

PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
July 10, 2007

The City of Kalamazoo Planning Commission meeting was called to order by Commissioner Kuseske at 7:00 p.m. at the Greenwood Reformed Church, 1815 Winton Ave. Approximately 20 additional people were in attendance.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Terry Kuseske, Chair; Frank Cody, Vice Chair; Casey Fawley; James Kneen; Merilee Mishall; Linda Wienir.

MEMBERS EXCUSED

Bertha Stewart

MEMBERS ABSENT

Sonja Dean; Reed Youngs

CITY STAFF

Keith Hernandez, Deputy Director/City Planner; Robert Bauckham, Assistant City Planner; John Kneas, Assistant City Attorney; Amy Thomas, Recording Secretary

ROLL CALL

Planner Hernandez completed roll call and it was determined that the aforementioned members were present.

AGENDA (July 10, 2007)

There were no changes to the agenda.

Commissioner Cody, supported by Commissioner Kneen, moved approval of the July 10, 2007 Planning Commission agenda. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

MINUTES (June 7, 2007)

There were no changes to the minutes.

Commissioner Wienir, supported by Commissioner Fawley, moved approval of the June 7, 2007 Planning Commission minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Hernandez referred to the orange folders provided to the Planning Commissioners. The folders contain information with communications from interested parties regarding P.C. #2007.11.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. **P.C. #2007.11: Consideration of a request from the Reach and Teach School for a special use permit (SUP) to allow the existing building and parking lot at 622 W. Kalamazoo Avenue and 527 & 529 W. Willard to be used as a school.**

Planner Bauckham gave the staff report, which is incorporated in these minutes by reference hereto. This request includes the building at 622 W. Kalamazoo Avenue, which housed the former Bible Baptist Church, and a separate parcel used for parking at the corner of W. Willard and Greenwich. The church moved to another location and the building is now vacant.

The Reach and Teach School has been using part of the building occupied by New Genesis. The school was developed to assist students who have been suspended, expelled or who have dropped out of school. The Reach and Teach School is under contract with KPS (Kalamazoo Public Schools) and has been functioning for 4 years. The goal of the school is to place students back in regular schools or help them with graduation. The students at the school range in age from 12 to 17 years old. The applicant would like to purchase the former church building and relocate the Reach and Teach School to that address. The school will have approximately 100 students, 5 teachers and 6 other staff members, and it will be open from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday during the regular school season. The campus is closed to casual exit or entry, and visitors are screened and monitored. City Metro Transit buses will be utilized for transportation of the students to and from the school. Students who graduate from this facility would receive an alternative high school diploma. Funding for the schools comes from various grants and from the Kalamazoo Public School system operating funds.

The church building is located in zone RD-19 (duplex zone), and the fenced parking lot is in the zone M-1 (industrial zone). Schools are allowed in both of these zones with a special use permit. The exterior of the two sites would not be altered for this project. The interior of the building will be remodeled for the school use. There is a small parking lot on the north side of the church property and a fence has been installed to screen the houses to the north. No additional exterior lights are planned for either of the parcels and no existing trees are to be removed for this project. Landscaping will be added to both sites, on the south and east sides of the building site, and the north side of the parking lot.

City staff believes this project meets the criteria necessary for approval of the special use permit. City staff is recommending approval of this application with the condition that the site plan be approved by the Site Plan Review Committee prior to occupancy.

Mary Blakely, Director of the Reach and Teach School, was present to discuss the application. She advised that this is the school's 5th year, and there have been many success stories. It is important for the school to have its own place to allow more control of the facility. It costs \$625 per week to transport each student to school and they are given bus tokens for Metro Transit.

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Ms. Blakely stressed that the students at the Reach and Teach School are good kids who have made bad decisions. Staff at the school work with the kids, parents, courts, etc. There will be a bus stop in front of the school, which will allow for closer supervision of students coming and going from the school.

Commissioner Wienir commented that she was impressed with the proposal. She inquired as to how many bathrooms there would be at the new facility. Ms. Blakely advised that their current location has 3 stalls for the girls and one stall for the boys. The new location has two levels with 4 bathroom stalls on each level.

