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

Minutes July 28, 2017

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, July 28, 2017, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present:  
Mmes. Anderson, DeJoy, Lee, Mouacheupao, Reveal, Underwood; and  
Messrs. Baker, Fredson, Lindeke, Makarios, Ochs, Oliver, Perryman, Rangel Morales, Reich, and Vang.

Commissioners Absent:  

*Excused

Also Present:  
Jonathan Sage-Martinson, Planning and Economic Development Director, Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Fay Simer, Department of Public Works, Allan Torstenson, Lucy Thompson, Bill Dermody, Merritt Clapp-Smith, Mike Richardson, Jamie Radel, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes June 30, 2017.

Chair Reveal 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 Reveal had no announcements.

III. Planning Director’s Announcements

Donna Drummond said planning commissioners can join the American Planning Association for $65.00 and get all of the benefits of national and state chapter membership. Also, the City Council approved a resolution asking the Planning Commission to do a zoning study looking at a possible overlay district for the Tangle Town area near Macalester College.

IV. Zoning Committee

SITE PLAN REVIEW – List of current applications. (Tia Anderson, 651/266-9086)

One item came before the Site Plan Review Committee Tuesday, July 25, 2017:

- Transfer Road Self Storage – New construction of rental storage facility at 631 Transfer Road. Josh Davis-Transfer Rd SS, LLC SPR #17-059511
Three items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee Tuesday, August 1, 2017:

- 809 Building – Building Renovation at 809 7th Street East. Dayton’s Bluff Neighborhood Housing Service SPR #17-060629

- Montessori Training Center – Garage demolition and building addition at 611 Ames Avenue. Jessari Sutton-Montessori Center of MN SPR #17-061722

- Olympus-Best Jet Hangers – New construction of 2 hangers at 717 Eaton Street. Keith Schwegler-Olympus Ventures SPR #17-060783

NEW BUSINESS

#17-056-298 Victoria Park Apartments Phase 3 – Conditional use permit to increase the maximum allowable height up to 2 ft.; with a variance of 5 ft., (10 ft. required) in building setback. 1425 Victoria Way, NW corner at Kay Avenue. (Lucy Thompson, 651/266-6578)

Commissioner Lindeke said that one of the things that came up at committee was whether or not balcony setbacks should be triggered the same way as regular setbacks as a policy matter for zoning code.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, replied that that is an amendment that staff was thinking might make sense to look at, so it probably will be included in a future package of amendments.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Makarios moved the Zoning Committee’s recommendation to approve the conditional use permit and variance subject to an additional condition. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Commissioner Makarios announced the items on the agenda at the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, August 3, 2017.

V. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commercial Development District: Firehouse Wine Bar – Adopt resolution determining that the commercial development district is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. *(Jamie Radel, 651/266-6614)*

Commissioner Perryman gave the Committee report. The Committee went over zoning text amendments for Chapter 65 and reviewed the Short Term Rental Study, which the Committee is moving forward to the August 11th Planning Commission agenda for a final vote. The Committee also went over the Transportation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Today the committee is recommending approval of a resolution related to a Commercial Development District for the Firehouse Wine Bar.

Commissioner Underwood gave some brief background about the project. The structure for the wine bar is one of the oldest in the city as a former firehouse. It is in the area of Ramsey, Grand and 7th. There was a great effort to save the building instead of having it torn down as part of a
larger development.

Commissioner Rangel Morales did not understand the purpose of labeling this as a commercial district as opposed to just rezoning.

Ms. Drummond said that this is a unique feature of the City’s code. It is a way of defining an area for an additional liquor license to go beyond the established limit of licenses by ward that is in place. The role of the Planning Commission in this case is to determine whether or not that district is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Chair Reveel added that there is a lot of community support for this development and this action will allow it to be a commercial establishment that serves liquor.

