

MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
June 17, 2020

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a Meeting on June 17, 2020, at the City of DeKalb Municipal Building, 200 South Fourth Street, DeKalb, Illinois. Chair Max Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Chair Maxwell stated he wanted to thank everyone for being here tonight. He mentioned for those attending the meeting room has been set up to meet the CDC recommended distancing guidelines and the Executive Order from the Governor.

A. ROLL CALL

Recording Secretary Aaron Walker called the roll. Planning and Zoning Commission members present were: Chair Maxwell, Ron Klein, Jerry Wright, Trixy O'Flaherty, and Steve Becker. Vice Chair Christina Doe and Commissioner Vicki Buckley were absent. Principal Planner Dan Olson was present representing the City.

B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (Additions/Deletions)

Chair Maxwell requested a motion to approve the June 17, 2020, agenda as presented. Ms. O'Flaherty motioned to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Klein seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. June 3, 2020 – Chair Maxwell requested a motion to approve the June 3, 2020, minutes as presented. Ms. O'Flaherty motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Klein seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

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

None

E. NEW BUSINESS

1. **Public Hearing** – A petition by DeKalb CUSD #428 to amend the special use permit approved by Ordinance #2017-31 to extend the time frame for a modular classroom to remain on the site at 1121 School Street (Littlejohn Elementary School).

Tammy Carson, Director of Facility Operations for DeKalb School Districts, advised three years ago they petitioned to add a modular classroom to Littlejohn Elementary School due to increased enrollment. She advised the modular classroom was split into two separate rooms that housed music classes and the library. She noted students from different grades rotate in and out of the classrooms all day. She stated enrollment has not decreased since the original petition for the modular classroom and the school district is asking for an extension.

Ms. Carson advised a comment was received by staff regarding the petition from a neighbor at 1039 N. 13th St. She noted the complaint was not directed towards the modular classroom but was regarding the landscaping along the resident's property line next to the school. She advised she walked the property with the School District grounds keeper and will remedy the issue by the following week. Mr. Klein questioned if Ms. Carson had spoken to the complainant yet. She advised she had not made contact but will do so once the landscaping is corrected.

Principal Planner Dan Olson went over the staff report dated June 12, 2020. He advised the School District was requesting approval of a petition to amend the special use permit approved by Ordinance 2017-31. He advised in 2001, the City had initially granted a special use permit for the placement of a modular classroom in the same general location. He noted the classroom stayed on site for approximately 10 years and was removed in 2011. He stated the School District requested in 2017 to have the modular classroom placed back on the site based on the enrollment. The modular classroom was restricted to a three-year period in the special use permit issued for the site.

Mr. Olson advised the modular classroom is approximately 70' x 24' and is located just to the south of the hard-surfaced play area west of the school building. He noted the modular classroom is constructed of a wood-based siding and there is a handicap accessible entrance on the north side of the structure. He advised the Unified Development Ordinance requires 62 parking spaces and the school currently has 72 parking spaces, including 3 handicap parking spaces. In conjunction with the approval in 2017, Mr. Olson noted the School District added site lighting along the west side of the school building to illuminate the playground area and screened the trash dumpster in compliance with the UDO.

Mr. Olson advised staff recommends the modular classroom be allowed to stay on the site for no longer than three (3) years. He noted an annual inspection is conducted on the modular classroom and a Temporary Facility Permit is issued by the DeKalb County Regional Office of Education.

Mr. Olson stated several Citizen Response Forms were received by staff. He advised Jason Leverton, of 1221 N 13th Street, indicated he does not support the proposal due to safety concerns and lack of unity of school operations. Mr. Olson stated a response form was also received from Tom Dickman, of 1105 N 13th Street, indicating support for the proposal if the School District has good reason for the modular classroom. He advised another response form was received from Frank and Patricia Andrlik, of 836 N 11th Street, noting support for the project as long as students and teachers are not in danger and the modular classroom is clean and in good working order. Finally, Mr. Olson advised an email was received from Katherine Goshko, of 1039 N 13th St, with concerns regarding landscaping and maintenance of school grounds next to her property.

Mr. Olson advised staff recommend approval of the amendment to the special use permit and allow the continuation of the modular classroom on the subject site for three more years. He stated the classroom will allow the school district to service the educational needs of the community, which promotes the public health, safety, and general welfare of the City.

Chair Maxwell gave the public an opportunity to speak. There were none.

Chair Maxwell gave the Commissioners a chance to speak.

Mr. Becker stated it seems the School District is just putting a band-aid on a long-term issue with increased enrollment. He questioned what the School District's long-term resolution is. Tammy Carson advised there is a bubble of high enrollment in grades 4-5. She advised in the up coming years; enrollment is projected to decrease as that bubble moves through the higher grades.

Mr. Becker questioned how the School District handles safety measures for the modular classroom for events like tornado warnings and thunderstorms. Ms. Carson advised they do not leave students inside the modular classroom and they are brought back into the main school building if there are any tornado warnings or other safety concerns.

Mr. Maxwell questioned if there is any anchoring of the modular classroom to secure the building in case of a tornado. Ms. Carson advised she did not see anything on the original plans for the modular classroom, but she will check with the classroom provider.

