

**WEST ST. PAUL PLANNING COMMISSION**  
Regular Meeting

**The regular meeting of the West St. Paul Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Samantha Green on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 6:56 pm.**

**Roll Call:** Samantha Green, Morgan Kavanaugh, Dan McPhillips, Maria Franzmeier, Tori Elmore, Lisa Stevens

**Also Present:** Melissa Sonnek, City Planner; Sharon Hatfield, Administrative Specialist; Amanda Johnson, City Attorney; John Justen, Council Liaison

**Adopt Minutes:** Minutes from the December 15, 2020 meeting were approved without any changes.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**PC Case 20-19 - Site Plan Application for the Construction of a Car Wash at 1949 Robert Street South – Crew Carwash, Inc.**

Sonnek said that this site plan application was for a car wash at the current Baker's Square site at 1949 Robert Street. Surrounding properties are on the north, B4 Shopping Center (Southview Square), to the east R1, Single Family Residential (Southview Country Club) and to the south and west, B3 (Aspen Dental and Southview Garden Center.) The side yard setbacks comply with code with the exception of the previously discussed north side yard setback, (66 feet). The parking setbacks meet the code minimums. The parking requirements for a car wash call for stacking for no less than 40 cars. The proposed stacking room allows 42 cars. There are 25 parking stalls, (10 regular stalls and 15 stalls that would offer a vacuum option.) The applicant was asked if he anticipates fully stacking the site. He said that they have never experienced the full number of cars being stacked, and do not expect full stacking at their site. Parking stall depths and widths meet the code minimum and the drive aisle width meets the code minimum. The eastern access on Crusader Avenue may be closed in the future. City Staff says the closure would increase safety of the site and of the intersection of Robert Street and Crusader Avenue. The access on the western side is proposed to be 35 feet wide. City Staff feels that this is too wide and recommends that the access width be reduced to 30 feet wide. Lighting plans show that some lighting extends beyond the property line. City Staff is recommending as a condition of approval that the applicant revise the plan so that no light extends into the abutting property lines. Regarding the landscaping, the plan calls for removing 3 trees (54 caliper inches) on the southern side of the property. The 30 percent minimum replacement would be 16 inches of replacement trees, (6-7 trees.) The plan proposes to plant 15 trees. This would meet the percentage replacement requirement but not the code that requires 1 tree for every 20 feet of property line. This would require 53 trees for 1,055 feet of property line. City Staff says that the applicant may not be able to plant the full number of trees. However, they would like to

have at least 11 more trees planted. Regarding the “fencing versus landscaping,” and the condition of the approved CUP, fencing was to be installed on the western and southern property line to reduce noise pollution. The garden center to the west, however, already has a privacy fence constructed. Additional landscaping may be preferable to having two fences abut one another.

The Environmental Committee reviewed the plan at their last meeting. The Committee said that the site could use more trees, particularly along the north and west property line. They discussed other tree species like Arborvitae or evergreens as they require less spacing between the trees. The Committee did approve of the plan. The Committee also recommended that the plants be pollinator-friendly and not treated with neonicotinoids; additional trees be planted on the west and north property lines; consider planting arborvitae or evergreens; and installing a rain garden in the south east planting bed to manage any stormwater runoff. Staff is recommending as a condition of approval that the applicant consider any additions or recommendations made by the Environmental Committee in their January 12, 2021 memo. On the east side of the site there is additional screening required because of the neighboring residential properties. Since there are already existing trees and fencing on the east side of Robert Street, this requirement has been met. The applicant has complied with the minimum code requirements for construction materials and design. Sonnek said for buildings which stretch over 60 feet or longer, code requires at least 2 measures of visual relief. The north and south elevations of the building stretch beyond this threshold. City Staff is recommending as a condition of approval that the north and south elevations be revised to conform to the visual relief requirements. The submitted plans did not include any details regarding the roof top mechanicals. City staff is recommending as a condition of approval that all rooftop mechanicals be properly screened. There is a similar situation with signage. There are no specifics on signage “ironed out” at this point. City Staff is recommending as a condition of approval that all signage comply with the appropriate signage code sections of zone ordinance. The submitted plans were reviewed by the City’s engineering consultant, WSB. The site is over the 1-acre mark, therefore multiple measures including water quality and rate control are required. City Staff is recommending a condition of approval that the applicant adhere to all the items outlined in the WSB memo of January 4, 2021. The applicant is also working with Staff to determine if additional utility, alterations and/or improvements are needed for the construction of the site. As the site is on Robert Street or abuts Robert Street, MnDOT did review the submitted plans. Since the site does not have driveway access to Robert Street, MnDOT’s comments were limited. The comments primarily talked about ADA access and compliance. City Staff is recommending as a condition of approval that the applicant adhere to the items outlined in the MnDOT memo of December 21, 2020. Sonnek concluded by saying the City Staff recommends the approval of the site plan subject to the conditions previously described in Sonnek’s presentation including that the applicant shall apply for and obtain all applicable building and sign permits, and that the site plan will be revised so that a trash receptacle will be provided at each vacuum station.

