

CITY OF NORTHVILLE
Planning Commission
May 15, 2018
Northville City Hall – Council Chambers

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Kirk called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Present: Steve Kirk
Carol Maise
Dave Mielock
Christopher Miller
Mark Russell
Ann Smith
Jeff Snyder
Donna Tinberg

Absent: None
One vacancy

Also present: Ken Roth, Mayor
Pat Sullivan, City Manager
Sally Elmiger, Planning Consultant

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

MOTION by Russell, support by Maise, to approve the agenda as published.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: May 1, 2018

Chair Kirk noted the following correction should be made: Page 2, 4th paragraph from the bottom, last line, end of sentence: . . . permit ~~needed~~ was needed.

Motion by Mielock, support by Russell, to approve the May 1, 2018 minutes as corrected.

Motion carried unanimously.

5. CITIZEN COMMENTS:

Greg Presley, Presley Architecture, 108 N. Center Street, Northville MI and member of the Downtown Development Authority Economic Development Committee (EDC), said that the EDC had discussed asking the Planning Commission to study the possibility of creating an East Main Street Overlay District. The area contained 6 historic structures that were originally homes but were now in the CBD District. The Historic District Commission (HDC) dealt with requests regarding those structures, including demolition

requests, on an individual basis, but could not create policy. An overlay district could demonstrate what the City wanted to see in that area in terms of historic preservation, or in the event of demolition, what kind of development was desired.

The Commission discussed this idea, noting that an overlay district could provide a vision for East Main Street and the surrounding area. The HDC should be involved in the initial discussions. Planning Consultant Elmiger could discuss the concept and the structures in question with the HDC, including the possibility of returning them to their original residential use. The next Master Plan update was scheduled for 2019; that was only 6 months away.

6. REPORTS:

A. CITY ADMINISTRATION: None.

B. PLANNING COMMISSION: None.

C. OTHER COMMUNITY/GOVERNMENTAL LIAISONS: None.

7. SITE PLAN

8. DISCUSSION

550 SEVEN MILE – CONCEPT PLAN DISCUSSION

As Commissioner Snyder owned part of the property under discussion, Commissioner Russell made the following motion:

MOTION by Russell, support by Mielock, to recuse Commission Snyder from this discussion item, and to allow him to participate in the discussion from the audience.

Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Snyder left the dais and joined the audience.

Planning Consultant Elmiger explained that this was a request from the developer to share some ideas regarding the McDonald/Ford Site. The developer had asked to present a conceptual plan in order to get feedback from the Commission.

James V. Clarke, R.B. Robertson Brothers Homes, 6905 Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Hills MI 48301 was present on behalf of this concept plan. Greg Presley, Presley Architecture, 108 N. Center Street, Northville, MI was also present. Mr. Clarke explained that he was presenting a conceptual plan for development of the Seven Mile and River Street Properties as shown in the materials distributed to the Commission. Robertson Brothers, a 70-year old company, was currently building in 10 communities, and was primarily focusing on infill development that addressed the need for affordable housing for millennial buyers.

The proposed 3.87-acre development area was the site of the former Ford dealership. The site was challenged: toxins had to be removed and there was uncompacted fill in excess of 10 feet. Additionally there were some floodplain issues, and the location off of Seven Mile Road limited the type of development that could be built there.

Robertson Brothers was proposing 60 townhomes, with 1.52 acres of dedicated open space, including a 50-foot buffer that they had agreed to provide to the Wayne County park to the west. Overall density was 15.6 units per acre. There were 54 parking spaces in addition to 2 car garages for each of the homes, totaling the 174 spaces that were more than they needed but that also provided for shared parking with Mr. Snyder's property.

Mr. Clarke explained that the overall concept of a residential development with commercial development including cross easements on two sides resulted in a de facto mixed use project. While Robertson Brothers understood the Commission would like to see mixed use including live/work units, they were unable to discover any current developments that were successful in filling live/work spaces. People who worked at home did not want their homes to have a commercial appearance; they modified their existing residential space to include a home office or home space for their home business. Additionally, first floor commercial would need to have parking in front, something that Wayne County might not allow. Commercial parking in the rear would be inconsistent with a residential development there.

Robertson Brothers had been following the Commission's conversations regarding developing Master Plan and Ordinance amendments for this area. They wanted to present this proposal as filling a need in Northville's housing market. The 1500 square foot units would be substantially less expensive than other single family homes in Northville, and would have a price point of high \$200,000's or mid \$300,000's.

Mr. Clarke said they considered this location as secondary to the downtown, and in their opinion it should not have commercial uses that would compete with downtown.

