that kind of access.

Commissioner Rangel Morales asked if the City owns any other properties within that block and
with there being so many vacancies is there a view of what this particular block is supposed to
look like?

Mr. Spencer replied no, that 7th Place is a no man’s land from a government standpoint because
it’s still owned by Public Works but functions like a park or a plaza. So we don’t have any other
holdings there. As to the vision, the vision has always been to be a dynamic place filled with lots
and lots of people. And it is not like we’re starting with nothing, there’s Park Square Theater,
Great Waters, Wild Tymes, and now Afro Deli and Bruegger’s, so it’s not that far from hitting
that tipping point where it is a lively dynamic place.

Commissioner Lindeke was on the task force for the Capitol City Bikeway planning and St. Peter
Street was identified as one of the future legs of the network. There was discussion at that time
about the plaza, and going out 7th Place through that weird 80’s arch, which should probably go at
some point. There is this plaza in front of the Travelers building that was brought up as being an
opportunity to do something else there, because it is underused. It is being used by skateboarders,
so there is some space to work with to do some planning for a redesign.

Mr. Spencer said that Hamm Plaza is owned by the City. Between 7th Place, Hamm Plaza,
Landmark Plaza, the plaza in front of the convention center and over to the Science Museum we
have a series of continuous public spaces that perform very well and Hamm Plaza as you said is
maybe a cute little skate park but it could used for more. The other thing that makes this an
attractive project is it does help connect all of the energy that you see around Rice Park and draw
it into the center of downtown. We are not far off from having a continuous fully engaged and
animated downtown.

Commissioner DeJoy said that for several years there has been rumor that maybe the Coney
Island would reopen, any insight on that?
Mr. Spencer said that Coney Island still maintains all of its licenses and they would be perfectly allowed to open their doors on 3 minutes notice. The owner has a mind of her own and he would love nothing more than to see that beautiful space open on a regular basis so we will see what happens.

Chair Reveal said that she hopes we’re doing some special thinking about how that collection of public spaces might be vitalized in the spring and summer. Maybe there could be an art festival or a music festival that really emphasizes 7th Place as a venue for all kinds of art.

Mr. Spencer said our job is to set the table so that that can happen easily and he thinks she will be happy with what unfolds in the next year.

VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Commissioner Thao reported that at the last meeting they had two items on the agenda, an update on the schedule for the Comprehensive plan update including bringing some plan drafts to the committee starting in June. They also discussed the River Balcony Master Plan and made a recommendation to release for public review and set a public hearing on May 19th. The next Comprehensive Planning Committee meeting on April 4th will be spent discussing the Ford public realm and zoning study.

VIII. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner DeJoy announced the items on the agenda for the next Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting on Wednesday, March 29, 2017.

IX. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Ochs announced that they had met last week and received an overview of what is happening at Jackson Street. Phase 2 started on March 20th and Phase 3 will begin around June or July. The second item was on downtown metered parking. The rates were increased on January 1, 2017 in the downtown area. The next item was an update about safe routes to school planning and the identification of three different pilot schools to evaluate how that will work. It was discussed whether it should be a separate chapter or remain in the Complete Streets Action Plan in the Transportation Chapter in the Comprehensive Plan. The last item was automated vehicles and they ran out of time for that. For the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, March 27th there are three items on the agenda.

X. Communications Committee

Commissioner Gelgelu had no report.

XI. Task Force/Liaison Reports

Commissioner Makarios said that the City hosted a large public meeting on March 7th regarding the Ford site and a couple hundred people attended. This was where the City unveiled some clarification of a finer level of detail for the zoning and public realm plan. There was a little debate in the neighborhood around density and traffic but overall there was a lot of excitement. There are no scheduled meetings for the task force but he expects they will be scheduled soon.
XII. Old Business
None.

XIII. New Business
None.

XVI. Adjournment
Meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Drummond
Planning Director

Approved April 21, 2017
(Date)

Melanie McMahon
Secretary of the Planning Commission