

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
April 10, 2018
FINAL

Second Floor, City Hall
Commission Chambers
241W. South Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Members Present: Rachel Hughes-Nilsson, Chair; Charley Coss, Vice Chair; Gregory Milliken; Sakhi Vyas; Derek Wissner; Alfonso Espinosa; Emily Greenman Wright; James Pitts; Jack Baartman

Members Excused: None

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Robert Bauckham, Senior Development Planner; Clyde Robinson, City Attorney and Beth Cheeseman, Code Administration Clerk and Cashier

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Planner Anderson proceeded with roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present.

C. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Wissner, supported by Commissioner Greenman Wright, moved approval of the April 10, 2018 Planning Commission agenda. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Milliken, supported by Commissioner Vyas, moved approval of the February 1, 2018 Planning Commission minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

F. PUBLIC HEARINGS

P.C. #2018.02: Request from Patrick Coffey to rezone 713 Simpson Street from Zone M-1 (Manufacturing, Limited District) to Zone RM-15 (Residential, Multi-Dwelling District). **[Recommendation: motion to recommend to the City Commission to approve the rezoning request.]**

Planner Anderson asked Attorney Robinson for clarification about opening both public hearings at once since they were related. Attorney Robinson advised opening each hearing separately.

Planner Bauckham proceeded to present the staff report. The applicant owns 713 Simpson Street and operates Healthy House 4 Women, a transitional residence for women recovering from addictions. The applicant has operated the transitional residence from this property for approximately three years. The zoning for this property is M-1, Manufacturing, Limited District and this zoning does not permit new residential uses or structures. The transitional house is not a permitted use in the M-1 zone. The applicant would like to have the property rezoned to RM-15, Residential, Multi-Dwelling District. The second request is for a special use permit to allow the transitional housing to continue. The transitional housing is permitted within the RM-15 zoning with approval of a special use permit.

The program allows a maximum of eight adult women to reside in the home with an average stay of 90 days to one year. Besides staff and family members, no men are allowed in the house. A staff member lives in the house and the women are supervised at all times. The program includes recovery coaches, counseling and other assistance three days per week. The residents attend AA and/or NA daily. They have a curfew of 9:00 p.m. each day. The residents do not have vehicles on site. The goals of the program are to help the women with their recovery, provide life and job skills, and transition them into permanent housing. The applicant has spoken to the Director of the Northside Association for Community Development, sent out letters to the neighbors, gone door to door to speak with the neighbors about the request, and received positive comments about continuing the program in their area.

Staff believes the transitional residence use is compatible with existing adjacent uses. The rezoning is compatible with the future land use plan. The request also helps to accomplish the Strategic Vision goal of “Strength through Diversity.” Planner Bauckham added that the applicant will need to submit a site plan if the rezoning and special use permit are approved. Staff is recommending approval of the rezoning and special use permit. Planner Bauckham stated that the special use permit would be contingent upon the rezoning of the property.

Commissioner Milliken asked why the issue has come before the Commissioners at this time. Planner Bauckham stated that staff only recently became aware of the transitional use in the house.

The applicant, Ms. Pam Coffey, came forward to speak assuring the Commissioners that she never intended to break any zoning ordinances. She indicated they sought to follow the process once they were aware of the issue. Ms. Coffey said the house is for women transitioning from prison or treatment centers who need a safe place to start over. She believes it is very needed in the community. Ms. Coffey shared that she is a recovering addict of 25 years and she has a passion for serving these women. She cited the case of one woman who served 15 years in prison who had three children. She stated that the woman was ready to recover. She followed all of the rules of the program and stayed in the house for about seven months. The woman was able to get an apartment, a car, and was eventually hired with Pharmacia.

Commissioner Pitts asked about other houses in the area with similar purposes. Ms. Coffey responded that she knows of a home for homeless families on Eleanor Street. She also stated the possibility of a family house coming to Ada Street.

Commissioner Wissner asked her to explain her business model. Ms. Coffey explained that they work on a referral basis from treatment centers and have a contract with Professional Consultant Services. She also has a contract with GFM - The Synergy Center. The women are funded through Southwest Michigan Behavioral Association (SWMBA) for outpatient treatment and they can get 90 days of housing. Ms. Coffey attempts to get funding and resources for each woman to stay with them for at least 6 months. She gets referrals on a regular basis.

