



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

Minutes Friday, March 15, 2024

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, March 15, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present: Mmes.: Grill, Presley, and Starling
Messrs.: Hackney, Holst, Houmas, Johnson Becker, Martinson, Ortega, Reilly, Risberg, and Taghioff

Commissioners Absent: Mmes.: Thomas
Messrs.: Hood, Khadar, Ochoa, Moore and Syed

Also Present: Luis Pereira; Planning Director, Karoline Finlay; Planning Secretary, Yasmine Robinson; Current Planning Team Manager, Kady Dadlez, Nellie Jerome, Lucas Allen from Planning and Economic Development and Jimmy Shoemaker; Public Works. Jane McClure from My Villager.

I. Approval of the minutes for the March 1, 2024 Planning Commission Meeting

Commissioner Starling pointed out an error in the date on the minutes.

MOTION: Commissioner Holst moved to approve the minutes from March 1, 2024 with the date correction. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Starling. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

II. Chair's Announcements

Planning Chair Grill had no announcements to share with the commissioners. She did remind the commissioners that today we would be holding a public hearing on the Heights Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Director Pereira shared with the commission that there is a bill in the legislature to address missing middle housing. Staff has been working with legislators to make changes to the bill to ensure its effectiveness.

IV. Public Hearing: The Heights Comprehensive Plan Amendment (*Bill Dermody, 651/266-6717*)

Planning Chair Grill opened the public hearing by reading the chair script. She reminded the audience that questions should be posed directly to the chair and the commissioners. Karoline Finlay, Planning Secretary handed the chair the public sign-in sheet. There were no names on the sheet for public testimony. The chair then asked three times if there was anyone present who wished to be heard. There was no one. The chair then asked for a motion to close the public hearing and refer the Heights Comprehensive Plan Amendment to the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee.

MOTION: Commissioner Holst made a motion to close the public hearing and refer the matter to the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Reilly. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

V. Zoning Committee

Commissioner Taghioff gave the report for the committee. There were two agenda items at the March 7, 2024 Zoning Committee meeting.

#024-011-658 964 Payne Rezoning – Rezone from H2 residential district to B2 community business. 964 Payne Ave., NE corner of Payne Avenue and Case Avenue H2, District Council 5, Ward 6. (*Christina Hong, 651/266-6572*)

Commissioner Ortega asked why the site was currently zoned residential instead of business? Commissioner Taghioff explained that due to a “historical quirk” it is an “L” shaped site that is dual zoned.

The rezoning of 964 Payne Avenue was approved unanimously on a voice vote.

#024-013-570 1566 University Ave. W CUP & Variances (United Village) – Conditional use permit for additional building height; 75’ permitted by right; 90’ requested; and variances for front yard setback, entrance drive, above grade window and door openings, building anchoring the corner, structure step backs, and building façade articulation on property at 1566 University Ave. W., between Snelling Ave. and Pascal St., T4M, District Council 13, Ward 1. (*Kady Dadlez, 651/266-6619*)

Commissioner Taghioff explained the conditional use permit and the first four variances for the site. For the CUP the committee felt that the ask for 90’ building height was consistent with the master plan as it anticipated hotel building heights of 100’ to 180’. There are a total of eight variances for the site. There were ten motions in total for the United Village conditional use permit and variances. They are as follows:

MOTION VARIANCE #1: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the first variance with conditions (to permit 1' step back on the Asbury side of the hotel building; 6' stepping back required and 1' proposed for a variance of 5'),. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Holst. The motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

MOTION VARIANCE #2: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the second variance with conditions (to permit a 44.4' front yard setback for the hotel building; 10' maximum setback required for a variance of 34.4'). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Starling. The motion passed on a roll call vote with ten commissioners voting in favor and two against (Reilly and Taghioff).

Commissioners Reilly and Taghioff voted against the motion to approve the variance. Commissioner Reilly stated that findings A and B were not met, noting that landscaping was not enough to make a high-quality pedestrian streetscape, as called for in comprehensive plan land use policy LU28 and that Ramsey County guidelines for access are not a reason to approve the variance. Commissioner Taghioff concurred with Commissioner Reilly's stated reasons to oppose the variance, adding that finding C was not met because the applicant did not demonstrate a practical difficulty.

MOTION VARIANCE #3: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the third variance with conditions (to permit an entrance drive to occupy 322' of lot frontage; 60' maximum required for a variance of 262'). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Starling. The motion failed on a roll call vote. Eight commissioners voted against the motion to approve variance #3 and four commissioners voted in favor (Grill, Holst, Presley, Starling).

The motion to approve the variance failed on a voice vote of 4 to 8. In voicing opposition to the variance Commissioner Taghioff noted that findings A, B, and C were not met. The proposed driveway is vehicle-focused and does not provide safe and efficient circulation of all modes of transportation, including transit, pedestrian and bicycle traffic, as per the intent and purpose of the Zoning Code. The variance is not consistent with transportation policy T3 in the comprehensive plan, which calls for designing first for pedestrians, then bicyclists, then transit, and then other vehicles. The variance is not consistent with land use policies LU9 and LU28, which call for high-quality urban design and pedestrian friendliness and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes. Land use policies LU14 and LU30 were also cited by commissioners as reasons to oppose the variance. Commissioner Reilly cited policy LU1.3 from the Union Park Community Plan that calls for promoting development that provides safe, pleasant, and interesting pedestrian experiences, especially along University Avenue. Commissioner Taghioff stated that the project site allows for access on all sides, therefore, the practical difficulty finding was not demonstrated. The entire redevelopment site, 34 acres, gives the applicant the freedom to make choices about access. The decision to site the driveway parallel to University Avenue is a choice made by the applicant and does not constitute a practical difficulty. Commissioner Hackney cited the district councils' opposition to the variance.