**MOTION:** Commissioner DeJoy moved the Neighborhood/Comprehensive Planning Committee’s recommendation to approve the resolution for the Commercial Development District is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

### VI. Transportation Committee

**Safe Routes to School Plan** – Approve Planning Commission resolution recommending the plan to the Mayor and City Council for adoption. *(Fay Simer, Public Works, 651/266-6204)*

Ms. Fay Simer, Pedestrian Safety Advocate with the Department of Public Works, gave a power point presentation, which can be seen on the web page at: [http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission](http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission)

Commissioner Ochs believes that the Safe Route to School Plan is a very important part of our City’s policies because it is the foundation for creating more livable spaces for families, getting families into our communities, keeping them here and making them feel like they are important. This is key to our economic development. Together with the Complete Streets Plan, the Pedestrian Plan, the Transportation Chapter, Vision 8-80 initiative, and the work of departments like Parks and Recreation, Planning & Economic Development as well as Public Works, these are really key to what we do for our present and future.

Commissioner Baker asked about prioritizing potential safe routes to school infrastructure projects for implementation. Did that come together from the Steering Committee or where did that list come about?

Ms. Fay Simer said that came from the Steering Committee and the consultant’s recommendation of best practices based on their work or examples from other cities. The challenge with the project is defining the walk zones. If they created a map of the walk zones, which is typically about ½ mile around each school, and put that buffer around all 80 schools in Saint Paul it pretty much covers the entire city. That speaks to the need for safe walking and biking infrastructure throughout the city but does not help prioritize based on whether it’s in a walk zone or not because that is everywhere.
MOTION: Commissioner Lindeke moved on behalf of the Transportation Committee to approve the resolution recommending the plan to the Mayor and City Council for adoption. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Rush Line Locally Preferred Alternative – Approve Planning Commission resolution recommending that the Mayor and City Council support the LPA. Bili Dermody, 651/266-6617

Bill Dermody, PED staff, said that the Rush Line study has been a multi-year effort, with the City of Saint Paul represented on the Rush Line Task Force by Councilmember Amy Brendmoen. He described the Locally Preferred Alternative process and the main questions in determining the LPA in Saint Paul, including whether to take White Bear Avenue or the Ramsey County right-of-way, Phalen Boulevard or East 7th Street, and how exactly to get into downtown.

Commissioner Reich asked why not down Arcade then to East 7th into downtown.

Andy Gitzlaff, Senior Transportation Planner, Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority, said they looked at 55 different route options as part of this study and 7 different types of rail and bus options. There are a lot of data for why certain options were not chosen, but primarily going up Arcade over on Maryland is very narrow right now. There would not be space to get any dedicated guideway through there without impacting one side or the other of that road and taking parking. So that was the rationale for that alignment option coming off the table.

MOTION: Commissioner Lindeke moved on behalf of the Transportation Committee to approve the resolution supporting the LPA recommendation to the Mayor and City Council for adoption. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Mr. Dermody announced the items on the agenda at the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, July 31, 2017.

VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Ford Site Master Plan – Approve resolution recommending Ford Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan to the Mayor and City Council for adoption. (Merritt Clapp-Smith, 651/266-6547, and Mike Richardson, 651/266-6621)

Merritt Clapp-Smith is PED staff and lead on the Ford project. Ms. Clapp-Smith went through a series of slides talking about what happened at the recent committee meeting, the public comments received and the nature of comments and recommendations from the staff. The power point can be viewed on the web page at: http://www.stpaul.gov/planningcommission.

Commissioner Lindeke asked for clarification on the Mississippi River Critical Area standards and how/when they were written.

Chair Revele said that there had been a two to three year discussion of Critical Area rulemaking at the Comprehensive Planning Committee, Planning Commission and other committees, because it took a long time for the City, State and other affected municipalities to work through differences and ideas for updated critical area standards.
Donna Drummond, Planning Director, said that there is more to come. The DNR developed the rules for the critical area and the next step is for all the cities in the critical area to update their critical area regulations to be consistent with the new rules. The city will begin that step next year.

Commissioner Makarios said that in the northwest corner of the site that is zoned Gateway it allows up to 65 feet and the Critical Area limit is 48 feet, so if someone wanted to build a 65 foot building in that northwest quadrant they could apply for a conditional use permit. He asked if that conditional use permit would have a different set of standards than the traditional conditional use permits that are seen at the Zoning Committee.