Sonnek asked if there were any questions. Green asked about the screening versus a fence on the shared [property] line with Southview. Green asked if theoretically, Southview were to take down their fence, would the applicant need to construct a fence. Sonnek confirmed this and said that it would be a reasonable condition of approval. Sonnek asked for the City Attorney for her opinion. Johnson, said she thinks this is true. However, the Commission is approving the plan as it is before them tonight. The fence exists today. The City would have to look at what might happen in the future and what mechanism there is for enforcement on an already approved site plan. Johnson is not sure “what kind of teeth” there would be.

McPhillips asked about the sidewalks on Crusader Avenue and if the City knows where the sidewalk will go. Sonnek said that the applicant has agreed to install sidewalk on their side of the site. Crusader Avenue is scheduled for reconstruction in 2022. A study will be conducted this year to see where the sidewalk should be constructed, either the north or south side of Crusader Avenue. It does benefit the site especially because of the bus stop on Crusader Avenue.

Franzmeier said the trees planted on the south side of the property looks like they might interfere with the future sidewalk. She wondered if the sidewalk adjacent to Aspen Dental would be removed as part of the Crusader Avenue “road refresh.” Sonnek said that she would be surprised if the sidewalk were removed. The City would try to preserve the existing sidewalk during the street reconstruction. She does not know the specifics of the design. If the sidewalk were disrupted, the City would try to reconstruct it. Green asked Furr to elaborate on the sidewalk plans. Furr said that the proposed sidewalk is outside of the carwash property and in the right of way. The sidewalk would not affect their landscape plantings. His company has been in conversations with the City Engineer; they plan to coordinate their work with the Crusader Avenue roadwork construction plans along with the carwash construction plans. Furr said that the current plan shows a fence on the western property boundary. They have had discussions regarding the necessity of installing the fence while there is an existing fence there today. Franzmeier asked about the materials for the carwash fence. Furr said the fence would be constructed of a composite material called Trex; it does not require as much maintenance. It stands up much better to weather than wood.

Green asked Furr how he felt about the Environmental Committee’s recommendations such as the rain garden in the southwest corner. Furr said that they have never done a rain garden before. They are particular about their landscaping being tight, trimmed often and neat and clean. Some types of water treatments are not meant to be maintained often. They get out of hand because they are supposed to be natural. This does not fit in with their image of being clean and tidy. Furr is concerned with this. He had not seen the recommendation until now. They are happy to add more trees and to increase landscaping. Thanks to the variance, they can add more green space to the north property line. They can also consider other options outside of the rain garden as well.

Kavanaugh asked about the northeast corner of the site plan; it abuts Robert Street. Kavanaugh asked if there is room to do some landscaping. Furr said absolutely. They have an annual flower program during the spring and summer season and have multiple change outs of annual flowers. They could add some beds along the sidewalks along the Robert Street frontage. They could also add some shrubs. They are fine with adding trees but would prefer not to block the visibility from Robert Street to the building.

