



City of Ann Arbor

301 E. Huron St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
<http://a2gov.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Meeting Minutes City Planning Commission

Tuesday, September 20, 2011

7:00 PM Ann Arbor Municipal Center, 301 E. Huron Street, 2nd Flr.

Commission public meetings are held the first and third Tuesday of each month. Both of these meetings provide opportunities for the public to address the Commission. Persons with disabilities are encouraged to participate. Accommodations, including sign language interpreters, may be arranged by contacting the City Clerk's Office at 734-794-6140 (V/TDD) at least 24 hours in advance. Planning Commission meeting agendas and packets are available from the Legislative Information Center on the City Clerk's page of the City's website (<http://a2gov.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>) or on the 1st floor of City Hall on the Friday before the meeting. Agendas and packets are also sent to subscribers of the City's email notification service, GovDelivery. You can subscribe to this free service by accessing the City's website and clicking on the red envelope on the home page.

These meetings are typically broadcast on Ann Arbor Community Television Network Channel 16 live at 7:00 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of the month and replayed the following Wednesdays at 10:00 AM and Sundays at 2:00 PM. Recent meetings can also be streamed online from the CTN Video On Demand page of the City's website (www.a2gov.org).

1 CALL TO ORDER

Chair Mahler called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

2 ROLL CALL

Rampson called the roll.

Present 6 - Mahler, Derezhinski, Briggs, Westphal, Giannola, and Adenekan

Absent 3 - Bona, Pratt, and Woods

3 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Adenekan, seconded by Derezhinski, that the Agenda be Approved as presented. On a voice vote, the Chair declared the motion carried.

4 INTRODUCTIONS

None

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

11-1197 August 16, 2011 City Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Westphal, seconded by Giannola, that the minutes be

approved and forwarded to the City Council. On a voice vote, the Chair declared the motion carried.

6 REPORTS FROM CITY ADMINISTRATION, CITY COUNCIL, PLANNING MANAGER, PLANNING COMMISSION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES, WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

6-a City Council

Derezinski reported that the Council meeting the previous night focused on funds dedicated to public arts in the Streets millage. He said the action was postponed until after the second meeting in November to allow the Arts Commission to make a presentation to City Council about the activities to date. He noted there is currently a collaboration with the Detroit Institute of Arts and other groups.

Derezinski said that the Clark Rezoning proposal prompted discussion regarding spot zoning and focused on the Commission's discussion about this location and the proposed rezoning across State Street. He said he pointed out that Planning Commission wants to proceed with the corridor study to look at land use comprehensively. He said this item was postponed.

Derezinski said that Council approved the change to the Commission's bylaws.

Derezinski said that Council approved a resolution moving forward with clusters of annexations. He said that the City has had conversations with adjoining townships.

Derezinski said that, while not on the agenda, City Place was being discussed by Council members, and whether there could be last minute changes. He said, if things stay as now, the buildings would be demolished and construction of the site plan would move forward.

6-b Planning Manager

Rampson reported that the R4C/R2A committee meeting scheduled for tomorrow has been postponed to allow for the members to have additional time to study the final draft report.

Rampson reminded the Commission about the Joint Commissions meeting, which will be held at Cobblestone Farms on September 27 at 6:00 PM.

6-c Planning Commission Officers and Committees

None

6-d Written Communications and Petitions

11-1198 Communication to City Planning Commission

Received and Filed

7 AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Persons may speak for three minutes about an item that is NOT listed as a public hearing on this agenda. Please state your name and address for the record.)

None

8 PUBLIC HEARINGS SCHEDULED FOR NEXT BUSINESS MEETING

Mahler read the Public Notice as published in the newspaper.

9 REGULAR BUSINESS - Staff Report, Public Hearing and Commission Discussion of Each Item

(If an agenda item is tabled, it will most likely be rescheduled to a future date. If you would like to be notified when a tabled agenda item will appear on a future agenda, please provide your email address on the form provided on the front table at the meeting. You may also call Planning and Development Services at 734-794-6265 during office hours to obtain additional information about the review schedule or visit the Planning page on the City's website (www.a2gov.org).)

(Public Hearings: Individuals may speak for three minutes. The first person who is the official representative of an organized group or who is representing the petitioner may speak for five minutes; additional representatives may speak for three minutes. Please state your name and address for the record.)