Ms. O'Flaherty stated she did not have any questions, but she lives in the same neighborhood as Littlejohn School and never had any issues with the modular classroom. She advised she would still prefer a permanent solution, but the current modular classroom is not a detriment to the area.

Mr. Wright questioned what the projection for enrollment is and what work will be needed to support that enrollment once this three-year period is over. She stated enrollment is projected to decrease and there may not be a need for a modular classroom, and they could bring their students back into the main building. She stated the library inside the main building now houses support staff due to the increased enrollment from the past couple of years. She noted, with decreased enrollment, they may be able to convert the space back into a library.

Ms. Carson advised with the projected decreased enrollment, they may be able to redistrict their schools to provide the best options and opportunities for their students. Mr. Wright questioned if there are other schools that have lower enrollment and if Littlejohn is unique in its increased enrollment. Ms. Carson advised Littlejohn is a three-section elementary school, meaning they have three first grade classes, three second grade classes, and so on. She noted with the space Littlejohn has, it would typically be a two-section school. Ms. Carson advised they do not have open classrooms anywhere at any of their schools, which brings in the need for the modular classroom.

Mr. Wright questioned if there are any contingency plans in case enrollment keeps increasing against their projections. Ms. Carson advised multiple options have been investigated. She advised based on where the growth is occurring, an addition could be added to one of their schools. She noted this would cost anywhere from 5 million to 10 million dollars. She advised another option would be to redistrict the schools to be grade specific. She stated instead of having multiple Kindergarten – 5th grade schools, there would be one Kindergarten – 2nd grade and one 3rd grade – 5th grade school. She advised nothing has been decided, but the school district has discussed contingency plans.

Mr. Maxwell questioned if it was wise to rent out Cheseboro School if there are current issues with increased enrollment. He noted when Roberts Elementary was given to NIU, it was detrimental to the school district. Ms. Carson advised there are many obstacles to operating out of Cheseboro School. She noted there is no playground, no food serving area, and they are landlocked. She advised Cheseboro does not accommodate a full two section school, which is the School District's baseline for operating elementary schools.

Mr. Maxwell advised he agrees a 5-million to 10-million-dollar addition may not be viable, but if the School District has space at Cheseboro, it should be utilized. Ms. Carson advised the School District has discussed utilizing Cheseboro. She advised the renovation cost would be 3 million dollars, which would be entirely on the School District to pay. By renting out Cheseboro the tenant (Menta Group) would be responsible for a large portion of the renovation costs. Ms. Carson noted most of the growth is on the north side of town, while Cheseboro is on the south side.

Mr. Maxwell questioned what renovations would be required for Cheseboro. Ms. Carson advised the property is in a state of disrepair. She noted Cheseboro had an open concept plan, which walls were put up randomly and not all the way up to the ceiling. She advised they would require a new ceiling, lighting, sprinkler system, bathrooms, and flooring.

Mr. Maxwell inquired how the tenant is going to occupy Cheseboro when so many renovations need to be completed. Ms. Carson advised the tenant and school district will be splitting the renovation costs. She noted the necessary work was put on hold due to COVID-19.

Mr. Maxwell noted NIU enrollment has been decreasing and they have several vacant buildings. He questioned whether the school district has contacted NIU to try and recapture Roberts Elementary or another vacant building. Ms. Carson advised discussions between the superintendent and NIU have taken place, but nothing has been finalized.

Chair Maxwell gave the public one more opportunity to speak. There was none.

Mr. Wright moved that the Planning and Zoning Commission forward its findings of fact and recommend to the City Council approval of an amendment to Ordinance 2017-31 to extend the time frame for a modular classroom to be located at 1121 School St. (Littlejohn Elementary School) as shown on the attached Exhibit A, subject to the following condition:

1. The modular classroom may remain on the subject site in the location as shown on Exhibit A for no more than three (3) years of the date of approval of the Ordinance granting the amendment and shall, on or before said date, be removed from the property. At such time, the surface beneath the modular classroom shall be restored to a pre-installation, grassed condition.

Mr. Klein seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken. Mr. Klein – yes, Mr. Becker – yes, Ms. O’Flaherty – yes, Mr. Wright – yes, Chair Maxwell – yes. Motion was passed 5-0-2. Ms. Buckley and Vice Chair Doe were absent.

F. REPORTS

Mr. Olson advised the next meeting would be July 6, which will be the first meeting at the DeKalb Library - Yusunas Meeting Room. He noted there will be two hearings. He advised the first hearing will be for First United Methodist

Church who is looking to relocate on 16 acres of property along the west side of North Annie Glidden Road. He stated the second hearing will be for First National Bank (121 W. Lincoln Highway) requesting a sign variance for a digital display sign.

Mr. Olson advised on June 8 the City Council approved on first and second reading the petition by John Pappas for the Isaac Tower Suites off Sycamore Road. He also noted the City Council approved on first reading the rezoning of 421 Grove Street with the second reading up for a vote on June 22.

G. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Becker motioned to adjourn, Ms. O'Flaherty seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. The Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting adjourned at 6:31PM.