

MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
April 4, 2022

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a meeting on April 4, 2022, at the DeKalb Public Library in the Yusunas Meeting Room located at 309 Oak Street, DeKalb, Illinois. Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

A. ROLL CALL

Recording Secretary Stephanie Turner called the roll. Planning and Zoning Commission members present were: Trixy O'Flaherty, Maria Pena-Graham, Bill McMahon, Shannon Stoker (arrived at 6:04 PM) and Chair Max Maxwell. Steve Becker and Jerry Wright were absent. Planning Director Dan Olson and City Manager Bill Nicklas were present representing the City of DeKalb.

B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (Additions/Deletions)

Chair Maxwell requested a motion to approve the April 4, 2022, agenda as presented. Mr. McMahon motioned to approve the agenda as presented. Ms. O'Flaherty seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. March 7, 2022 –Chair Maxwell requested a motion to approve the March 7, 2022, minutes as presented. Ms. O'Flaherty motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Ms. Pena-Graham seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Open Floor to Anyone Wishing to Speak on Record)

Chair Maxwell noted Shannon Stoker arrived at 6:04 p.m. Cliff Cleland, 518 S. 2nd St., approached the podium to speak on the project at 145 Fisk Avenue.

Chair Maxwell informed Mr. Cleland that he would get an opportunity to voice his concerns at a later point in the meeting as this portion is open to discussion for items that are not on the agenda.

Planning Director Olson added the applicant (145 Fisk Ave.) will give his presentation, staff will add input, then the public will get a chance to speak on the matter.

E. NEW BUSINESS

1. **Sketch Plan (Concept Plan) Review** – A request by Jon Sauser for review of a Sketch Plan (Concept Plan) for construction of approximately 32 apartment units in the existing building at 145 Fisk Avenue.

Jon Sauser, contract purchaser of 145 Fisk Avenue, started out by informing the Commission and audience of being a lifelong resident, DeKalb business owner, and a

vested part of the community for many years. Mr. Sauser stressed the proposed site's building has been sitting vacant for over 25 years and added he wants to see something beneficial come from this property. He explained there have been many plans for this building over the years that never were finalized. He added the building is historical and has good bones so it should not be torn down and should be redeveloped. Mr. Sauser said the goal was to create a project that fits in with the existing community and neighborhood, which he believes should be an apartment building.

Mr. Sauser described the plan for the proposed building, which would consist of one- and two-bedroom apartment units. He mentioned they would use of the existing parking area, which currently has more than enough parking. He explained City staff recommended moving the existing access along Sycamore Road further north to better accommodate traffic flow at the stop light (N. 1st St. and Sycamore Rd). Mr. Sauser indicated the proposed site lies between multifamily and single-family residences.

Mr. Sauser continued by noting the existing landscaping of the property, including a good number of mature trees. He mentioned the goal is to keep as many of the trees as possible and if any trees or bushes need to be replaced, they will make it blend in with the neighborhood. Mr. Sauser described the location being within walking distance to downtown, NIU, and being located on bus routes. He added the apartment units will be consistent with the floor plans provided and the existing layout of the building. He explained the one- and two-bedroom units tend to have longer residency, which will add to the stability of the project and neighborhood.

Dan Olson, Planning Director, went through the staff report dated March 31, 2022, and stated the site is currently zoned Neighborhood Commercial "NC" and contains a vacant four-story building. Mr. Olson discussed the proposed plan of 32 apartments consisting of nine 2-bedroom units and 23 1-bedroom units with leases being at market rate.

Mr. Olson talked about the history of the building and proposed plans for the site since 2006 which included a plan for luxury lofts and a forty-room boutique hotel, both of which were never materialized. He explained the Concept Plan, or Sketch Plan as described in the UDO, allows the applicant a chance to get feedback from the Commission, City staff, and residents prior to proceeding to a rezoning petition, public hearing, and more detailed plans.

Planning Director Olson described the site plan noting the current access on Sycamore Road is too close to the intersection (N. 1st St. and Sycamore Rd.), which led to moving it to the northeast and making it a right-in and right-out only access. He went on to say there is parking for 65 spaces, which is more than the number required and there will be an access point re-established off Fisk Avenue. Mr. Olson discussed the amenities of the project including a mail room, tenant lounge, exercise room, and outdoor patio and grills.