(Comments about a proposed project are most constructive when they relate to: (1) City Code requirements and land use regulations, (2) consistency with the City Master Plan, or (3) additional information about the area around the petitioner's property and the extent to which a proposed project may positively or negatively affect the area.)

11-1196 Varsity at Ann Arbor Site Plan for City Council Approval - A proposal to demolish a 2-story office building and construct a 13-story (148 feet) apartment building with 181 units for 415 persons, including 76 vehicle and 137 bicycle parking spaces at 425 East Washington Street on the 0.59 acre site. Staff Recommendation: Postpone

Dileo presented the staff report, noting that the petitioners had submitted their preliminary approval from the Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner.

PUBLIC HEARING:

Hugh Souk, 505 E Huron Street, representative of the Sloan Plaza Condominium Association, stated that he and his neighbors are concerned about the impact of this project to the vicinity, particularly the traffic on Huron Street. He said the driveway opening on Huron does not provide adequate queue spacing for vehicles, which will make traffic flow worse. He said the other concern is with the design of the facade, which is non-contextual. He said the site is located between historic buildings and should respect this. He said that both frontages needed to be treated as main facades, rather than an alley way.

Bob Keane, WDG Architect, 1025 Connecticut Ave, NW Ste 300, Washington, DC, representing the petitioner, said that this has been a highly collaborative process. He said he feels that working with the zoning overlay and the neighborhood has resulted with good comments, which they have largely addressed. He provided a presentation of the context of the neighborhood as it relates to the site. He described the elevations as two slip masses for a building model, with a folding metal wall

creating a dramatic top.

Christine Crockett, president of the Old Fourth Ward Association, noted that she was on the design committee that helped develop the design guidelines. She said that she does not object to this project; it is appropriate for D1 and good for campus. She said her objection is to the design on the Huron Street frontage, and she has not seen a change since the design was submitted in August. She said it feels like a back door garage. She said she has confidence that this developer can acknowledge the character of the Huron Street overlay. She said that the garage entrance should be consolidated to a single entrance on Washington. She added that the building facades on both Huron and Washington streets need to be treated with the same respect.

Ray Detter, 120 N Division Street, Ann Arbor, representing the Downtown Citizens Advisory Committee, said that no one is going to argue about the zoning or the height. He said that his comments center on design. He noted that the design is better than when they started, and can be better yet. He said the Commission can make suggestions for improving the design, such as eliminating the driveway onto Huron Street and pulling back the portion of building along that street. He said another possibility would be widening the mews, so people can walk from Huron to Liberty. He said that there is no question that this will be approved, but he hopes that it can be an even better project.

Earl Ophoff, 3815 Plaza Drive, Ann Arbor, Midwestern Consulting for the petitioner, addressed the comments listed in the staff report. He said that the solid waste comments are consistent with what has been approved with Zaragon 1 and Zaragon 2. He said that there is no need for a variance to allow for a truck entrance, because a dumpster will not be provided. He said that they have addressed the Forestry comments, and he said he was confused about comments regarding references to corrections to the grading plans.

Brad Moore, 4844 Jackson Road, Ste 150, Ann Arbor, J. Bradley Moore, Associate Architect for the petitioner, said that the Huron facade has been revised significantly to make it look more like a front entrance. They have added windows and a canopy, pedestrian entry, flower boxes, along with stone material, taking cues from other buildings like Campus Inn. He said that regarding traffic on Huron, all of the site's current traffic exits onto Huron, which will be reduced. There will be right-out/right-in restrictions. He noted there is less conflict with pedestrian traffic on Huron, so dual entries reduces these conflicts.

Steve Kaplan, neighbor of the future building, appealed to the petitioners to put more of the parking below grade to allow more opportunity for grade-level uses, since this building will change the retail context of the area. He said there is a growing need for uses that would be squandered with grade level parking.

Mahler closed the public hearing at 8:05 pm.

Motion made by Derezinski, seconded by Westphal that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Mayor and City Council approve The Varsity Planned Project Site Plan and Development Agreement.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

Derezinski asked how we can solve the issue of the plaza.

Dileo said there are three available options: redesign to reduce the size of the plaza, request a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals, or through planned project modifications.

Derezinski asked why this did not get caught earlier in the process.