Commissioner Wienir stated that she had questions from concerned citizens regarding this application. She referred to the residents across the street from the proposed school and inquired as to what would be done to safeguard the neighborhood. Ms. Blakely stated that some of the kids in the school were actually trying to break up fights and they wound up being expelled. The kids have been expelled for things other than fighting, and there has been no fighting at the Reach and Teach School. Ms. Blakely stressed that the focus is about the future of the students not about their history. If they can't follow the rules, they will have to leave.

Commissioner Wienir referred to the next question on her list: Are we to expect fighting, drug use, etc. from the students at the school? Ms. Blakely commented that many people jump to conclusions about the students; many of the students are from KPS. The students welcome visitors with a hand shake; if you show respect to them, they will show you respect. Ms. Blakely stressed the need to communicate with the families of the students. When kids have someone to show them respect, positive changes occur.

Commissioner Wienir inquired as to how many students would be at the school. Ms. Blakely stated that she expects to have no more than 100 students at the school.

Commissioner Kuseske requested more details about the proposed staffing. Ms. Blakely stated that there will be 11 staff members, including teachers and security guards/hall monitors. The staff at the school know the parents of the students.

Commissioner Wienir inquired as to the class sizes, and Ms. Blakely advised that there will be 12 to 15 students per class. There have been 27-29 students per class at the other facility.

Commissioner Mishall referenced the security guards and inquired as to what other staff there will be. Ms. Blakely stated that there will be 3 hall monitors and a grants person who can also be a hall monitor. Ms. Blakely will be hiring an assistant and there will be a social worker on staff.

Commissioner Fawley inquired if there had been any fights or violence. Ms. Blakely advised that a stare-down is considered the beginning of a fight. Students get angry if their cell phones are taken; staff have been trained to deal with this situation.

Commissioner Kneen requested an explanation of how the school will be structured. Ms. Blakely stated that the school is a 501C3 nonprofit organization. She advised that she has been a teacher for over 15 years but that she is not currently in the teachers' union. Staff from the school visit student's homes to make sure the students are safe. The Kalamazoo Public Schools serve as the

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fiduciary and they provide the financial support for the school. Students at the Reach and Teach School don't lose the benefits of the "Kalamazoo Promise." Some funding for the school comes from the State of Michigan.

Commissioner Fawley inquired if the school is funded by grants too. Ms. Blakely advised that it was grant funded in the beginning. The Gilmore Foundation provided some of the grant money. There were 12 students at the school when it started; by the end of the year there were 40 students. She commented that kids are looking for an identity. If they can't find it at home they sometimes join gangs. There is a lot of poverty and jobs are not plentiful. This is a source of frustration for kids; they need job skills.

Commissioner Mishall inquired if the students will be required to use the bus for transportation. Ms. Blakely stated that parents have the option of dropping their kids off at the school, but most parents cannot afford to do that.

Commissioner Cody inquired if students would be allowed to drive to school. Ms. Blakely stated that they will be allowed to drive as long as they are responsible.

Commissioner Cody referred to the letter from the Manager of the Metro Diner & Nightclub. The letter suggested that the parking lot might be under utilized by the school and, therefore, could be available for use by other entities. Ms. Blakely stated that she would like to offer the south side of the building to another tenant, but there hasn't been a decision regarding the parking lot. It might be possible to share the lot with the adjacent restaurant.

Commissioner Wienir expressed concern regarding the potential level of noise from the students. Ms. Blakely commented that people sometimes expect the students to be rowdy but they are actually very quiet.

Commissioner Wienir requested more details about the hours of operation. Ms. Blakely stated that the school would be open from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with no ½ days or Saturdays. The kids will not be allowed to linger outside. This will be a closed campus and the students won't be able to leave without permission. They have to ring a bell to get in. The hours have been changed in the past to allow students to attend school during daylight hours; the school would open at 9:00 a.m. during winter hours.

Commissioner Kuseske inquired as to how the school's programs are assessed. Ms. Blakely advised that she works with Cindy Green, Assistant Superintendent of Student Affairs for KPS. Grades, credits, MEAP scores, etc. are used for making an assessment of the program.

Commissioner Mishall inquired as to when this application would be reviewed by the Site Plan Review Committee. Planner Bauckham stated that the applicant is waiting for the conclusion of the Planning Commission meeting and then the final site plan will be submitted for review.