Kavanaugh asked about the entrance to the carwash and the lines for the cars coming in and out of the carwash. He asked if there were enough room to prevent blockage especially because the entrance to the carwash is the same as the exit. Furr confirmed that the [traffic direction] would be clearly marked and defined; they typically use a 40-foot wide entrance and they have brought it down to 35 feet. When customers are coming in, they will be making a U-turn to come off of Crusader Avenue and get in line for the carwash. A U-turn takes more space than a right hand/ninety degree turn. They prefer to keep the width to 35 feet so that an entering car would not interfere with an exiting car.

Franzmeier asked about the snow removal process for the site. Furr said that they are extremely particular regarding snow removal; they require that the top of every concrete curb be cleared of all snow. Their company requires the removal prior to their opening at 7 am. If it is actively snowing, they are regularly clearing the snow. It is a full time job, and they take it very seriously. They would like to keep their property dry so that customers will want to come in and clean their vehicle. They have underground concrete heat; there is radiant heat in some places so that the snow does not build up. This is for the safety of their customers and their employees. They regularly salt the lots as well.

Franzmeier asked about the signage for the site. Furr said that building signage was shown on some of the elevations of the renderings that their company provided. They will likely reuse the pole sign that is existing on the site. It would be dressed up with a new sign logo. Franzmeier asked if the pylon sign was in compliance. Sonnek said that pylon signs in the business districts of West St. Paul would be legal non-compliant. Sonnek asked the City Attorney if it were a reasonable condition of approval to require that the pylon sign be converted to a monument sign. Johnson said that she has to investigate what has been done before in previous redevelopment. She will look into this. Franzmeier asked if he were open to providing a new compliant monument sign. Furr said this is not a call he can make. He must speak with the owner; he is very particular about signs. Sonnek asked if he would be able to give an answer prior to the Council meeting on January 25. Furr said yes. Kavanaugh said on the past, the Commission has strongly recommended the sign conversion. He mentioned the Dunkin Donuts example. Code requires the monument signs, and they look a lot better. Sonnek talked about the Dunkin Donuts sign; they took some time to get the monument sign done. It took Cub Foods about 10-12 years to get their signs converted. The conversion was part of the condition of approval at that lot; three existing pylon signs would be changed into a monument sign. The construction of the new signs is happening right now.

Stevens asked what the highest possible number of trees would be for this site. Sonnek said that depending on the species and variety, the number could vary. The recommendation from staff is to have at least 26 trees. This included the additional 11 trees that she mentioned in her report and presentation.

Stevens asked if the applicant was fine with the other recommendations from the Environmental Committee, (besides the rain garden.) Furr has to review the report again. Sonnek said that the recommendations included the planting of pollinator-friendly plants not treated with neonicotinoids; planting more trees on the north and west side of the property, considering planting arborvitae and evergreens; and the rain garden. Furr said that his company can comply all of the items with the exception of the rain garden. He said that arborvitae could be planted on the western side of the property to act as screening and to increase the number of trees for the application.

Johnson followed up with the question regarding the signage. She said that the City tried [requiring the conversion from pylon to monument signage] with Pawn America and lost that case. Johnson said the City cannot require that the applicant change the pylon sign. The City can ask them nicely to make the sign prettier. Green asked Furr very nicely with a strong recommendation to consider the monument sign. Furr said that this would be taken into consideration and guaranteed that the any sign there will look very nice. McPhillips said that in the Renaissance Plan and in the Comp Plan, the City was going toward the monument signage. He strongly recommends the monument sign.

With no other discussion from the Commission, Green opened the Public Hearing at 7:30 pm. As there was no public comment, Green closed the Public Hearing and brought the discussion back to the Commission.