Ms. Clapp-Smith replied that the critical area rules have a set of performance standards to meet the conditions for a conditional use permit. Based on the description of the performance standards in the state rules, City staff feels that there is a good chance that the conditions could be met and therefore it is appropriate for the Ford zoning districts to allow heights somewhat above the Critical Area regulations. If the standards for a conditional use permit are not met in the future, then the buildings in the Critical Area would have to comply with the maximum Critical Area heights.

Commissioner Makarios understands but the conditions to be met relate to visibility from the opposite shoreline and not to character of development in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Reich asked if the Critical Area only allows up to 48 feet and the Ford zoning in the northwest corner allows up to 65 feet, could heights exceed 65 feet with a conditional use permit?

Ms. Clapp-Smith said that exceeding 48 feet would require a conditional use permit for the Critical Area standards AND a variance to the Ford district height limit of 65 feet.

Ms. Clapp-Smith continued with her power point presentation.

Commissioner Makarios asked how to enshrine the idea for Hidden Falls Regional Park expansion and Mississippi River Boulevard realignment into the document going to City Council.

Ms. Clapp-Smith said that it could be put in the plan. Do you want to try and identify where that road realignment would go now or could the intent be identified now and the details figured out later?

Ms. Clapp-Smith ended the presentation and recommended that the Commission consider sending the plan back to committee for additional review and examination of key items.

Commissioner Mouacheupao provided an overview of the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting on July 11th to discuss the Ford plan. She explained that at committee they discussed the public hearing comments, including the additional comments that came through, and that there was a lot of discussion and things to consider. In the end, they had a unanimous vote to approve the plan with the additional recommendations mentioned, including the MRB realignment and retaining depiction of the recreation fields space. Now, in light of the additional staff recommendations discussed today:
Commissioner Mouacheupao moved to send this back to Comprehensive Planning Committee for further discussion. Commissioner Underwood seconded the motion.

Commissioner Makarios is okay either way but he does not believe that this necessarily needs to go back to committee and he is prepared to move forward today. 1) Lots of talk about the comments and the number of comments and what they received and he appreciates Ms. Clapp-Smith walking through the timeline of comments but they had all of the information before them when they met at the Comprehensive Planning Committee and no new information has come forward since then. At committee they had a very thorough discussion and they made a decision to move forward. The other small changes that staff had suggested -- dealing with parking design, building width, lot coverage, broadband and studying Ford Parkway -- are largely technical and can be considered by the full Commission today. We could easily remove the recreation fields from the map and it is something the committee had a lot of discussion around, and he does not feel that they need to delay this for 2 weeks, but he understands if there are people who feel strongly that they need to weigh in on this debate and take more time with the issues that have come up today. However, he doesn’t think that further discussion of the plan at committee would change their recommendation.

Commissioner DeJoy asked what the committee would discuss that it didn’t already consider; is there a specific reason to bring it back to committee?

Commissioner Mouacheupao said that there are the additional staff recommendations that they didn’t talk about at committee.

Chair Reveal noted that the timeline for plan review by City Council would not necessarily be affected if the item is sent back to committee and returns to Planning Commission in two weeks.

Commissioner Oliver said he was at the committee meeting and all of the changes that Ms. Clapp-Smith had on the slides were things that they discussed and are not new considerations. There is no new content to send back for discussion.

Commissioner Baker said the staff recommendation is to send it back to the committee and that process is important. He wants to make sure that when moving forward we can move forward saying that we heard the community and we were flexible enough to send it back to the committee for more conversation. His concern is more about the reputation of the committee and the process.

Commissioner Underwood said that the issues and plan considerations presented here today have been really well vetted. She appreciates and respects the accountability the City has taken regarding the temporarily missing 200 comments, which was about over half of all public comments received and while the for and against ratio of those comments might have been similar across the board and they understood the public response generally, she feels that out of respect for the process and the community role in this work, it is the responsible thing to do to go back to committee.

