

PLANNING COMMISSION – CITY OF HOUGHTON
CITY CENTER – COUNCIL CHAMBER
JULY 27, 2010

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

ABSENT: Jay Green.

Also present: Justin Ruonavaara, Mr. & Mrs. Mike Lowney, Tony and Carol Benaglio, Cathy and Mike Dennis, Mike and Mary Shea, Ciro and Sandra Sandoval, Cindy and Larry Asiala, Bill and Margo Hall, Alan Baker, Gil Lewis, Sue Bagley, Dave and Beth Reed, Ted Gast, Pat Heiden, Kedman Hungue, Chipu Hungue, Evelyn Goke, Ann Vollrath, and Phil Janke.

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

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES: A motion was made by Merz and seconded by Lubinski to approve the minutes of the June 22, 2010 Regular Meeting as presented.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA: No changes were made to the Agenda.

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

PUBLIC HEARING: City Manager MacInnes explained the process of Conditional Rezoning. Property owner Mike Lowney is requesting a conditional rezoning of Lots 4 & 5 of Block 4 of a private plat from R-3 to B-3 with conditions so that he can construct an 8,000 square foot storage rental building. The Ordinance would have to

be approved by both the Planning Commission and Council after public hearings in front of each. There is a letter from Roger Held of Ninth Avenue opposing the rezoning.

Tony Benaglio of 1005 11th Avenue presented a petition to the Commission signed by 21 homeowners in the neighborhood asking the Commission to not re-zone the property. He asked the Planning Commission to focus on residential neighborhoods throughout the City. He said that the residents invested a lot of money in their homes and this rezoning will lower their property values. He also expressed concern that allowing this rezoning could open up other rezoning requests by setting a precedent.

Mr. Benaglio asked property owner Mike Lowney if he purchased this lot to put the storage units on, if he discussed with the DNR if this property was a wetland, and if he will own the buildings.

Property owner Mike Lowney said that he purchased the property to build an apartment building; however, he thinks there is too much congestion in the neighborhood and is looking for an alternative use for the land. He said this storage building will benefit the City because it will increase the taxes generated on this property. He does not feel that his property is a wetland as a wetland must be one-third of an acre. He will contain all run-off on his property. Justin Runovaara will purchase the building and erect the storage buildings if the rezoning is passed.

A discussion was held about the possibility of the property being a wetland. City Manager MacInnes said this property is not on a wetland map. Mr. Lowney said he has legal advice that a wetland must be at least one-third of an acre.

Cathy Dennis of 904 S. Franklin said this rezoning would directly affect the value of her house as she lives close to the property and the lower value would lower her taxes as well as the taxes paid by her neighbors.

Pat Heiden of 1009 9th Avenue expressed concern that this rezoning would set precedence as it would be hard to deny other people.

City Manager MacInnes said the City has only granted a conditional rezoning twice, and in both instances there was permission of the neighbors.

Mike Shea of 900 Franklin said he is worried about water run-off as there are already water problems every spring where the creek that runs behind his house that comes from the proposed property can barely handle the water. Mr. Shea also said that he thinks the rezoning will devalue his property. He said he would have never built his house in this area if he knew that property could be rezoned around it.

Phil Janke of 1001 Spruce Street said this rezoning would have a major impact on the value of the homes in the area.

Evelyn Goke of 1004 Baltic Avenue also said this rezoning would devalue the property. She is worried about noise and light coming from the rental units as they would be open and accessible all night. She does not want this to interrupt her quiet neighborhood.

Alan Baker of 1104 Datoite is concerned that the property is a wetland.

Bill Hall of 804 Franklin Street said he moved to this neighborhood because it is a quiet, family neighborhood and he would like it to stay that way.

Margo Hall of 804 Franklin Street said she is concerned about traffic in the evenings and at night and how this will affect the safety of her grandchildren and other children in the neighborhood.

Mike Lowney said he feels the concerns about wetlands, drainage and property values are invalid.

There were no further comments.

A motion was made by Lubinski and seconded by Lankton to close the public hearing.

NEW BUSINESS: Chairman Mike Butvilas called for a motion regarding proposed Ordinance 2010-222. No motion was made.

Rachel Lankton asked why the proposed storage units could have a gravel parking lot when residential rentals are required to pave their lots. City Manager MacInnes said that the ordinance does not require business properties to have paved parking lots. Kristine Bradof said the intersection is already full of gravel and there are drainage issues. It is a messy intersection after rain.

City Manager MacInnes explained that Laiti Jewelers would like to locate their jewelery store in the building next to the Ambassador Bar. Pictures of the proposed changes were presented. Rachel Lankton was not in favor of the metal awning as it does not fit in with the historic look of downtown.

Mike Needham said he feels that the metal overhang will outlast many of the other facades.

This item was tabled for a few minutes.

A motion was made by Lubinski and seconded by Lankton to support the split of Lot 121 of Forest Park Plat, City of Houghton and to send this on to the Council.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried.

The Commission again discussed the Laiti Jewelers site plan. A motion was made by Lubinski and seconded by Needham to approve the site plan for Laiti Jewelers as presented.

Tom Merz said he thinks the façade is fine and fits in with the façade of the Ambassador next door.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried.

City Manager MacInnes provided the Commission with information regarding Complete Streets. The Health Department will be holding a workshop in September or October and the Planning Commission will be invited. The Bike Committee is interested in working with Complete Streets.

Kristine Bradof said the Bike Committee is doing a good job of doing the work and bringing it to the Planning Commission.

City Manager MacInnes said the Bike Committee just finished the BikeFriendly application.

The site plan review ordinance was discussed as it says a site plan review is required when commercial buildings are resided. Mr. MacInnes said this has been very hard to enforce because there is little awareness that a site plan review is required for residing. The Commission agreed to let Mr. MacInnes monitor residing of commercial properties and bring them to the Commission when he thinks it is necessary.

Mr. MacInnes presented the Commission with an invitation to a Community Trails Summit hosted by the Houghton County Planning Commission and asked members of the Commission to attend if they can.

Rachel Lankton asked that Mr. MacInnes have the sandwich board sign on Sharon Avenue for the Once and Again Shop removed as it is in violation of the sign ordinance. Mike Needham said he would like to see a way that tenants can advertise to help small business owners. The issue was discussed about signs for tenants in strip malls.

The next Planning Commission Regular Meeting will be held Tuesday, August 24, 2010 at 5:30 p.m.

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

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried.

Gary Lubinski
Secretary