Mr. Olson stated the future request for the rezoning of the property will be from the NC District to the "PD-R" - Planned Development Residential District with waivers requested to the UDO. He highlighted some of the possible waivers that will be needed

as a part of this plan including a buffer area adjacent to the lower density residential area to the east, parking setbacks, and landscaping requirements. Mr. Olson said City staff and outside agencies have reviewed the plan and no major site design concerns were identified. He mentioned the applicant will have to address stormwater management issues, perform a traffic analysis, and consider a recommendation of adding a fence along the east property line at the next level of review.

Planning Director Olson reported the City received public comments on this plan including a letter of support from Jon and Margaret Delano, owners of the apartment buildings at 506 N. 1st Street and 108 Fisk Avenue. He stated an e-mail was received from Gary Heller of 521 DeKalb Avenue after the agenda was posted noting concerns of the large parking lot effecting the quietness of the neighborhood and questioning if the large trees near his property would be removed. Mr. Olson responded to Mr. Heller's e-mail that the plan is to try to save as many of the trees as possible and it will better determine when the preliminary engineering plans are completed.

Mr. Olson also advised an e-mail was received after the posting of the agenda by Nathan Books of 201 Fisk Ave. He said Mr. Books was concerned about multiple aspects of the plan, the first being the density of 32 units. Mr. Olson explained surrounding buildings have fewer units but are situated on smaller lots so the actual density per acre for this site is lower than some of the surrounding apartments. He relayed Nathan Books' request for a fence along the east side of his lot for security and privacy purposes, which Mr. Olson noted is reasonable. Mr. Olson said staff would recommend a fence and landscaping in this area. He also spoke on another concern of Mr. Books which was possible noise that may come from the proposed outdoor rooftop patio on the east end of the building. Mr. Sauser stated the artist drew in a patio on the plans, however the location of the patios has not been determined. Mr. Olson touched on one more comment from Mr. Books about the current plans appearing to show an ADA ramp being placed to the east side of the building next to his home. Mr. Olson showed the ADA ramp would be placed at the back of the building and it was a misprint on the plan regarding the ADA ramp along Fisk Ave.

Chair Maxwell asked if there were any comments or questions from the Commission.

Chair Maxwell voiced his approval of the project for allowing the preservation of the architecture in DeKalb and his appreciation of the concerns of the residents in the neighborhood. He noted he likes the idea of apartments in the building.

Ms. O'Flaherty said she likes what she sees in the plan, and it is an excellent use of the building. She said she also likes the idea of the old building being kept and preserved in the right way.

Mr. McMahon questioned if a fence was going to be required along the east lot line.

Mr. Sauser replied it has not been determined yet, but he will work with the City staff as to whether a fence or landscaping will be placed there.

Planning Director Olson informed the Commission the UDO requires a buffer between a PD-R zoned site and a less dense residential area whether it be landscaping or a fence or a combination of the two.

Mr. McMahon wanted clarification as to the roof top patios and their locations on the building. Mr. Sauser responded the artist of the plan drew multiple patio areas and the intent is to have one or two patios. He also said the one on the east end is not a priority.

Mr. McMahon raised a concern about there being 32 units, stating 20 years ago buildings were being torn down due to the density being too much. He questioned how this project relates to the density problem back 20 years ago in this area. Mr. Olson mentioned he cannot speak to 20 years ago, but for today's standards, the density of this building is comparable to other apartment buildings in the area. City Manager Nicklas commented he has personal and professional experience on this area. He talked about living in the Haish flats along Fisk Ave. in the 1970's which consisted of five 2-bedroom flats which were made up of three to four graduate students per flat. Mr. Nicklas' stated his professional experience came when he oversaw the City's redevelopment of the Pond-Fisk Ave. area in the 1990's. He mentioned the area was deteriorating and the density back then does not compare to what is there now.

Mr. McMahon asked if the trees that were questioned previously by a resident of the neighborhood would be preserved. Jon Sauser responded he is unsure if the trees will be able to remain, but he will try. Planning Director Olson communicated the engineering of the detention pond will help determine if certain trees can be saved, however the plans must proceed further along before a final answer can be provided.

Ms. Stoker inquired if there would be a southbound entrance off Sycamore Road or just the right in/right out as shown on the plan. Mr. Sauser replied the City Engineer determined the only safe option was to have a right in/right out entrance and exit on Sycamore Road.

Chair Maxwell gave the public an opportunity to speak.

