

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
September 3, 2020
FINAL

Electronic meeting
under the authority of Executive Order 2020-154 & 165
issued by Governor Gretchen Whitmer

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; Sharda Chambers; Derek Wissner; Coreen Ellis; Brian Pittelko; Sakhi Vyas; Emily Greenman Wright, Vice Chair; *Alfonso Espinosa

Members Excused: James Pitts

City Staff: Pete Eldridge, Assistant City Planner; Clyde Robinson, City Attorney; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Joseph Ulery, Deputy Chief Information Officer; Neal Conway, Communications Coordinator; Jack Urban, City Commission Liaison

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

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

C. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Ellis, supported by Commissioner Wissner, moved approval of the September 3, 2020 Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Vyas, supported by Commissioner Chambers, moved approval of the July 29, 2020 Planning Commission minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Eldridge pointed out that letters of support were circulated earlier in the day for both hearings.

F. NEW BUSINESS

None.

G. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Commissioner Milliken reviewed the process for the public to comment on the public hearings.

1. P.C. #2020.12: Joy Abimbowo is requesting a special use permit to change the family day care to a group day care at 3069 Mt. Olivet Road. [**Recommendation: approve special use permit for the group day care**]

Planner Eldridge presented the staff report. The applicant wants to expand her family daycare of six children to a group daycare of 7-12 children. The house is in zone RS-5. It has 907 square feet available for the daycare with a fenced backyard and play area. The front yard has a double lane driveway which is sufficient for pickup and drop offs. The applicant, Ms. Abimbowo has been licensed since 2019. The children in her care are 6 months to 12 years of age. She is open M-F, 6am to midnight. Planner Eldridge shared maps and pictures of the property and surrounding areas. He noted that there is a sign in her yard advertising the daycare. He will work with Ms. Abimbowo regarding this because daycares are not allowed to have free-standing signs in the front yard. Home daycares with six children are an approved and appropriate use in the RS-5 district. A special use permit is required for a group daycare (7-12 children). Ms. Abimbowo's request aligns with the Strategic Vision goal of Complete Neighborhoods. Planner Eldridge explained that the required public noticing was completed. He said the applicant talked to her neighbors and was able to provide letters of support from two of them. Planner Eldridge explained that the proposed special use is appropriate and compatible with surrounding land uses. The existing daycare meets all of the additional requirements for a group daycare listed in chapter 4.2K2. An occupancy inspection is required by the Building Official to make sure that Life Safety Code is met. He said that children are allowed to play outside with appropriate supervision in the fenced play area. The existing road capacity is sufficient for this use and Mt. Olivet has curbside parking. Planner Eldridge shared the staff rationale for approval. He said the proposed daycare is an allowed use in RS-5; it complies with zoning ordinance requirements; it has a double lane driveway for pick-up and drop offs of children; and the group daycare aligns with the Strategic Vision Goal of Complete Neighborhoods. He also mentioned the letters of support received. Planner Eldridge recommended the Planning Commissioners approve the daycare with the condition that it will not be operated until it has the required license from the State of Michigan.

Applicant, Joy Abimbowo, shared that she has done daycare for about 10 years. She worked with the elderly for four years before starting the home daycare. Ms. Abimbowo has run the home daycare for one year. She reported that there is an increased demand - people continue ask if she can provide daycare services. She feels that she has the space for more children.

Commissioner Milliken asked about staffing needs and 2nd shift work. Ms. Abimbowo said her cousin will be assisting her. She said she currently has the six children alone with her cousin assisting occasionally. Right now, she has one baby who comes from 4:30-11:30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Ms. Abimbowo said that once her assistant is available, she can take more children on the 2nd shift. She added that most of the children come at 6 am and leave at 5:30pm.

Commissioner Milliken opened up the public comment portion of the hearing.

No public comments at this time.

Commissioner Milliken closed the public comment portion of the public hearing.

Commissioner Milliken asked staff to clarify about the inspection by the Building Official. He wondered if that should be a condition of approval. Planner Eldridge said it did not need to be a condition. It is one of the required forms Ms. Abimbowo needs to submit for her group daycare license. Ms. Abimbowo shared the inspections and trainings required for her license. Planner Eldridge said that after she submits her application, someone from State comes and does a site inspection. He was comfortable with only condition being the license from the State.

Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Vyas, made the motion to approve special use permit for the group day care use for 7-12 children with condition of the group daycare not being operated until the required license is obtained by state of Michigan.

Commissioner Greenman Wright stated that it was obvious the applicant had done a lot of work in preparing her home and that she runs a successful business if there is more demand. She stated appreciation of the service Ms. Abimbowo is performing in the City. Commissioner Greenman Wright shared that she would be voting yes with no hesitation.

Commissioner Milliken added that the request is compliant with the zoning ordinance and the Master Plan. He pointed out that the use is in high demand. Commissioner Milliken stated that he puts a lot of stock in the staff report and state of Michigan licensing process.

Roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed.

2. P.C. #2020.13: The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Kalamazoo is requesting a special use permit to allow a community service center in an M-1 District at 825 and 847 Portage Street / 720 and 726 E. Vine Street. [**Recommendation: approve special use permit for the community service center**]

Planner Eldridge presented the staff report. He pointed out that the request includes four parcels. He shared that the Boys & Girls Club is well established in the Kalamazoo area with three locations - W. Paterson Street, Lake Street and Gertrude Street (Kalamazoo township). Planner Eldridge said the Boys & Girls Club intends to continue a presence in the Northside, Edison and Eastside neighborhoods. This property is approximately 1.5 acres. Three of the parcels are vacant with one building remaining on the south parcel. The proposed new building is approximately 30,000 sq. ft. for administrative offices, programming space and a gymnasium. Planner Eldridge shared maps and pictures of the property and surrounding area. The current zoning of this property is M-1. This particular area is identified in the Master Plan to be changed to a more mixed-use type zone such as LW-1 or LW-2. At that time a community service center would not require a special use permit. Currently, in the M-1 zone, it does require a special use permit. This request meets two Strategic Vision goals – Shared Prosperity and Youth Development. Planner Eldridge stated that the required public notices were sent. The applicant talked to property owners and nearby businesses and received two letters of support. Planner Eldridge explained that the request meets special use permit criteria. The location is compatible with the mix of uses already existing in the area. Portage Street allows for cross-City access which includes a bus route. The location will be convenient to attract and serve youth from multiple neighborhoods. The facility will comply with the additional zoning criteria mentioned – noise ordinance standards. No outdoor recreational opportunities are proposed. Planner Eldridge stated that the new construction will go through site plan review approval process. He added that access for

parking and drop offs is from Jackson Street. The existing road capacity is adequate to handle traffic needs for this particular use. Planner Eldridge shared the Staff Rationale for recommendation. Community Service Centers are an allowed use in M-1; this area is being evaluated for rezoning which would allow a community service center by right; the facility and location would attract and serve youth from multiple neighborhoods; the request meets the Shared Prosperity and Complete Neighborhood goals of the Strategic Vision. Planner Eldridge recommended that Planning Commissioners approve this request.

Applicant, Matt Lynn, Chief Executive Officer, shared a little more about the Boys & Girls Club. He said that in 2018, they found out Edison Elementary School was slated to be torn down and rebuilt per the Kalamazoo public millage. Because they lease their current space, they began to look at their options. They were committed to staying connected to the Edison neighborhood which has been their home base for over 20 years. Mr. Lynn feels this property is ideal. There are many crosstown connections to other neighborhoods and schools and parents will easily be able to drop off and pick up youth on a daily basis. Mr. Lynn said the facility will give them the opportunity to expand their reach and capacity to serve more youth throughout the Kalamazoo area. He shared that they have completed the purchase of the property, a survey, a Phase I ESA, Phase II ESA, and BEA on the property.

*Commissioner Espinosa joined the meeting while the Mr. Lynn was talking.

Commissioner Milliken asked where staff would park. Mr. Andrew Gyorkos replied that they're working on putting the building on the northern part of the property. He said the parking would be on the southernmost portion - where the contamination is located. He said they are talking to Loaves and Fishes about sharing parking in the already existing lot.

Commissioner Ellis asked if Edison's new school building would include the Boys & Girls Club or if they would be separate. Mr. Lynn replied that they will be separate. He believes they will still have a dynamic partnership with them. The youth will just walk across Jackson to get to Boys & Girls Club. He thought there may be some joint program opportunities – using green space /playground at the school.

