

PLANNING COMMISSION – CITY OF HOUGHTON  
CITY CENTER – COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
OCTOBER 27, 2009

PRESENT: Chairman Mike Butvilas, Mayor Robert Backon, City Manager Scott MacInnes, Tom Merz, Mike Needham, Jay Green, Rachel Lankton, Kristine Bradof, and Gary Lubinski.

ABSENT: None

Also present: Ann West and Margot Hutchins of the Houghton Bike Committee; Bill Leder, Bill Baxandall, Mark Daavettila, Carl Honkala, Kelly Heidbrier, Evan Wernecke, Byron Theis, Jeff Morden, Mike Hachscheidt, and Mark MacLennan of the MTU Senior Design Class; and Don Schwenn of Moyle Development.

REGULAR MEETING: Chairperson Mike Butvilas called to order a Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES: A motion was made by Lankton and seconded by Needham to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2009 meeting as presented.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA: City Manager MacInnes added under New Business – Item D – Houghton Bike Committee.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO ADDRESS COMMISSION: No one addressed the Commission.

NEW BUSINESS: City Manager MacInnes introduced the MTU Senior Design Class. They are preparing a design for Cedar Street which

is proposed to run from Wal-Mart to the Houghton/Dodgeville road.

Mike Hachscheidt addressed the Commission on behalf of the MTU Senior Design class. His group is designing a two-lane, 45 mile an hour connecting road between Wal-Mart and the Houghton/Dodgeville Road.

Mark MacLellan said that his group will design a road to connect U.S. 41 and Sharon Avenue as a by-pass for truck traffic to keep it out of the MTU campus and downtown. Their by-pass starts at 41 Lumber and ties into Pilgrim Road and will connect to the road the other group is designing.

Don Schwenn of Moyle Development presented a revised site plan for the former Burger King building. The site plan was revised taking into consideration concerns made by commission members at that meeting. The front door facing Shelden Avenue was removed as well as the extra drive-thru on the west side of the building.

A motion was made by Lubinski and seconded by Lankton to approve the site plan as presented.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried.

Don Schwenn of Moyle Development presented a revised site plan for the former McDonald's building downtown. The plan at this time is to put a Mexican restaurant in the building. Mr. Schwenn showed the commission a drawing of the proposed front and back façade of the building. They no longer have plans to put apartments in this building on a second floor.

The proposed façade is fitting for a Mexican restaurant. City Manager MacInnes said he would like to see a façade that matches the historic character of the downtown.

The commission asked Mr. Schwenn to come back with the proposed colors for the outside of the building, provide an alternative to the dryvit façade that is in character to our downtown facades, and to show the two adjacent Shelden Avenue buildings in the new renderings of the restaurant. City Manager MacInnes offered four hours of architecture services to come up with a more historic façade which Mr. Schwenn accepted. The commission will review this site plan again.

Ann West reported that the Bike Committee has been working for a couple of years on bike-safety issues for the community. They are looking at signage and striping areas to create safe bike routes.

Margo Hutchins said the Committee asked business owners to install bike racks. There are some communities that have ordinances requiring businesses to provide bike parking and the Committee asked the Planning Commission to consider an ordinance or come up with other ideas to reach businesses about the importance of bike racks. She said the City could apply to become a “Bike-Friendly Community” and asked if the Commission was interested in taking the steps necessary to apply for certification.

City Manager MacInnes said the committee is looking at adding some bike racks downtown. He would like to see businesses outside of the downtown install bike racks.

City Manager MacInnes said it is a good idea to add bike racks as a requirement of the parking ordinance so that during the design process space can be made for them.

City Manager MacInnes reported that Shelden Avenue will be open on Thursday. There will be a ribbon cutting and check presentation ceremony at 8:00 starting at the Franklin Square Inn.

The following items are being proposed for downtown by the merchants:

- Outdoor dining on some corners. The Council would like a uniform look to the dining areas with a wrought iron fence separating the seating area from the travel lanes.

- Christmas decorations this year will consist of a natural wreath hanging from each light pole. They may have different ideas for next year.
- A place to hang banners across the street where the second skywalk used to be. This may be restricted to downtown events only.

Mr. MacInnes said all signage will be erected slowly so as to not add unnecessary clutter.

Tom Merz mentioned that there is no speed limit sign from the MTU library to the bridge. Mr. MacInnes said speed limit signs will be erected.

City Manager MacInnes said that MDOT will mark the travel lanes and crosswalks downtown. The City will have to mark the parking areas so that cars are not parking in the travel lanes. There will be free one-hour customer parking downtown. It may take a couple of weeks to get all of the signs up to control this. The goal downtown is to keep 30% of the parking spots open at all times to encourage customers to stop.

MDOT has plans to repave College Avenue, fix the drainage problems, make it bike-friendly, and install handicap ramps on each intersection starting next spring.

The next Planning Commission Regular Meeting will be held Tuesday, November 24, 2009 at 5:30 p.m.

A motion to adjourn was made by Lankton and seconded by Lubinski.

Motion carried.

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Gary Lubinski  
Secretary