Cliff Cleland, who lives at 518 S. 2nd Street in DeKalb, informed the Commission he has been a citizen of DeKalb since 1962 and he loves the downtown area. He applauds the applicant for his work on making this building livable. Mr. Cleland questioned how the sizes of these units compare to the high-end units in the downtown area and how the occupancy rate will compare.

Planning Director Olson answered the dimensions of the units are similar to ones in the area and the newer downtown units, and the occupancy rate in the high-end apartments (Cornerstone, Plaza DeKalb, Isaac Suites) is at full capacity.

Cliff Cleland inquired on who the apartments are being marketed to. Jon Sauser said these units will be open to anyone, there is not one specific demographic targeted.

Mr. Cleland wanted to know about the plan for heating and cooling for the building.

Chair Maxwell responded the Concept Plan is for more general questions and questions on details of the building will be addressed as the project moves forward.

Mr. Cleland asked the applicant about his sale of previously owned properties to Hunter Star and if he planned on doing anything like this again with the problems

Hunter Properties had. Mr. Sauser responded the issues at certain Hunter Property locations were not the locations he sold to Hunter Star. He added the properties he sold to Hunter are still operating and are quality apartments.

Cliff Cleland discussed the letter from the neighbor and wondered if there was any negative feedback from those who do not approve of the project. Mr. Sauser responded not at this time.

Robert Carlson, of 3 Wedgewood Cove and owner of Carlson Appraisal, said he has worked on many appraisals over the past 42 years in DeKalb, Macomb, and Carbondale in which the Sauser family has owned the properties. Mr. Carlson reported he has heard nothing but positive input from people in Macomb and Carbondale about the Sauser family and their developments. He stated he owns buildings around the subject site and this proposal is comparable with the buildings he owns. Mr. Carlson voiced his opinion that Jon Sauser has all the factors needed for property ownership. He added Mr. Sauser is a prudent property owner, and he develops the highest and best use of any site. He finished by saying this project requires all of Mr. Sauser's knowledge and experience and he gives total support.

Marilyn Cleland of 518 S. 2nd Street in DeKalb expressed she is glad to hear what she heard tonight about the Hunter Property connection with Mr. Sauser. She announced she was happy Mr. Sauser is a lifelong resident so he will not just buy the property and walk away from the responsibilities of being the owner. She added she loves the building and wishes Mr. Sauser well.

Gary Erickson of 508 DeKalb Avenue spoke on the quietness of the neighborhood due to Fisk Avenue being a one-way street. He urged the one-way street not be changed for the safety of the children in the neighborhood. Mr. Erickson described the school zone on Sycamore Road and approved moving the entrance and exit further down Sycamore Road. He voiced his approval of the project and encouraged they keep the same character of the neighborhood and preserve the school zone so the children are safe.

Judith Rodeo, who lives at 222 Sycamore Road, relayed her concerns about low-income individuals moving into these apartments, a property tax hike, where garbage may end up, and the odor associated with smoking marijuana. She added she is supportive for something being done with the building but wanted her concerns addressed. Jon Sauser addressed the concerns by stating the apartments will be market rate. He added he agrees with Ms. Rodeo on smoking, but pointed out there are challenges with regulating smoking marijuana since it is legal. Mr. Sauser explained hotel rooms and rental cars are listed as non-smoking and people still smoke in them, so to tell renters it is a non-smoking building may be frivolous. He added there will be active management which should keep any problems to a minimum.

Jacob Merrill, NIU student who lives at 900 Crane Drive, expressed he loves the idea of making this building into apartments. He critiqued the parking lot size and rather see green space than parking spaces, which would be better for the environment and possibly help with potential noise concerns. Chair Maxwell pointed out the necessity for the required 57 parking spaces due to some of the units being two-bedroom units. Planning Director Olson indicated this item will be investigated further with the

applicant, because they are showing eight additional spaces than what is required by the UDO.

Mr. Sauser informed all that due to the property sitting vacant and not being maintained, the parking area in question looks like a field but most of the concrete is there and is covered with weeds and vegetation.

Marilyn Cleland addressed Mr. Sauser and asked he be as environmentally sensitive as possible when working on the parking lot. She added parking lots can be made from bricks with holes in them to allow for water to soak into the ground and therefore water runoff is reduced and the need for detention.

Chair Maxwell closed the public comment portion of the meeting for this agenda item.

F. CONSDERATIONS

Discussion on the 2002 Comprehensive Plan Update – City Manager Nicklas started by thanking the Commission for taking on the task of updating the Comprehensive Plan from 2005, which are usually updated every 5-7 years. He commenced with Chapter Two of the 2022 Comprehensive Plan document that was provided to the Commission labeled Inventory and Analysis. He explained this chapter consists of data on where the City is now and how we got to this point.

