

WEST ST. PAUL PLANNING COMMISSION

The regular meeting of the West St. Paul Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Hubert on Tuesday, January 17, 2017, at 7:00 p.m. in the Municipal Center Council Chambers, 1616 Humboldt Avenue, West St. Paul, Minnesota, 55118.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Shay, McPhillips, Leuer, Hubert, Nelson, Kavanaugh, and Ramsay.

Absent:

None.

Also Present:

Asst. Community Development Director Boike, Council Liaison Fernandez, and Recording Secretary Dull.

APPROVE MINUTES

ON MOTION of McPhillips, seconded by Ramsay, RESOLVED to approve the West St. Paul Planning Commission meeting minutes of December 20, 2016 as written. Ayes: 7 Nays: 0 Abstain: 0

PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

Renaissance Plan Update Review

Asst. Community Development Director Boike reviewed the memo to the Planning Commission and introduced Andrew Dresdner, Cuningham Group.

Mr. Dresdner presented a PowerPoint presentation to Commissioners. He detailed the history of the Renaissance Plan as well as its importance and purpose. Mr. Dresdner reviewed the primary recommendations of the plan and provided a series of clips from the report itself. He walked through the community engagement process and identified the community's ideas of strengths and weaknesses along the corridor as well as areas of agreement and disagreement. Next step for the plan would be to move on to Phase 2 which would work to amend the Zoning Code to fit with the plan as well as rebalancing the Code in other areas.

Commissioner Ramsay noted that during the previous work session the Signal Hills representative stated there was nothing that could be done with the Kmart building due to the existing lease and that Signal Hills' owners were comfortable with the current tenants and income generated. He was concerned that since Signal Hills was a big part of the Renaissance Plan, there wasn't much that would happen with that property or the idealized residential on the north end.

Commissioner Kavanaugh asked for more information on the PAC, number of meetings, time and staff involved, etc. Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike advised there were roughly five meetings, one every other month for a year, two-three public meetings with 20-30 attendees, staff included Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike, Community Dev. Dir. Hartshorn, and City Manager Fulton, as well as the progress presented to Council about three times. Comm. Kavanaugh asked about the split vote in the memo, the vote to accept the plan, and noted his concern that the Planning Commission hadn't had any input before the plan's acceptance. Mr. Dresdner stated the completion of the document was the result of the PAC. It was the Council that was split with whether they were comfortable progressing it as is. Because PAC's job was complete in putting together the report, Mr. Dresdner recommended the Council progress the plan to hash out areas of concern. Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike explained the vote noting it was Council's direction to proceed with the plan but part of that motion was direction to have a joint meeting.

Commissioner Leuer asked about the Thompson golf course. Mr. Dresdner explained there are still moving parts with the regional development but that it was part of the plan to use the area appropriately and was tailor made for the town center. Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike added that the existing Renaissance Plan keys in on a few areas and how they might be developed. He explained that they took the same approach with the update being presented keying in on places like the north end, Signal Hills, and the golf course.

Mr. Dresdner displayed illustrations of the intent of that area and noted it was important to think about Robert St. as a whole and not just in parts with the pattern to include smaller blocks and slightly more dense development.

Commissioner Shay asked about the plan for pedestrian walkways. Mr. Dresdner responded that the plan didn't go into specific details for each site but walkways were in the plan with ADA-compliant sidewalks and safe crossings over or under Robert St.

Commissioner Hubert explained that the Plan would put forth principals and potential uses; it does not say that the golf course will definitely be eliminated and housing will be developed but provides more of concept of what the City could look like.

Commissioner Ramsay noted the golf course couldn't be built on because of the soils and that the tunnel also couldn't be built per previous discussions. Mr. Dresdner stated the golf course would still be valuable for open space, recreation, and other repurposing. As for the tunnel, the County was still looking at it and it's not accurate to say it cannot be done. Commissioner Ramsay noted that with only one safe crossing, if Robert St. is the divider that people would not walk the entire length of Robert St. to cross at the tunnel.

Commissioner Hubert stated that having a safe, dedicated crossing for connectivity to the regional trail is what is being looked at in the Plan and the Plan provides options for that. He noted the logistics were for the elected officials to determine.