Mr. Presley added that they were suggesting 3 stories and a 35-foot drip height, which was a little greater than the 2-1/2 stories and 30' foot height allowed under the ordinance. The deviations would probably be requested as part of a PUD plan.

Commissioner Smith noted that Northville had 1500 square foot condos/townhouses by the Cider Mill, built 12-15 years ago, whose selling price averaged \$200,000/\$215,000. She questioned whether the market would support higher priced units of the same size. She also pointed out that the target demographic – young millennials – did not stay in Northville for a variety of reasons, including high taxes and lack of nightlife activity. Instead people in that age group sought out communities like Royal Oak and Ferndale, both communities where Robertson Brothers had enjoyed success in developing this type of project.

Commissioner Smith continued that the townhomes as described would not appeal to people who wanted to downsize and stay in Northville, because of the lack of a main floor master bedroom.

Mr. Clarke said they thought the 2-3 bedroom units would appeal as entry level housing to young families. They had studied the market and had a 70-year track record in building successful communities.

Commissioner Mielock commented that what Robertson Brothers was proposing was not currently allowed. Mr. Clarke agreed, explaining that they wanted to show this concept plan before ordinance changes were finalized.

Commissioner Mielock said that he was a strong proponent of commercial uses along Seven Mile Road, especially in light of the commercial uses directly across the street. Nothing presented this evening had guided him to think differently.

Commissioner Russell asked about the cross access easements and the ingress and egress shown on the concept plan, which did not seem to him to be valid. Mr. Snyder emphasized that this was a conceptual plan. When he received approval for CrossFit several years ago, he had agreed to a shared approach with this particular concept in mind.

In response to a question from Commissioner Russell, Mr. Snyder said CrossFit actually did not need the shared parking. Mr. Clarke said the proposed development also did not need the shared parking.

Commissioner Russell asked about water detention. Mr. Clarke said that detention would be mainly underground.

Mr. Clarke asked if the Commission was interested in any residential development on this site and if the Commission was interested in the type of development being proposed.

Mr. Russell said that over time the Commission had discussed Seven Mile Road being a corridor/gateway into the community. They needed to maintain consistency with those conversations. He felt there needed to be commercial along Seven Mile Road, and any development needed to address the pedestrian component as well. With other future development in the area, he strongly believed there needed to be a neighborhood retail component, including such things as a dry-cleaning store, a place to go for basic needs such as milk, etc.

Discussion followed regarding the 100-foot right-of-way in this area, which hindered pedestrian traffic. Perhaps conversations could take place with MDOT regarding reducing the right-of-way, or installing a boulevard island. The width of the right-of-way along with the width of the thoroughfare made the difference between a pedestrian and non-pedestrian-friendly gateway. Also, the City needed to know if Wayne County would allow any parking in the right-of-way when that was separated by a curb and gutter.

Commissioner Russell felt there needed to be a traffic study regarding ingress and egress to the site. He could support the cross easement for shared parking.

Commissioner Maise was concerned there was too much parking.

Commissioner Mielock said he would be willing to look at a higher density residential development if proposed within a PUD that offered trade-offs to the City.

Commissioner Maise asked if first floor commercial was being required because of possible future developments in the area. Mr. Clarke said there was currently not a demand for the type of spaces first floor commercial would provide.

Commissioner Mielock said this was a unique site that the Commission had studied over a period of time. He felt commercial was a correct use for the Seven Mile Road frontage. He could support residential on the site, as long as Seven Mile Road had commercial uses.

Mr. Clarke explained that with the unique nature of the site, including the toxins and noncompacted soils, a developer had to cover the costs of cleanup and preparation. He felt a residential product with the right elevations could be an excellent introduction to the greater downtown area. He pointed out that Mr. Snyder already had trouble leasing commercial space in the area. The nature of retail development was changing, due to Amazon and other online sources of goods. The area next to the park offered a wonderful environment for residential development.

Mr. Presley emphasized that this development met the spirit of a mixed-use development, being residential surrounded by commercial uses.

Mayor Roth asked some questions regarding the Willits Building in Birmingham, also developed by Robertson Brothers. Mr. Clarke explained the first floor commercial uses there: 2 full service restaurants with another commercial space that had changed hands reasonably frequently. He pointed out there was also a parking deck for patrons to use.

In response to a question from Chair Kirk, Mr. Snyder cautioned that there were economic factors at work that needed to be considered. The property needed to be developed, and that development should not wait on things happening at the Downs property, which could take a very long time. Under current zoning a box store could come in as a use by right. Was it better to have a residential development rather than a box store?

In response to further questions from Commissioner Maise, Mr. Snyder said that developers who had indicated an interest in this parcel all were looking at residential development. He asked that the Commission not pigeonhole the property.

In response to a question from Chair Kirk, Mr. Clarke said they would do a traffic study if it looked like this project might move forward.