Mr. Nicklas moved on to Chapter Three which consists of goals and objectives and has been drawn up to show a format and to give examples to get ideas started. He stressed this Plan is going to be discussed at multiple public sessions and Commission meetings. After creating drafts of the Plan document, the hope is to get approval from this Commission and then move to the City Council for working sessions and providing an action item within approximately 90 days or so. City Manager Nicklas stated the Plan included in the document can be revised.

City Manager Nicklas discussed Chapter One which is the introduction to the Plan. He noted the information in this section is as up to date as possible due to it being obtained from a recently approved Financial Plan, which was endorsed by the City Council. The purpose of the introduction is to give a snapshot of information to anyone who has not been to DeKalb. He moved to the section titled Planning and Development Activity Since 2005, which includes all development that has occurred since the last Comprehensive Plan update. Finally on page 22, Mr. Nicklas described a list of potential planning issues that need to be addressed in the Plan and noted the City's planning jurisdiction is a mile and a half from any point of the City's corporate limits.

Planning Director Olson started with Chapter 3, Goals and Objectives, which consists of different elements starting with community appearance. He advised the Commission to think of ways to reinvigorate the City's college town identity while promoting expansion of community orientated services and jobs. He said to look at ways to utilize TIF 3 funds which covers most of the downtown area. An example is the proposed reconfiguration of Route 38 through the downtown area, which will reduce the number of lanes from four to three which will allow for a more pedestrian friendly experience and will slow down traffic.

City Manager Nicklas added this reconfiguration project is from 1st Street to 4th Street only and the Commission will need to use creative thinking to address the stretch from 4th Street to 7th Street. He stressed to think beyond today and think five years into the future. He said we need a plan to link the downtown core to the lagoon near NIU to help revive the college town aspect.

Planning Director Olson proceeded on to the topic of industrial development, which has consisted of a large amount of growth recently, with the development along Route 23, Gurler Road, and Peace Road. He stated the goal is to continue this growth and make industrial development diverse to include manufacturing, distribution centers, warehousing, and data centers.

Mr. Olson moved on to commercial development and the downturn in retail development, which is a nationwide issue. He stressed the need to look at a wide variety of uses for retail space. One of the corridors that needs attention is South 4th Street from Taylor St. to Fairview Dr. where a sub-area study may be needed. He mentioned that a parcel by parcel review in all neighborhoods is underway to complete the future land use map.

Planning Director Olson discussed the residential development portion of the comprehensive plan and said diversity and affordability are the two major goals to focus on. The objectives of this section are to preserve the neighborhoods, look at density categories (low, medium, and high) and urban design guidelines.

Mr. Olson proceeded to the topic of downtown enhancement which was touched on earlier in the meeting. He briefly spoke on the community facilities section and the need to work on it with other taxing bodies. He continued to natural features which concentrates on green space and agriculture use. Mr. Olson noted the final section is for transportation, which is currently in progress with the siting of the new transit facility as a major goal.

Planning Director Olson reviewed the draft 2022 future land use map compared to the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. He noted a major difference is the reduction of the amount of new residential areas within the 1 1/2-mile planning jurisdiction. He pointed out the large number of pre-approved lots for single-family residential including over 1100 approved in Iron Gate, and additional ones in The Bridges of River Mist, The Knolls, South Pointe Greens, and Devonaire Farms. He explained, however, these lots accommodate higher priced homes.

City Manager Nicklas described a demographic challenge ahead of trying to attract the family raising age group of 30-55 years who want to live in DeKalb. He mentioned the City has a lot of younger and older adults as the 2020 Census shows an increase in the age groups up to the late 20' as well as from the low 50's to the mid 70's. He said the important factors in attracting the family raising age group are good schools, an appropriate mix of housing and industrial and a necessity of incentivizing companies that create career jobs.

City Manager Nicklas told the Commission to have an open mind when looking at the urban design guidelines portion of the Plan.

Chair Maxwell explained the Commission has a lot of reading and brainstorming ahead and he looks forward to the process.

G. REPORTS

No reports provided at this time.

H. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. O'Flaherty motioned to adjourn, Ms. Pena-Graham seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. The Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting adjourned at 7:39 PM.

Minutes prepared by: Stephanie Turner Approved: 4/18/2022