Commissioner Milliken asked how the conversations with the neighbors went. Ms. Coffey responded that they went well. She mailed a letter to all of the neighbors in the 300' radius. The neighbors she talked with had no problem with the program remaining in place. She added that there have been no problems with the neighbors.

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson opened the public comments portion of the hearing.

Ms. Gwendoyne Lanier, resident and one of the founders and president of the Board of Directors for Mothers of Hope, came forward to speak in support of the rezoning and special use permit. She is also a recovering addict – sober for 30 years. She highlighted how important these kinds of houses are in light of the opioid crisis.

Ms. Valarie Cunningham, Founder and Executive Director of GFM - The Synergy Center, came forward in support of Ms. Coffey. She strongly urged the Commissioners to consider the rezoning request and special use permit for transitional housing. She said they have partnered with Ms. Coffey for the last three years. Ms. Cunningham stated that when they get referrals, they contact residential housing to see if there are places available. To receive the funds from SWMBA, the women need to be in a place that can offer substance abuse counseling or group counseling. She stated that the services provided by Ms. Coffey have been giving these women the opportunity to get their lives back and to have an improved quality of life.

Ms. Stephanie Moore, resident, serves on the Kalamazoo County Commission. She chairs the board for District 1, and urged the Commissioners to consider approving the requests. Ms. Moore indicated she is leading her board to have conversations about how to address the opioid epidemic and how to work with the people in the community who provide safe, healing spaces for those on the journey to recovery. She believes supporting the rezoning to allow people in the community to provide those spaces is an awesome way to do that. She encouraged the Commissioners that Ms. Coffey's program is a benefit to Kalamazoo and the residents in the neighborhood. She stated that the Coffeys are from Kalamazoo and are invested in the community. Ms. Moore also said that the applicant has been a business owner in the community for decades and Ms. Coffey truly has a heart to help people in the community.

Mr. Jon Weeldreyer, psychologist, addictions counselor, manager and counselor at the Kalamazoo Pine Rest Clinic, came forward to speak in favor of the rezoning and special use permit requests. He stated that substance abusers in treatment see a large improvement in a short period of time, but they are fragile for the first year. He indicated that the recovery environment is one factor that often sabotages people in recovery. He also said that it may require a residential setting for treatment for people to understand what a healthy family is like. He cited experiences of people on waiting lists for residential beds who died before receiving a spot in residential treatment.

Ms. Brenda Earhart serves on the Board at Healthy House and is aware of the services and the benefits those in the house are receiving. She requested support of the rezoning of Healthy House.

Ms. Nikkole Riojas, resident, came forward in support of the Healthy House 4 Women. Ms. Riojas stated that she feels the City of Kalamazoo has neglected their neighborhood as a whole and this program gives hope for families to come together and heal.

Mr. Patrick Coffey, applicant, came forward asking the Commissioners to vote in favor of Ms. Coffey's proposal. He stated that the nature of addiction leads to the person being unemployable, leading to homelessness and the possibility of becoming victims of rape, depression and exploitation which impacts whole families. He stated that their mission statement is, "All women safe, sober and self-sufficient." Mr. Coffey also noted that there is a peer support recovery system within the house. Ms. Coffey strives to get the residents connected to mental health services and conducts mandatory meetings. Ms. Coffey assists them in budgeting and finding alternative housing when they are ready to leave. He stated that they believe it is such vital work that they ran the house for about a year using their own funds and then became a 501C3 agency.

Ms. Rochelle Ayers-Brannen is a physician on the board of Healthy House 4 Women. She also strongly encouraged Commissioners to support the program at Healthy House. She stated that substance abuse is a mental health and physical condition.

Mr. Malcolm Earhart noted his experiences growing up in Kalamazoo and seeing neighborhoods decline. He stated that whatever goes into that area will be positive for the neighborhood. He believes it is a very good use of the property. He stated that the board's decisions are very important to the community. He encouraged Commissioners to think about the consequences "down the road" of the decisions they make.