Public Hearing

Conrad Bos, 423 Greenwich Place, stated that he lives next door to the subject property. He is not an opponent of the proposal, but he has concerns. There is already enough noise from the

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Metro Diner & Nightclub and he is concerned about patrons of the restaurant parking in the lot next to the church. Mr. Bos commented that allowing patrons of the Nightclub to park in the fenced parking lot would be preferable. People park illegally in the vicinity and they are not quiet. Ms. Blakely advised that the school has no desire to have the parking lot by the building utilized by others. Mr. Bos mentioned that when cars park on Willard, the headlights shine in his front window. He suggested that a privacy fence be installed in that location.

Netty Martin, 2208 Skyline, advised that she was representing her mother, who lives at 628 Kalamazoo Avenue. Ms. Martin stated that she has heard negative things about the school and that she hopes they will find another area to relocate. She added that she has been to the school and has observed drug activity and people loitering and smoking across the street on the corner. Ms. Martin stressed that she was not criticizing the Reach and Teach program, but that she had concerns about the school relocating in that neighborhood.

Robert Terrell, 6435 Breckenridge, advised that he has lived near the existing school for 39 years and there have been no problems. During the school year on Wednesday evening, there have been between 125 and 140 kids in that building. Mr. Terrell stated that he had not observed any problems with the school. He expressed approval of the building chosen for the school and commented that the school would be good for the Northside Neighborhood. Mr. Terrell commented that the proposed location has more positives than negatives and much to offer.

Helen Driver, 5206 Windy Ridge, Portage, MI, stated that she is on the board of the Reach and Teach School. She worked in 2004 at New Genesis as a computer technology person. She observed the kids at the school and most of them went directly to class. Ms. Driver indicated that there was not adequate space at the New Genesis building to accommodate the growing number of kids at the school. She stated that she supports the use of the former church facility for the Reach and Teach School.

Commissioner Kuseske requested that the applicant return to the podium to respond to information presented by the public speakers. Ms. Blakely stated that if the school owns the building they will be able to monitor things better. When sharing a building with another business, the doors had to remain open for other people in the building. Staff at the school will greet the students at the door. People have to pass through electronic security to access the building whether they are coming or going. At the previous location, the bus stop was around the corner, which made it difficult for staff to monitor the students. The bus stop is in front of the building at the proposed location. In response to a question from the Planning Commission, Ms. Blakely advised that the kids are not allowed so smoke at school.

There were no further public comments.

Commissioner Mishall, supported by Commissioner Fawley, moved to close the public hearing on P.C. #2007.11. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Cody, supported by Commissioner Wienir, moved to approve P.C. #2007.11, the request from the Reach and Teach School for a special use permit (SUP) to allow the existing building and parking lot at 622 W. Kalamazoo Avenue and 527 & 529 W. Willard to be used for a school, with the condition recommended by city staff. With a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Cody commented that with every situation there are generally problems that arise, but the attitude and practice of administration can help alleviate problems. He stated that he was in education about 40 years and added that he is delighted this project is moving forward.

Commissioner Fawley commented that problems may never come to fruition. Other neighbors bear the burden where schools are located. There will be much better controls at the new location. Commissioner Fawley referred to a situation where he observed unsupervised students coming out of a public school. It is important to make sacrifices in order to have success stories.

Commissioner Mishall inquired if there should be a stipulation for the parking lot on Willard to remain private. Commissioner Cody suggested that subject should be open for further discussion at a later time. Commissioner Fawley inquired if city staff could make a recommendation regarding the parking lot. Planner Bauckham advised that the bar at 411 Westnedge wants to use the parking lot at 527/529 W. Willard. They are working with the neighbors to secure that parking lot. The Kal-Haven trail will eventually come through that area and users of the trail will need parking. Accordingly, there may be a shared use of that parking lot in the future. If the concerns are strong enough, conditions can be placed on any SUP stating that the parking lot not be used by other entities.

Commissioner Wienir advised that the neighborhood association can bring representatives together to address concerns before they happen. She urged the applicants to work with the leadership in that neighborhood.