Commissioner Milliken opened up the public comment portion of the hearing.

Mr. Richard Stewart stated that his property is directly across the street from the former Grapevine complex. He said that he and the South town Neighborhood are happy to welcome the Boys & Girls Club to develop the parcels. They will be great neighbors. Mr. Stewart expressed concern that the City reduced Portage Street from two lanes in each direction to one lane in each direction with a turn lane in the center - from Stockbridge to Lovell. He said this change has caused a massive increase in auto accidents that they've documented and submitted photos on Facebook repeatedly. Mr. Stewart said it has also caused major traffic delays, congestion and air pollution from the starting and stopping traffic. He again expressed support of the Boys & Girls Club but asked that the City open Portage Street back up to two lanes in each direction. They believe the new development will bring more traffic to the area, and for safety, they want to have the road be four lanes. He shared that this area of Portage has school buses, railroad tracks and the City bus. He believed it is only safe and prudent to reopen Portage Street. Mr. Stewart also added that the City has ignored the South town Neighborhood plan. He said they are a diverse neighborhood, and this is their business district.

Commissioner Milliken closed the public comment portion of the hearing.

Commissioner Chambers said that she works off Portage Road. Her concern was also traffic and safety. She said there are a lot of accidents that happen, and she hoped the City will look into traffic over there. Commissioner Chambers said there is going to be a new apartment complex and potentially a new restaurant in that area. It can be dangerous because that intersection gets really busy.

Planner Eldridge said he will relay Mr. Stewart's comments to the City Planner and Traffic Engineer.

Mr. Gyorkos said that because they are already a block away, he did not feel they would be bringing in additional traffic. He said the proposed location will give them more room with parking.

Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Pittelko, made the motion to approve the special use permit to allow a community service center in the M-1 district.

Commissioner Greenman Wright believes that the Boys & Girls Club does incredible work. She was excited to see their presence and their accessibility to other neighborhoods expanding. Commissioner Greenman Wright thought the location was ideal and she couldn't think of a better anchor to have on that corner. She said it checks many boxes for the Master Plan.

Commissioner Milliken agreed that it complies with the zoning ordinance and with the Master Plan and serves as a catalyst for development along the Portage Road corridor.

Roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

H. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

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

None.

J. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Mr. Jack Urban, City Commission Liaison, expressed pleasure with what looks like a win-win situation with the Boys & Girls Club.

K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Eldridge said they are working on amendments to the NFP ordinance. He said those should be ready for the November Planning Commission meeting. Public feedback is being sought for the Downtown zone districts (D1, D2, D3) and the uses for those districts. Nothing was lined up for the October Planning Commission meeting at that time. Planner Eldridge shared that the Site plan review list was in the packet. He said they are incredibly busy with projects. He encouraged Planning Commissioners to reach out to staff if they have questions or want to see any of those site plans.

L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Ellis asked if they will continue meeting virtually for the rest of the year. Planner Eldridge said they are continuing to evaluate sites that would be large enough to meet. Until they are elevated to the next stage of Covid-19 recovery, they won't have any place with the occupancy level needed to hold citizen meetings in person. He will ask and see if an update can be sent out. They are planning to use the Zoom video conferencing for the next few months.

Attorney Robinson added that it will depend on the Governor's orders. There has been a slowing of Covid infection across Michigan, but the Governor's office is being cautious. If there is no spike in September after the Labor Day holiday, there may be an easing of some restrictions as they get further into the fall months.

Commissioner Chambers said that the City of Kalamazoo is looking for poll workers for November. She said high school juniors and seniors are also eligible to work. Any who are interested need to fill out applications and send them to the County Clerk's office. The training will be in October and you get paid for training. In November they feed you and provide masks and shields. Absentee ballots will be going out in the next couple weeks. She encouraged Planning Commissioners to share the information.

Commissioner Greenman Wright added that there is a great need, especially for workers in low risk categories.

Planner Eldridge received an update from Planner Anderson. The Executive Order allowing electronic meetings was extended today to go through Oct 1st. That will allow virtual meetings into late October.

M. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 8:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Christina Anderson,
City Planner
Community Planning & Economic Development