Green said that she would like to see more than 11 new trees on the site. It is a big site plan, and this is by the applicant's choice. More landscaping on the property would be greatly appreciated. The Commission is strongly recommending but not requiring a monument sign to be installed on the property as well as more screening and landscaping to be done on the western side of the property. Kavanaugh added that he would like to see more landscaping on the northeast corner that abuts Robert Street. Franzmeier wanted to discuss the 35-foot drive aisle. The applicant wanted the drive aisle to be around 40 feet. She would like to know that the other Commissioners think about this. She is leaning toward abiding the applicant's request. The applicant knows their business and Franzmeier does not want to see people crashing into each other in the intersection and their one access point. Stevens said she agreed with Franzmeier and asked why the City is asking the applicant to reduce the width. Sonnek said that code calls for a minimum of 30 feet for auto uses unless otherwise approved by the City Engineer. Sonnek and the City Engineer discussed the 30-35-foot mark. Furr confirmed that 40 feet is the preferred width. They have some with 35 feet. They have gone back and made some drive aisles wider after that were less than 35-40 feet. The width is important especially with this point being the single point of entry and exit for the site. Kavanaugh said that he was

comfortable with the 30-foot width; because of the sidewalk there, the City does not want there to be too large a gap for people to walk across. Stevens said she is okay with at least a 35-foot width.

**Kavanaugh made a motion to approve the site plan with the additional items previously mentioned.**

**Discussion followed.**

**Furr asked for clarification on the north and south elevation relief. Furr clarified that there are trash receptacles at each vacuum station. There are no problems complying with this. The roof top mechanicals screening is generally handled by the roof top parapets. Anything else would be properly screened. Furr said that the other conditions (without the rain garden and the visual relief condition that is in need of clarification,) are acceptable generally speaking. Sonnek further explained the visual relief requirements and said the City requires the applicant to break up the massing on any buildings that are 60 feet or longer. An example of a vertical offset would be the difference in building height on the east side of the building. An example of horizontal offset is the instance in which the building might jut-in or out. There is also the option to divide the façade with different materials or textures. An example of this is the use of the limestone adjacent to the brick for visual relief. The final option for visual relief is by having recessed windows; the minimum requirement is 2 feet. Furr asked about the north and south elevations and if the canopies that jut over the recessed windows would be considered visual relief. The awnings jut out 18-24 inches over the top of each window. Sonnek said that she would ask the City Attorney about this, but has not counted awnings for visual relief before. Johnson said that this would have to be discussed with staff afterwards to see if it meets the visual relief requirements. If it meets the requirements it could be acknowledged at the next Council Meeting.**

**Green reminded the Commission that Kavanaugh made a motion to approve the application with the recommendation to have further landscaping on the northeast corner of the site as well as strongly recommending a monument sign and [planting] more than the 11 trees that Staff recommended.**

**Green asked if there were any friendly amendments.**

**Kavanaugh added that condition #3 would be changed to 35 feet.**

**Franzmeier added a friendly amendment regarding the western side of the property and the suggestion of the arborvitae for screening. Franzmeier asked if condition #4 was still applicable to the current application. Sonnek said that it can be removed because the site plan incorporates the condition. Franzmeier added the friendly amendment to remove condition #4.**

**Kavanaugh accepted the amendment.**

**Stevens added the friendly amendment that the applicant play ball with the Environmental Committee.**

**Sonnek asked for a point of clarification. It sounds like the Commission's preference is for trees instead of the fence on the west side. Sonnek asked if this were an accurate assessment. The Commissioners confirmed this.**

**McPhillips seconded the motion.**

**Votes 6 ayes/0 nays. The motion carried.**

Green said that the motion passed and congratulated Furr. She wished him luck at the Council Meeting.

**NEW BUSINESS – N/A**

**OLD BUSINESS – N/A**

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**Upcoming Planning Commission Appointments and Election of Officers**

Sonnek said there are four seats up for appointment and there are three Commissioners seeking reappointment. Commissioner Strohmeier could not continue the rest of his term because of a work conflict. He will not be able to attend the February or March meetings. He will not be seeking reappointment. Sonnek thanked him for nearly 3 years of services on the Planning Commission. Sonnek said that with the reappointments, comes the re-election of officers. The two officers are interested in seeking their reappointment and re-election.

Green said that it is best not to reappoint officers until the reappointments have been done. The elections will wait for their next meeting.

**A motion was made to adjourn at 7:47 pm.**

**The motion carried. All Ayes.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Sharon G. Hatfield**