Commissioner Lee inquired as to what the next steps are in addressing the public’s concern and wanting to pause this process. This is a huge change to the community and she wants to make
sure that there is going to be more opportunity along the way for more public input.

Chair Revele said that if we send it back to committee to discuss the issues we heard today, which for the most part were already discussed at committee, though people may want to discuss them more, then it will come back to Planning Commission and then go to City Council. City Council will hold another public hearing with opportunity for another round of public comments and discussion at City Council.

Commissioner Perryman said that he does not anticipate the committee changing anything based on the late set of comments, which the committee had when it met. All recommendations under consideration by the full Commission today were reviewed by the committee already and he doesn’t see anything changing if they are sent back for more discussion.

Commissioner Rangel Morales said that the City staff has been really diligent about providing all public comments to the Planning Commission and even the late comments were provided to the Planning Commission 2 weeks ago, which is more than enough time to review. He does not agree with the commissioners who say that the process hasn’t already been honored.

Chair Revele took a vote on the motion to send this back to the joint Comprehensive/Neighborhood Planning Committee for further discussion and the motion failed on a hands vote of 7-9.

Commissioner Makarios moved the Zoning Committee’s recommendation for approval of the Ford Site Zoning and Master Plan. He also moved to incorporate the suggested staff recommendation that Ms. Clapp-Smith presented.

Commissioner Fredson cited a specific concern in the plan on page 68 table 5.1, building types by zoning district. It outlines the building types and number of units by zoning district. Currently under F1-River Residential, it permits ‘multi-unit home’ and ‘carriage house’. He said he felt very strongly that this F1-River Residential zoning district is the most prime piece of land on the site and should provide more people with an opportunity to live on the river.

**MOTION TO AMEND:** Commissioner Fredson moved to remove ‘Multi-Unit Home’ from F1-River Residential and add ‘Townhouse’, ‘Multi-Family Low’ to F1-River residential; keep the 48 foot maximum height for F1-River Residential, retain ‘Carriage House’, with the 30 foot maximum height; and maintain the 30 foot minimum setback from Mississippi river Blvd. Commissioner Underwood seconded the motion.

Commissioner Lindeke said he supports Commissioner Fredson’s amendment, but we have been talking about a separate design standard process that would happen after the Ford plan is on the table in City policy. So would this be the kind of thing to be addressed in the design standards further down the road or is it important to have it in now?

Chair Revele replied that it would certainly be part of it, but it would be better to predefine in the plan itself whether there is more building type variety in this district and when the design standard is done to pay particular attention to design in that district.

Commissioner Ochs is not in support of the amendment because low density is more important
along this particular stretch of the River Blvd. There is still accessible public space along the river bluff and affording the opportunity for anyone to live there should not be a high priority. Low density is the goal that he would like to see there.

Commissioner Baker asked if there could be another articulation of the amendment.

Commissioner Fredson clarified the amendment saying according to table 5.2 and the following pages in the plan in F1-River Residential it permits carriage house and multi-home unit only. Multi-unit home only permits 2-6 units and the carriage house permits 1-2 units. What he is proposing would allow more people to live along the river valley. Removing the multi-unit option which is 2-6 units and replacing with townhouse and row house that is 3-16 units and then multi-family low which is 6-40 units and keeping carriage house.

Commissioner Oliver supports the amendment and he views the density goals as being important site-wide and the idea that 5 blocks of low density doesn't fit with the larger site. People are worried that the density is going to be clustered too high on the eastern side of the site and put pressure on Ford Parkway, Cleveland, Montreal Avenue and those areas. It does not make sense to him to reserve the other side of the site to be very low-density. Allowing more density on the west along Mississippi River Boulevard would reduce the pressure for density on the rest of the site and spread it out better across the entire site. It fits more with our goals to have the least dense version of housing in this area be townhomes, it fits with the urban picture that we are seeing and makes our goals more attainable.

Commission Rangel Morales wanted to know if part of the amendment included removing the use of 'multi-unit home' altogether from the plan.