Commissioner Wissner, supported by Commissioner Pitts, moved to close the public comment portion of the hearing. A voice vote was taken and the public comment portion was closed.

Commissioner Greenman Wright requested clarification regarding ownership of the property and who was making the request. Mr. Coffey came forward and stated that he and Ms. Pam Coffey own the property together under the name of Income with Integrity. Ms. Coffey is the Executive Director of the program.

Commissioner Espinosa expressed concern for the future of the factory North of 713 Simpson. Ms. Coffey stated that the owner of the property currently lives there. Planner Anderson stated that there is likely to be additional rezoning on the Northside in the future, and the future land use map shows much of the property as generally residential in nature. Commissioner Milliken asked to see the future land use map again, and it was confirmed that the request is in compliance with the future land use plan.

Commissioner Vyas, supported by Commissioner Pitts, moved to recommend to the City Commission the rezoning of 713 Simpson Street from zone M-1 to zone RM-15.

Commissioner Vyas stated that she was excited to support this request. She believes it is an important work and they are well-researched, well-staffed and have a great program.

Commissioner Milliken noted that the request is compliant with the future land use map and consistent with the current zoning of the property immediately to the east. Commissioner Pitts expressed agreement with Commissioners Vyas and Milliken.

Commissioner Wissner stated that he was in favor of the request. He said it was a well-presented plan and he loved to see all of the community support.

Commissioner Greenman Wright appreciated the way it fits into the Strategic Vision goal of diversity for the City, citing that it is good to gradually step back from heavy industrial uses. She stated that she was proud of the work they were doing as a family to meet a major need in the community. Commissioner Greenman Wright stated that she hopes it gives more people the courage to take a risk and do something positive in the community. She noted the personal commitment and investment given by the Coffeys and that she would be voting in support of the request.

A roll call vote was taken and the motion was unanimously passed.

P.C. #2018.03: Request from Patrick Coffey for a special use permit to allow a transitional residence use at 713 Simpson Street. **[Recommendation: motion to approve the special use permit with one condition.]**

Planner Bauckham stepped forward to state that the recommendation for the rezoning will go to the City Commissioners for approval. He reminded the Planning Commissioners that the special use permit is contingent upon the City Commissioners' approval of the rezoning.

The applicant decided not to speak to this request. No one from the public came forward to comment.

Commissioner Coss, supported by Commissioner Espinosa, moved to close the public comment portion of the hearing.

Commissioner Wissner clarified with staff that it was the owner of the property making the request. Planner Bauckham verified this was correct.

Commissioner Pitts, supported by Commissioner Baartman, moved to approve the special use permit for 713 Simpson Street with the condition of the rezoning of the parcel.

Commissioner Pitts stated that he believed this was a very good idea and well needed in the community. He said he was proud to be a part of the community and make this motion.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked what would happen if the Commission did not support the rezoning. Planner Anderson responded that a transitional house is not permitted in M-1. If the City Commission did not approve the rezoning request, they would be faced with a conflict and would then attempt to find other options. She stated that the request does meet the Master Plan and Strategic Vision, and they are fairly confident in their recommendation to the City Commission.

Commissioner Milliken pointed out that this request is compliant with the criteria for a special use permit and meets all the standards. He commended the Coffeys on the work they have already done and the neighbors for their support.

A roll call vote was taken and unanimously passed with the stated condition. Motion was approved.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

H. NEW BUSINESS

Planner Anderson conducted the election of officers for the Planning Commission.

Chair

Commissioner Rachel Hughes-Nilsson was nominated by Commissioner Vyas with support from Commissioner Wissner.

Commissioner Greg Milliken was nominated by Commissioner Coss with support from Commissioner Greenman Wright.

A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Rachel Hughes-Nilsson was elected Chair with a vote of 7-2.

Vice Chair

Commissioner Greg Milliken was nominated by Commissioner Espinosa with support from Commissioner Wissner.

Commissioner Charley Coss was nominated by Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson with support from Commissioner Greenman Wright.

A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Greg Milliken was elected Vice Chair with a vote of 7-2.

Secretary

Commissioner Derek Wissner was nominated by Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson with support from Commissioner Greenman Wright.