Commissioner Kuseske commented that if we don't work with kids now, we work with them later in the legal system. Communication is the best answer to prevention of problems.

2. **P.C. #2007.12: Consideration of a request from the Calvary Bible Church for a special use permit (SUP) to allow an addition to be built onto the northeast area of the existing church building located at 855 S. Drake Road.**

Planner Bauckham provided the staff report, which is incorporated in these minutes by reference hereto. He stated that the church is located between the Clayborne Court Apartments and the former arboretum property. The Calvary Bible Church received a special use permit from the Planning Commission in 1985 for the original building. In 1998, the church obtained a special use permit for an addition and parking lot. The church is now requesting a 14,000 square foot addition, which will contain a multi-purpose room with a basketball court and classrooms. There will be 39 parking spaces lost when the new addition is constructed. However, 575 parking spaces will remain and the church is only required to have 242 parking spaces based on the number of seats in their sanctuary. The architecture and the color of the addition will complement the existing building.

Since the church is located in a residential zone (RM-15) a special use permit is required for this project. One or two existing light poles in the parking lot will be relocated to accommodate the addition. Landscaping will be added along Drake Road. The setbacks and 40% open space requirements will be maintained. The addition will be 400 feet north of the residential area. City staff believes the requirements have been met for the special use permit and approval is being recommended with the following condition: The final site plan is to meet the requirements of the

city's zoning ordinance. The site plan is to be submitted and approved before the building permits are issued.

Dan Johnson, Business Administrator for Calvary Bible Church, and Rob Atkins, Civil Engineer for the project, were present on behalf of the applicant. Mr. Johnson gave a brief history of the church. He commented that the church looks sizable from Drake Rd.; on average there are 1,600 attendees for church services. The chapel is used for funerals for soldiers and police officers. On an average Sunday morning every one of the classrooms is used. At the Wednesday night program there are over 700 children and every classroom is occupied. The church needs more classrooms, more play area and a larger gym. The church has an officer to assist with traffic control on Sundays. It is estimated that with the addition, the number of attendees at the church will increase to around 2,100 to 2,500. The expansion will allow for 10 additional classrooms and a regulation size gym. The church has been without a senior pastor for a year and a half, but there has been no decline in attendance.

Commissioner Kneen inquired if the church would need more parking if attendance continues to grow. Mr. Johnson advised that there is ample space on the east side of the building for parking. There are also 5 acres of unused space that can be used for parking if necessary; that area is currently used as softball fields.

Public Hearing

No one spoke at the public hearing.

Commissioner Mishall, supported by Commissioner Kneen, moved to close the public hearing on P.C. #2007.12. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Kneen, supported by Commissioner Cody, moved approval of P.C. #2007.12, consideration of a request from the Calvary Bible Church for a special use permit (SUP) to allow an addition to be built onto the northeast area of the existing church building located at 855 S. Drake Rd., with the condition recommended by city staff. With a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS REGARDING NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Kuseske thanked Ken Horton and John Hilliard from the Milwood Neighborhood for hosting the Planning Commission meeting. He commented that bringing the Planning Commission to different neighborhoods around the city is an attempt to increase citizen participation at the meetings.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

John Hilliard, 2009 Sheridan, thanked the Planning Commission for holding their meeting in the Milwood Neighborhood. He added that it is important for the Planning Commission to go out into the neighborhoods to hold their meetings. There were a limited number of people who showed up, but it is a start. Mr. Hilliard expressed concern that the Milwood Neighborhood has not been included in the planning projects that have been initiated in other parts of the city, with the exception of the Davis Creek Business Park. He added that Milwood is the largest neighborhood in the city. Mr. Hilliard stated that the Milwood Neighborhood has two major gateways: Sprinkle Road/I-94/Cork St. and Portage Rd./Kilgore/I-94. He suggested looking at gateway improvements in those areas as a means of generating revenue for the city. The Volvo truck facility on E. Cork Street is an example of a property that could be redeveloped. Mr. Hilliard mentioned that Sprinkle Road and Cork Street are gateways which affect people's perception of the community.