Commissioner McPhillips asked how the Renaissance Plan fit with other City plans and about next steps. Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike explained that the Renaissance Plan was part of the Comprehensive Plan and should Council choose to move on to Phase 2, zoning would be implemented and goals for the project would be put in place. For Planning Commission's tasks, the Plan can be approved as is, sent back, moved forward to Phase 2 or continued to discuss in greater detail and there were no timelines since it was a City project so the 60 day rule does not apply. He added that the Plan would have to come back to Planning Commission for a public hearing if approved. Staff is looking for recommendations to the Council. Comm. McPhillips asked if the Planning Commission could have a work session to discuss in greater detail. Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike stated the Council has not made any formal decisions on how to proceed because they requested input from Planning. If the Planning Commission was uncomfortable moving the Plan forward, staff would pass that along to Council.

Commissioner Kavanaugh agreed with the idea of a work session to drill down into more detail. He also noted the update would replace the existing document but that housing on Robert St. was an area of disagreement for PAC. Mr. Dresdner explained that the update focused more on the town center and north end but even the existing Plan had ideas of housing on Robert St. so it was not a new concept or a drastic change.

Commissioner Nelson confirmed that Phase 2 would be the zoning, that the document doesn't give any concrete city designs and stated that this would create a framework within the Code to provide opportunities for the vision to happen. Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike advised that staff reviews the Comprehensive Plan, Renaissance Plan, and the site plan with the Code itself when applications are presented.

Commissioner Hubert asked how the plan and future development would impact Robert St. and the current reconstruction project. Mr. Dresdner stated that the Plan stitches into different areas but for the most part works with what is existing noting that nothing contained in the plan would require rebuilding of Robert St. Commissioner Leuer noted that these plans are often 30-year visions so when it comes up again, it might be time to reconstruct Robert St. any way.

Commissioner Nelson asked if it took more energy to push the Plan forward with the interests at Signal Hills. Mr. Dresdner stated Signal Hills was a 40 acre prime location that the City has expressed interest in redevelopment but the owner has not. The owner has leases to honor but as situations change, the City should be ready if Signal Hills ever wants to partner but the City can't make the owner do anything.

Commissioner Shay asked that if the Comprehensive Plan was a higher vision, is there opportunity to approve portions that are actionable versus a separate tactical plan or does the Plan have to be approved in its entirety. She stated there were parts of the plan that she didn't agree with because of feasibility noting that if Signal Hills was a non-starter now, they should table it for later and just use items that are measureable. Mr. Dresdner recommended not cutting the plan and forwarding only certain parts because even though the City is not in a position to push anything forward with Signal Hills, it is still a good idea within the plan. He added that feasibility would be good work session material if the Planning Commission chose to go that route.

Commissioner Hubert stated it seemed the consensus of the Commission to push the discussion out one month to a work session but asked that Commissioners identify specific areas of concern.

ON MOTION of Kavanaugh, seconded by Shay, Commissioners CONTINUED the item for one month to a work session to be determined by staff before a regular meeting and Commissioners to submit comments, questions, concerns, and items of discussion to only Asst. Dev. Dir. Boike by email prior to the next meeting.

All Ayes: 7/0

Election of Officers

Commissioner Kavanaugh provided his self-nomination for Chair and gave a brief overview of his background and qualifications for the position. Secret ballot votes were tallied and confirmed Commissioner Kavanaugh as Chair.

Commissioner Nelson provided his self-nomination for Vice Chair and gave a brief overview of his background and qualifications for the position. Secret ballots were tallied and confirmed Commissioner Nelson as Vice Chair.

OLD BUSINESS:

None.

OTHER:

Asst. Development Director Boike asked for volunteers to sit as the Planning Commission Liaison for the Environmental Committee and explained the responsibilities. Commissioner Shay volunteered for the position.

ADJOURNMENT:

ON MOTION of Nelson, seconded by Ramsay, Commissioners RESOLVED to ADJOURN the January 17, 2017 regular meeting of the Planning Commission at 8:24 p.m. All Ayes: 7/0