Mr. Presley asked the Commission for further direction.

Chair Kirk was concerned about traffic issues. He noted that at this location the river did not always smell fresh. He supported commercial on the north and residential on the south.

Commissioner Mielock said he could support residential on the site if there were some way to effectively buffer the residential from Seven Mile Road.

Commissioner Maise pointed out the trail to the west. A PUD could offer a trailhead including parking. Mr. Clarke said development of a trailhead could be integrated into the gateway area.

Commissioner Miller said he saw the merits of having commercial on Seven Mile Road, but he would also be willing to look at a development that didn't have that. He thought the Commission should continue its process of developing an overlay district, and not necessarily look at changes specific to this development.

Commissioner Tinberg thought this development was inconsistent with the Commission's desire for commercial uses on Seven Mile Road. She had listened to tonight's discussion, and was concerned with what was realistic in terms of development of the parcel. Mr. Clarke had talked about attracting millennials, but she didn't think they could be attracted without some retail on site. Without retail there was no sense of community.

Commissioner Maise said she needed more information. She was also concerned with the marketability of the product being proposed.

Commissioner Smith reiterated that in her experience, this project would not appeal to millennials. Northville had high taxes and an excellent school system, neither of which appealed to that demographic.

Mr. Clarke said Robertson Homes was willing to invest \$24 million in the project; they were confident the units would sell.

Chair Kirk closed the discussion.

SEVEN MILE-SOUTH MAIN STREET OVERLAY – DRAFT ORDINANCE REVISION

Referring to her May 10, 2018 memorandum, and as the Commission had requested, Planning Consultant Elmiger had talked with the city attorney regarding the option of rezoning the Performance Regulated Industrial (PR-1) properties in this sub-area to General Commercial District (GCD). The City Attorney's opinion was that the risk of liability was low as long as the rezoning was based on the Master Plan and as long as the City followed the processes outlined in the Zoning Enabling Act.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said that the Commission should decide whether rezoning was something they wanted to pursue. If the Commission did want to move forward, the rezoning could be heard at the same public hearing as when the overlay district was presented.

Commissioner Maise asked the long-term impact of rezoning on the two properties involved: Munro Muffler and Inch Memorials. Were the property owners aware of that possibility?

Planning Consultant Elmiger said as far as she knew, the owners had not been contacted. In any event, current uses would be allowed to continue as legal nonconforming uses. However, they would not be allowed to expand without a variance.

Chair Kirk noted that as planners the Commission needed to focus on what the City needed in terms of logical development, as well as what uses would provide a long term tax base and needed employment and services to residents. Also, the Commission had long viewed this area as a gateway to the City, and the Master Plan indicated that the industrial uses should not be included. He would support going forward with the zoning change.

Commissioners Tinberg and Miller agreed.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said she could bring revised ordinance language to the Commission at the June 5 meeting.

Referring to the previous discussion, Mr. Clarke asked if Robertson Brothers could bring revised plans back to the Commission. Chair Kirk answered in the affirmative.

Commissioner Russell remained concerned about what Wayne County would allow on Seven Mile Road in terms of parking, and whether the right-of-way might be modified. City Manager Sullivan pointed out that if the development was all residential, parking would not be an issue. Parking would be an issue for commercial development along Seven Mile Road.

Mr. Presley suggested that a development might include some but not all first floor commercial along Seven Mile Road. Planning Consultant Elmiger suggested the draft language state that any residential project would be part of a mixed-use project, without further defining what that meant. That language would be similar to what was now required at the Foundry Flask area.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said she would modify the proposed Seven Mile – South Main Street overlay ordinance language to eliminate the PR-1 underlying zoning. She would not modify the language to reflect tonight’s discussion because there was as yet no clear direction as to whether the Commission wanted to make changes based on that discussion.

Commissioner Mielock said that density still needed to be discussed, including density in the commercial area.

Mr. Snyder noted that constructing a boulevard in on Seven Mile Road would be difficult; that was already a terrible intersection. The boulevard idea might not be viable.

Seeing that discussion had ended, and confirming that Planning Consultant Elmiger had enough direction to go forward, Chair Kirk closed the discussion. Commissioner Snyder rejoined the Commission.

TRAINING

City Manager Sullivan noted that as directed by City Council, on June 7 there would be all-city training led by the City Attorney regarding FOIA, the ethics ordinance, and the Open Meetings Act. They were also in the process of scheduling joint training with Plymouth for the Board of Zoning Appeals and Planning Commission.

9. ADJOURN

Seeing that there was no further discussion, Chair Kirk asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION by Maise, support by Russell to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl McGuire
Recording Secretary

Approved as amended 06/05/2018