Ken Horton, 1121 Cambridge, commented that the Milwood Neighborhood is the largest neighborhood in the city, but it has the least amount of crime. The Milwood Business Association is off to a good start with 25-30 members after 6 months. Mr. Horton expressed concern about the pollution that remains at the former Allied Paper site. Someone needs to contact the Allied Paper Co. about bringing that site back to use. Mr. Horton commented that the dividing line is visible at Miller Rd. when you go into the Edison Neighborhood. The Milwood Neighborhood works with KPS (Kalamazoo Public Safety) to enforce ordinances. Mr. Horton advised that the Milwood Neighborhood doesn't receive funds from the City of Kalamazoo. The Milwood Neighborhood doesn't have an office or staff, and the money raised at the neighborhood meetings is used to support projects in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Kuseske mentioned that the Comprehensive Plan is scheduled for review in the fall. He suggested incorporating the suggestions made at tonight's meeting into the Plan. Planner Hernandez advised that the gateway issue isn't new; it is part of the comprehensive study of the city. However, the MDOT (Michigan Dept. of Transportation) trunk lines are at the top of the list of priorities. The roads in Milwood that were mentioned are not trunk lines. Issues in the Milwood Neighborhood will be addressed. Planner Hernandez stated that city staff is in the preliminary stages of reviewing the Comprehensive Plan, and a strategy for the Allied Paper site will be incorporated into the Plan. It is important to know the city's limitations. City staff will probably return to the Milwood Neighborhood to talk with the residents about their priorities.

Commissioner Kuseske advised that City Commissioner Miller is now the official liaison to the Planning Commission. He thanked Commissioner Miller for her attendance at the Planning Commission meetings.

CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Hernandez thanked the members of the Planning Commission for attending the Planning Commission retreat. The presenters at the retreat appreciated the comments from the Planning Commission. Planner Hernandez advised that he is working on a way to finish the informal discussion which began at the retreat. Commissioner Kuseske inquired if the Planning Commission could hold a "Committee of the Whole" meeting. Planner Hernandez advised that

the Committee of Whole is a public meeting. Attorney Kneas advised that as long as no action is taken, the Planning Commission can meet to continue their informal discussion.

Planner Bauckham stated that the August meeting will take place at city hall. A tentative agenda item will be discussion of a possible amendment to the parking exempt district in the downtown area.

Planner Bauckham advised that city staff have normally reviewed 30-31 site plans by July. So far this year, 42 site plans have been reviewed.

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Mishall suggested beginning a dialogue regarding intergovernmental cooperation as it pertains to the Comprehensive Plan. Planner Hernandez advised that the current process involves city staff visiting a number of areas in the city to obtain feedback from residents about their priorities. Letters will be sent to residents to inform them of the process and when meetings will be held. City staff will review comments from residents and determine how their suggestions can be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan. If a more formal process is desired, the City Commission would have to initiate that process.

Planner Bauckham referred to the North Drake Area Plan and commented that a City of Kalamazoo property within that Plan is surrounded on three sides by Oshtemo Township property. Planning Commissions from both of those communities came together to develop the land use plan and it turned out well.

Commissioner Wienir voiced support for Commissioner Mishall's suggestion. As President of the WEB Neighborhood Association, she spoke with the County Board of Commissioners to encourage them to schedule more meetings between planners of neighboring communities. Chair people of Planning Commissions and City Planners need to work more together. She also suggested inviting business leaders from outside the county so they can learn more about what Kalamazoo has to offer. A similar program was offered in Bethlehem to encourage more development.

Commissioner Kuseske stated that he attended a workshop provided by the Michigan Township Association and Michigan Municipal League regarding intergovernmental relations. The workshop focused on how townships and cities interact. With regard to economic development, they look at the economic region and the overall economic area. Southwest Michigan First is the first place they go. It is important to show people what the area has to offer so they will invest in the community. He suggested having the Planning Commission communicate with Southwest Michigan First and neighborhood organizations, etc. Commissioner Kuseske inquired as to the time frame for the Comprehensive Plan review. Planner Hernandez stated that he would have more information on that topic shortly and that he would provide an outline to the Planning Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Kneen, supported by Commissioner Fawley, moved to adjourn the July 10, 2007 Planning Commission meeting. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

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The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Hernandez, AICP
Deputy Director/City Planner
Community Planning & Development