Dileo said this is a new requirement and there haven't been many projects that have been reviewed under the new A2D2 standards and reviewing for the new street wall setback issue wasn't caught until the second review.

Derezinski said that one of the issues that has been raised is traffic on Huron. He said that the petitioner noted that traffic will actually be cut down from 88 vehicles to 50. He asked if studies have been done on student driving behaviors.

Ophoff said they looked at peak hour traffic as part of the traffic study, and they found that this would reduce both the peak and overall load on Huron.

Derezinski noted that the design of the Huron frontage has been redesigned, yet some public speakers had made reference that those changes were not enough. He asked specifically which entrance or details were part of the discussion.

Moore showed a rendering of the Huron Street elevation and noted the changes.

Ophoff showed a plan review of the plaza in front of the Huron Street frontage, pointing out that the plaza differentiated it from looking like a simple entrance to a garage door.

Keane said that the Huron Street frontage contains the same materials and approach as the Washington Street frontage. He said the garage door looks more like a storefront, and the opening above adds articulation. He said that they are located between two Victorian buildings, but this is not a Victorian building.

Westphal asked how the plaza on Washington Street was conceived with the large setback of the neighboring church.

Dileo said the plaza was submitted in the original design but can't speak to the petitioner's intent. She said it has the effect of providing an appropriate transition to the church gardens.

Westphal said that he was struck by the need to diffuse traffic by adding additional vehicle entrances, and noted that there tends to be a struggle between additional curbcuts and pedestrian orientation needs. He asked if they had hourly traffic counts during the heaviest times, and if those showed the count would be significantly less with the new project.

Dileo said she believed the traffic impact study would address this enquiry and noted that, in general, residential uses have a lower traffic volume per unit than professional offices and apartments and have a larger spread of the peak. She said that she believed with student housing it would be significantly different than with professional office uses.

Westphal asked if the Design Review Board had taking into consideration the pedestrian orientation and if they had asked about possible retail use on the first floor.

Dileo said the first floor uses had been discussed at the Design Review Board, and the petitioner said they had not intended for retail at the present time but there are uses on the first floor that could be converted at a future date.

Westphal asked if the entrance on Huron Street, next to the garage door, will be a 24-hour access entrance.

Moore said that the residents will have security card access and visitors would need to walk down to the public entrance for access.

Giannola said her main concern is with the parking. She asked if there were calculations showing that the parking will meet the needs.

Moore said that they have provided sufficient parking under the zoning ordinance, and that it is similar to other student housing projects in the downtown. He said this is also similar to the petitioner's other projects. Moore pointed out that the close proximity to the campus means that students don't need to have cars to get to campus and therefore don't need the parking.

Giannola asked if the residents will be told that their apartments don't come with parking.

Moore said that the parking spaces will be leased separately.

Giannola asked if there have been problems with parking at 411 Lofts located next door.

Moore said that they are not aware of any problems that might exist. He said that they have been informed by the State Street Merchants Association that additional parking spaces will be available in the Liberty Square structure as well as at the Library Lot.

Giannola asked if staff knew if permitted parking spots were currently available at these lots.

Rampson responded that currently there is a waiting list and there will be 700 spaces that will be coming available on-line within a year. She explained that once the Library Lot is completed there will be shifting that will take place throughout the parking structures.

Moore added that the Library Lot will be completed before their construction is complete.

Briggs asked if there has been a partnership with ZipCar.

Moore said that they have identified two spaces, on the adjacent site to the west of them, for a car sharing service.

Briggs asked about the pedestrian-level design in the mews and plaza.

Moore said that they have been working with the church from the beginning, with much of the design influence coming from the church's desires as well as amenities coming from discussions with the City's Park's Department.

Ophoff showed a graphic overall view of the mews and described the materials. He said the path accesses the entrance to the bicycle storage room as well as brings pedestrians from Tally Hall alley all the way across the block. He said the path will provide a better entrance to the church's memorial gardens. Ophoff explained that they will be replacing the chain link fencing with a more decorative black fence similar to the existing fence that can currently be seen from the street. He said for lighting

they will be providing building mounted lights. Special paving in several colors and patterns will be used for the path. He noted that the architects have shown a green screen where the path comes closest to the building wall. He said they will echo the surrounding plantings and tie it all together.