After the motion to approve variance #3 failed, Commission moved to deny the variance citing the reasons stated above. There was no further discussion on the motion to deny the variance, which was approved on a voice vote.

MOTION TO DENY VARIANCE #3: Commissioner Taghioff moved to deny variance #3. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Reilly. The motion passed on a roll call vote of ten in favor and two against (Holst, Starling).

MOTION VARIANCE #4: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the fourth variance with conditions (to permit the hotel building to be setback and not anchor the corners at University & Asbury and University & Simpson). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martinson. The motion passed on a roll call vote of nine in favor and three against (Ortega, Reilly, Taghioff).

Commissioners Reilly, Ortega, and Taghioff voted against the motion to approve the variance. Commissioner Reilly referred to the rationale stated for his vote on variance #2, adding that the variance would alter the essential vision for the character of the master plan area and that finding F was, therefore, not met. Commissioner Ortega voiced his opposition to the motion and referred to both Commissioner Reilly and Taghioff reasons for his position, that neither findings A, B, nor C were met. Commissioner Taghioff concurred with Commissioners Reilly and Ortega's reasons for opposing the variance, and referred to policy T3 in the transportation chapter of the comprehensive plan that includes the hierarchy for design of rights-of-way being pedestrians first, bicyclists second, transit third, and then other vehicles. He added that policy LU9 in the land use chapter calls for high quality urban design that supports pedestrian friendliness and a healthy environment, and enhances the public realm.

MOTION VARIANCE #5: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the fifth variance with conditions (to permit 8% window and door openings on the west façade along Asbury Street; 15% required for a variance of 7% (have 1,036 square feet, need 1,934 for a variance of 848 square feet). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hackney. The motion passed on a roll call vote of six in favor and five against (Hackney, Johnson Becker, Ortega, Reilly, Taghioff).

Commissioners Hackney, Johnson Becker, Ortega, Reilly, and Taghioff voted against the motion to approve the variance stating that the findings C and D were not met, adding that a practical difficulty finding cannot be made for less glazing than the code requires. This is a design choice relating to the floor plan that is within the applicant's control, not a practical difficulty. Commissioners also noted the variance is not consistent with comprehensive plan policies for a high quality pedestrian design nor the Snelling Station Area Plan's call for street level activity.

MOTION VARIANCE #6: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the sixth variance with conditions (to permit window and door openings to comprise 31% of length (50% required) and 16% of the area (30% required) on the west façade along Simpson Street; (have 54 linear feet, need 88, for a variance of 34 linear feet for the length requirement and have 433 square feet, need 792, for a variance of 359 square feet for the area requirement)). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hackney. The motion passed on a roll call vote of seven in favor and three against (Ortega, Reilly, Taghioff).

Commissioners Reilly, Ortega, and Taghioff voted against the motion to approve the variance. Commissioner Taghioff cited the district councils' opposition to the variance. Commissioner Reilly cited findings B and C for his opposition and referred to the comprehensive plan policy calling for a high quality pedestrian design, LU9, and noted that a practical difficulty was not demonstrated. Commissioner Ortega concurred with the reasoning of Commissioners Reilly and Taghioff in voicing his opposition to the variance.

MOTION VARIANCE #7: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the seventh variance with conditions (to allow window and door openings to comprise 31% of length, 50% required and 16% of width, 30% required on the east façade). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martinson. The motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

MOTION VARIANCE #8: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the eighth variance with conditions (Variance to permit window and door openings to comprise 6% of length (50% required) and 9% of the area (30% required) on the east façade along Asbury Street; (have 10 linear feet, need 88, for a variance of 78 linear feet for the length requirement and have 100 square feet, need 338, for a variance of 238 square feet for the area requirement). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martinson. The motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

MOTION, CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT: Commissioner Taghioff moved to approve the conditional use permit with conditions (permit for additional height; 75' permitted by right and 90' proposed). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hackney. The motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

Commissioners Reilly, Taghioff, and Hackney commented that they like and support the project and the conditional use permit, but despite this they were not able to support all of the variance requests.

VI. Comprehensive & Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner Holst gave the report for the committee. The committee met last on Wednesday, March 13, 2024. The committee received a presentation from Planning staff regarding drive through sales and service use. There will be a zoning study that will come before the full Planning Commission in the near future.

VII. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Risberg gave the report for the committee. The committee last met on March 4, 2024. There were three presentations from Public Works: Jackson Street Reconstruction, Dale Street Safety Conversion and the Dale Street Redesign.

Jimmy Shoemaker from Public Works gave the commissioners an update on the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan changes that have occurred since December 23, 2023.

MOTION: Commissioner Risberg made a motion to approve the committee recommendation of the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan to the Planning Commission and to refer the recommendation to the City Council for approval. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hackney. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

VIII. Communications-Nominations Committee

Director Pereira reported to the commissioners that the annual report has been completed and will be transmitted to the Mayor's Office and City Council today.

IX. Task Force/Liaison Reports

None.

X. Old Business

None.

XI. New Business

None.

XII. Adjournment

11:06 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by:
Karoline Finlay, Planning Commission Secretary
Planning and Economic Development Department,
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved _____

4/12/24

(Date)



Luis Pereira
Planning Director



Mauricio Ochoa
Planning Commission Secretary