Commissioner Fredson said that the four components of the amendment are: 1) Removing multi-unit home from F1-River Residential, 2) Adding townhouse and multi-family low to F1-River residential, 3) Keeping the 48 foot maximum height, and 4) Maintaining the 30 foot minimum setback from the Mississippi River Blvd.

Commissioner Reich stated that if density is the issue that we are trying to solve, he isn't sure if spreading the density out differently across the site addresses it.

Chair Reveal noted that there is no recommendation to change the minimum and maximum number of housing units allowed overall on the site. The proposed change would not increase or reduce overall site density, but it would distribute it differently across the site.

Ms. Clapp-Smith clarified that all of the zoning districts allow a range of heights and lot coverage within them. In addition to the zoning, the master plan limits the site to no fewer than 2,400 housing units and no more than 4,000. If every lot on the site was built to the maximum allowed under zoning, there would be more than 4,000 housing units, so when the site is built out some of the buildings are going to have to be smaller than the maximum. The 4,000 units is a ceiling that caps maximum build out. If the River Residential zoning district allows more housing units, then a portion of the maximum of 4,000 units will shift there and leave fewer units on the rest of site.

Commissioner Reich clarified that a shift to more units along the river would have a corresponding reduction in density in other areas.
Ms. Clapp-Smith replied that within the limits of each zoning district, there remains some flexibility about how to distribute development across the site, so there could be various ways it would play out across the site.

Commissioner Ochs emphasized that the low density housing as proposed in the River Residential district provides a park like atmosphere along the river and that increasing the density in this area would take away from that. It behooves us to try to have a contiguous park like atmosphere along the bluff up and down both sides of the river, while making the public areas more accessible and enjoyable spaces for all.

Commissioner Mouacheupao stated that before they were called ‘multi-unit homes’ they were referred to as ‘mansion-plex’ housing, so that gives you a visual idea of what is being proposed. She agrees that it makes it feel too exclusive and supports the amendment to make it feel less so.

Commissioner Perryman supports the amendment for reasons of equity— that anyone could access it and be able to open their door and see that space and have that quality of life.

*The motion to add the amendments with four parts carried 14-2 (Makarios, Ochs) on a voice vote.*

Commissioner Makarios said that Ms. Clapp-Smith mentioned doing an inset in the plan for the realignment of the Mississippi River Boulevard. He moved to recommend that they recommend realigning the southern portion of the Mississippi River Boulevard to incorporate what is now park space on the Ford site to be incorporated into Hidden Falls Regional Park. Realigning Mississippi River Boulevard to the north would allow that park space to become part of the regional park instead of City park, which in turn could allow the corresponding amount of park land to be added elsewhere on the site as City park space. We already have a recommendation to explore that avenue and he would like to have an inset in the plan showing what that alternative looks like.

Mike Richardson, PED staff, has some reservations about including an inset that indicates some sort of specific alignment. Instead, the language could be strengthened to identify the same intent, if that is what the commission decides to do. He also thinks that it is possible to more clearly delineate what needs to be addressed in the future because there is so much uncertainty now about what’s possible, how much land would be transferred, and how road realignment would be best designed.

Commissioner Makarios said is comfortable with letting staff work out some stronger language in the plan to indicate the interest in the Hidden Falls Regional Park expansion and road realign, without doing a map inset.

Chair Reveal said the motion is to address this graphically as well as narratively in the plan, but will rely on staff to do that appropriately. Commissioner Makarios said he is removing the recommendation to show it graphically.

Mr. Richardson added there are some specific concerns that need to be addressed in the future, such as traffic calming and the creation of adequate functional park space on either side of the road.
MAIN MOTION: Commissioner Makarios moved to approve the resolution with the additional changes, recommending the Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan to the Mayor and City Council for adoption. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Commissioner Mouchepao announced that the next Joint Comprehensive/Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting is on Tuesday, August 8, 2017.

VIII. Communications Committee

Commissioner Underwood had no report.

IX. Task Force/Liaison Reports

No reports.

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

None.

XII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:37 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 September 22, 2017
(Date)

Cedrick Baker
Secretary of the Planning Commission

Planning team files/planning commission/minutes/July 28, 2017