

Summary of Challenges with the City Planning Department Process - A Proposed Addition for the Barn at 200/202 Huron View, Ann Arbor:

How the Current City Site Plan Review Process is Flawed for Small Projects

- In August 2019, Theresa and Brad Angelini of Angelini & Associates Architects made an offer to purchase the property at 200/202 Huron View in order to use the barn as the office for Angelini & Associates Architects staff of 10. The barn and house are zoned O-Office and have been used as office space since the 1970's. The property was granted a Special Exception Use in 2012 for use of the barn as a church for under 49 people. (The barn has a finished interior.)
- Our sales agreement included a contingency to confirm with the City Planning Department that it would be feasible to add a small addition to the barn and to understand the requirements and cost implications associated with this proposal. We were referred to a staff member in the Planning Department, who had done the staff report work for the Special Exception Use for the church (previous ownership).
- We met with the Planning staff member and various other departmental authorities to review the proposed addition to add a new code-conforming stairway to the exterior to connect the three floors and remove the existing non-conforming interior stairs. This would provide open office space on the middle level for 8 desks, which was what was needed to use the barn for this open office space. There were 5 meetings with the staff between August 22nd and October 16th to review the proposed project, which raised no major concerns.
- We were told that since the previous church approval had an approved site plan (an approved plot plan), all that would be needed was Administrative Approval by staff, if the addition was under 10% of the existing square footage. The associated required site work would only include connection of the sewer from the street to the barn (disconnection of the sewer between the house and the barn, with an estimated cost of \$25,000).
- On October 16th, after we had released the contingency based on the City feedback, the Planning staff member notified us that a mistake had been made and the previous "plot plan" used by the church was not a "site plan" and therefore any addition would be required to go through the full Site Plan Review with the City Planning Commission.
- The Site Plan Review Application then led to include City Council Review, since the square footage for filling in the existing stairs, in addition to the square footage of the proposed stairway/entry/ADA restroom addition exceeded 10% limit of the existing 2225 SF of the barn. The proposed additional square footage would have been 496 SF over three floors. The existing garage of 492 SF on site was to be demolished, also. The net gain on the site would have been 4 SF. This Site Plan Review Process led to the following requirements:
 - Engineered storm water detention areas – two excavated rain gardens of significant size.
 - 3 new street trees plus 1 tree in the parking area (while 5 landmark trees exist).
 - A "fire access road" so two fire engines could pass side by side between the barn and house.
 - Reworking of the parking and asphalt to provide 13 spaces and the wide fire access road (the church had 17 approved) involving removal of bushes and existing landscaping.
 - A 5-foot wide sidewalk along Huron View, with no sidewalks nearby, leading nowhere and destroying the existing raingarden of coneflowers, poppies, bee balm, dusty miller, and black eyed susans, creating an impermeable surface area of 600 SF.

- Enclosures for the trash/recycling/compost bins.
 - Engineered Sanitary flow calculations (although 3 showers and a restroom were to be removed and we were initially told that this calculation would not be necessary).
 - A Traffic Trip Generation study calculated by a Traffic engineer – for the proposed 15 cars entering and leaving the site daily for the offices in the barn and house.
 - One-way signage on existing drives, conflicting with the neighbor's existing drive access on the easement.
 - An inspection for the footing drain disconnect program.
 - The requirements above, coupled with engineering fees to prepare the submittal, \$12,835 in city application fees, and the sewer connection totaled over \$120,000, causing us to pull the project from the City Site Plan Review on 3/16/20.
- During the 7 months of this process with the City Planning Department, we experienced the following problems that created unnecessary delays and expense:
 - Staff made a mistake on what requires a Site Plan Review vs an Administrative Approval.
 - "Plot Plan" and "Site Plan" are not defined in the Zoning Ordinance, creating misunderstandings.
 - Staff used old copies of the Zoning Ordinance during meetings, which caused confusion since the old and new ordinances have different page numbers
 - Staff used calendars from the previous year when projecting CPC Meeting dates, so the dates given to us were wrong.
 - The etrakit system used by the various departmental reviews did not always contain the staff review – some staff just noted required resubmission on etrakit – and would not communicate the actual feedback for 3 months, even after multiple email requests.
 - The staff reviews on etrakit did not reference the portion of the Ordinance that they were referring to when requiring resubmission.
 - Some staff reviews were not written as clear sentences that stated a requirement or gave feedback.
 - Staff reviews on etrakit were not timely.
 - The Planning Commission Meeting in March was cancelled for not having a quorum, which would have delayed the project another month.
- Recommended Improvements to the Site Plan Process:
 - Reconsider the threshold of adding 10% of existing square footage setting off Site Plan Review. Considerations should include:
 - The size of the original building. Consider setting a SF threshold for an addition of 500 SF or 1000 SF, not necessarily 10% of a building under 5000 SF.
 - If there are multiple buildings on a site, consider the total SF on the site, rather than limit it per building. (currently a 10,000 SF building could have an addition of 1000 SF currently while a 1000 SF building could have an addition of 100 SF, but both would require a full Site Plan Review, just above these numbers)
 - Consider allowing additions for life safety or ADA requirements, without triggering a Site Plan Review. (stairways, ADA restrooms, elevators)
 - Define "Plot Plan" and "Site Plan" in the Ordinance.
 - Staff reviews on etrakit should be reviewed by other departmental staff before posting – both for consistency of departmental reviews and for coherent sentences.
 - The City needs to determine what is of critical importance that will encourage development and improve the City while also being fair to the property owner.