Briggs asked about the width of the walkway and if there was any possibility to extend the 5 feet widths to accommodate pedestrian-bicycle conflicts.

Ophoff said it is 5 feet at a minimum, and varies to 8, 9, and 10 feet. He said that originally they had proposed such extensions but came to realize they can't extend pavement onto the neighboring historic property.

Briggs encouraged the petitioner to consider additional details with the walkway noting that Milwaukee has done things to incorporate public art and interesting items in their paving projects. She asked about the bicycle storage room amenities.

Ophoff explained the exterior Class C spaces, and interior Class B spaces as well as the entrance to the bicycle room.

Keane pointed out the location of the bicycle storage.

Briggs asked about amenities, such as free bicycle tire air that might be offered.

Keane said it was a nice idea, and they will look into it.

Briggs asked why the parking is not all underground.

Keane said there is already an excavation on the site, so it is cost effective to use the site. He said that the architectural treatments are such that it will not feel like you are entering a garage, but rather a garden.

Adenakan asked why retail was not considered.

Moore said that the student lounge on the grade level and fitness center on the second level will activate the plaza. He said if there was an interest in converting the first floor lounge to retail, there would still be an upper floor student lounge available making such a conversion possible. He said in talking to owners in the area, they found that there is not a current demand for retail and they would like to support the neighboring retail businesses.

Adenakan asked if there were more pedestrian than vehicular traffic on Huron Street.

Dileo said that she didn't have a count but believed there are more cars than pedestrians on Huron Street. She offered to follow-up with The City's Public Services Department to see if she could get a count.

Adenakan asked about the amount of bicycle parking provided.

Moore said they were providing more bicycle parking than what was required and referred to the comparison charts in the staff report.

Dileo reviewed the information in the comparison chart.

Westphal asked staff to clarify the Commission's ability to talk about the design guidelines standards and the planned project.

Dileo said that discussion of design is wide open; the code says that there is a mandatory review and voluntary compliance. She said that the planned project standards were not amended and they allow for design discussion as well as allowing for flexibility for setbacks and height that provide a public benefit. She said the intent is for the "beneficial arrangement" in a physical configuration, rather than design.

Westphal praised the report and work of the Design Review Board in reviewing the project, noting that it had led to positive changes in the project.

Westphal applauded the petitioner for the walkway and bicycle parking in excess of the minimum requirements. He said when this project comes for a vote, he was having a struggle with the arrangement. He said that he feels that the plaza space will be underutilized without retail on the first floor. He said the space that is created between the plaza and the church setback appears more of an open space than a plaza, and he views this as a negative rather than a positive. He said in looking at the plaza there is an entrance to the lobby with a wall or hedge separating one from the building without any permeability to the building except for the lobby area, which Westphal described as giving him the feeling of a wide path more than a plaza.

Westphal said the project should not have two curbcuts, since we are trying to encourage pedestrian traffic in this area and he does not believe the argument that an additional curbcut is necessary to diffuse traffic. He said it's dangerous and not a pedestrian oriented use to put a driveway on Washington. He added that he would urge another look at the east facade to improve the appearance.

Moore said the petitioner is willing to remove the plaza to meet code.

A motion was made by Derezinski, seconded by Giannola, that the petition be postponed until the outstanding issues are resolved. On a roll call, the vote was as follows with the Chair declaring the motion carried.

Yeas: 6 - Eric A. Mahler, Tony Derezinski, Erica Briggs, Kirk Westphal, Diane Giannola, and Eleanore Adenekan

Nays: 0

Absent: 3 - Bonnie Bona, Evan Pratt, and Wendy Woods

10 AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Persons may speak for three minutes on any item.)

Ray Detter said that he has been involved in discussion about traffic and parking downtown. He said that there is no intention of building more public parking. He said that we want to be more creative than using existing parking structures for long-term parking and we should be working in that direction.

11 COMMISSION PROPOSED BUSINESS

None

12 ADJOURNMENT

**A motion was made by Derezinski, seconded by Adenekan, that the meeting be Adjourned. On a voice vote, the Chair declared the motion carried.
Adjourned at 8:50 PM.**

Eric Mahler, Chair
mg

**Working Session Immediately Following Adjournment, in Council
Chambers Workroom.**