A voice vote was taken and passed unanimously. Commissioner Derek Wissner was elected Secretary.

Planner Bauckham summarized the 2017 Annual Report of the Planning Commission and Planning Division. He cited that there were seven Commissioners at the start of 2017. Two Commissioners left the board and three Commissioners were added during the year. Eleven meetings were held last year with

the Annual Meeting on April 13. There was also a Planning Commission retreat on November 15. He then reviewed the twenty requests acted upon by the Planning Commission. Planner Bauckham highlighted some of the notable site plan projects that the Planning Division processed through the year saying that they also closed out 40 cases from 2017 and prior years. Other activities of interest included: the City received the Redevelopment Ready Community certification through the MEDC; the 2025 Strategic Vision and the 2025 Master Plan were both approved through the Imagine Kalamazoo process; three Neighborhood Enterprise Zone requests were processed and approved; the Site Plan Review program was revamped; many activities continue related to the construction of the Exchange Building; and a new Neighborhood Activator was hired.

Planner Bauckham spoke about the changes in the Site Plan Review Process. Mr. Mark Reynolds, Consultant for the Lean Six Sigma program, along with a staff team, reviewed the Site Plan Process. A new Site Plan Review Policy was developed including a new application form, site plan checklist, and a pre-application questionnaire. Staff believe the new process will improve efficiency with less paperwork allowing electronic review of site plans through the Blue Beam system. A pre-application process for all projects was created. The new system allows applicants to submit one 11x17 paper copy and an electronic version of their site plan. This system allows results to be given to the applicant prior to the meeting. Copies of the plans are sent electronically to the Planning Commissioners and the neighborhoods where the plan is located. To aid the process, there will be applicant surveys at the conclusion of projects and quarterly staff meetings with the committee.

Planner Bauckham informed the Commissioners that the zoning ordinance allows the Planning Commission to decide how the Site Plan Review Program will be administered. It can be administered by staff or the Planning Commissioners. He stated that if the Commissioners decide to administer the Program, they will need to have a second monthly meeting in order to keep within developers' timeframes for their projects.

Commissioner Milliken, supported by Commissioner Coss, moved to allow staff to continue to administer the Site Plan Review Process.

A voice vote was taken and passed.

I. CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Regarding non-agenda items)

Mr. Matthew Maycroft came forward and reported that a jogger was hit in front of his house on Winchell Avenue. He requested a sidewalk be added to about 600 feet of the road. Mr. Maycroft shared a map with the Commissioners showing the location for the proposed sidewalk. Planner Anderson thanked Mr. Maycroft for bringing it forward and said that the Planning Commission will be reviewing Complete Streets and this request will be included.

Commissioner Milliken encouraged Mr. Maycroft to talk with his Neighborhood Association in order to include the sidewalk in the Neighborhood Plan.

J. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

City Commission Liaison, Mr. Jack Urban, thanked the Commissioners for handling the 716 Simpson case as a rezoning rather than a variance. He believes that rezoning the property will give the whole operation a firmer standing.

K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Bauckham said they have received nine site plan projects for review so far this year. He noted the projects for the Kalamazoo Nature Center and the Midtown Marketplace. Planner Bauckham reported there are also six projects in the pre-application stage. In a future meeting, staff will submit a rezoning request for the E. Cork Street hotel area in order to bring them into zoning compliance. He stated that they are also looking at updating the City website for changes in the Planning Division and Site Plan Review Process.

L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Milliken asked Attorney Robinson if there was any action on the Medical Marijuana ordinances at the City Commission. Attorney Robinson stated that they passed the zoning ordinance and the licensing regulation ordinance. He stated that the changes made had to do with the buffer zone between jurisdictions and some changes due to the emergency rules. There were no substantial changes to the amendments passed by the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Greenman Wright asked the Commissioners to continue to support the homeowners impacted by the flood in Kalamazoo. She stated there are still hundreds of home owners who don't have heat, hot water or electricity. There is still a great need.

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson welcomed Mr. Jack Baartman to the Planning Commission.

M. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Coss, supported by Commissioner Espinosa, moved to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken and passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 8:27pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Christina Anderson,
City Planner
Community Planning & Development