

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Special Meeting Minutes
January 11, 2021
FINAL

This meeting will be conducted electronically in order for members, staff, and the public to comply with the ***Emergency Order under MCL 333.2253 – Gatherings and Face Mask Order*** issued by Robert Gordon, Director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, on December 18, 2020.

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; Shardae Chambers; Derek Wissner; Coreen Phipps; Brian Pittelko; Sakhi Vyas; Emily Greenman Wright, Vice Chair

Members Excused: James Pitts

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Pete Eldridge, Assistant City Planner; Clyde Robinson, City Attorney; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Andie Miller, Senior Systems Analyst; Amanda Cockcroft, Marketing and Communication Specialist; Jack Urban, City Commission Liaison

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 4:03 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 Vyas, supported by Commissioner Greenman Wright, moved approval of the January 11, 2021 Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Anderson announced that they will need to complete their meeting by 5:15 pm at the latest.

Commissioner Milliken announced that this is a public meeting and they will be taking public comments. He said they would wrap up discussion at 5:00pm to leave time for citizen comments and the remainder of the agenda.

E. NEW BUSINESS

1. Discussion on procedures for Planning Commission review of large cases, such as large or scattered site zoning requests and public engagement and notice practices of these cases.

Planner Anderson reviewed the usual notification and engagement efforts for larger cases. For notification purposes, she proposed sending letters earlier (but not too early) and include information on meetings, office hours, and how to get more information.

The Planning Department follows the Public Participation Plan (PPP) for engagement efforts. Planner Anderson thought staff could work in more opportunities for comments and concerns and a more defined space between notices. She said that when they craft their PPP for a project, they will really think about the elements they are using to reach everyone in a timely manner.

To increase communication with the Planning Commission, Planner Anderson would like to use the City Planner Report time on the agenda to bring them into the loop on large projects. She proposed to communicate in detail about the projects at three points: 1) Start of project – Public Participation Plan, how they hope to engage and a basic timeline; 2) Between engagement/input and design – report feedback, what was learned and where they are going with the project; 3) Pre-Hearing/Final Draft – wrapping it up, time to ask any questions. She said they will provide the same information to the City Commission.

Planner Anderson said that the increased touch points are a time to understand the case and ask any questions. Once the Planning Commission receives the information in their packet, they can ask for information to be included in the hearing presentation. She reminded Planning Commissioners that they always have the option to continue a public hearing. If they do that, Planner Anderson requested they give staff clear direction on the information needed and when the case will continue.

Commissioner Vyas thanked her for breaking down the plan. She thought increasing touch points will help them to look into things and generate questions sooner. Commissioner Vyas reviewed some things regarding the NFP Phase II project. She thought the second phase was less consistent than the first phase. What seemed of concern was that they didn't address questions from the first time. She thinks they can get ahead of that by more touch points. Commissioner Vyas wondered about the most satisfying way to come to a decision when there are still questions lingering.

Commissioner Milliken thought the first way to come to a consensus is through discussion at a meeting. He said he sometimes needs time to absorb new information and questions. If they don't have answers for questions and feel like they can't decide without those answers, it is justification to table to a following meeting. He thought the plan laid out would be helpful. It would be good to have additional opportunities to engage and ask questions. Commissioner Milliken shared that he didn't feel comfortable going or engaging in public participation events. He attended the events virtually and learned things but learning the night you are supposed to decide is hard.

Planner Anderson said staff will do their best to be ready to answer questions. If there is something they can't answer, and it is intricately tied to the Planning Commission's ability to recommend or approve a case, then continuing is the best bet. She said, in a technical sense, the Planning Commission can put conditions on a motion or recommend removal of a parcel or an area.

City Commissioner Urban said that continuing or tabling an issue to a subsequent meeting is fine if they are specific about what needs to be clarified or what additional information is needed. He added that it might be good for Planning Commissioners to review midway through a project if all the stakeholders they expected to hear from have responded. They may also want to evaluate areas where they could be blind-sided.

Planner Anderson said that at a midpoint presentation, they can be far more detailed with whom and how they engaged to help answer that question. Commissioner Milliken thought that would be very helpful.

Planner Anderson asked if they needed more or different information in the public hearing presentations. Commissioner Vyas thought it may be helpful to be alerted to things to watch for or possible concerns people will have with any particular case. City Commissioner Urban thought that would be especially helpful for the newer members of the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Greenman Wright expressed frustration that they can't answer questions or ask questions during citizen comment period in a public hearing. Commissioner Greenman Wright thought the multiple touch points will offer more opportunities so they're not just getting information/feedback in the public hearing. City Commissioner Urban urged them to use the Commissioner Comment period at the end of the agenda to let the citizens know their comments were heard and considered or if more information is needed.

Planner Anderson reminded them they can direct staff to respond to the comments. It's not an opportunity for two-way dialogue, but it is an opportunity to answer questions.

Commissioners Vyas and Greenman Wright asked what the process would look like to exempt parcels from a zoning change? What are their options are for making things more manageable for Commissioners and citizens? How do they make decisions that are less than all or nothing?

Attorney Robinson cautioned them about exempting parcels and getting into spot zoning or acting like the Zoning Board of Appeals. He said when they look at rezoning requests, they can think about whether the entire request make sense for all the parcels involved. They can exclude parcels if they feel the rezoning is not appropriate for that parcel. Attorney Robinson told them there is nothing wrong with breaking motions into parts.

Planner Eldridge reminded Planning Commissioners that there will be some situations people will need to apply for variances. That's what the ZBA is there for and if unique circumstances are involved, it can be warranted to go that route.

Commissioner Pittelko thanked staff for the update. He appreciates the renewed focus on outreach for citizens. Commissioner Pittelko like the idea of having more heads-up on what would be controversial or require more deliberation.

Commissioner Greenman Wright thought the NFP meeting would have gone completely differently if they had the meeting in person and were better able to work as a team. She felt they've lost a lot by meeting virtually.

Commissioner Phipps wondered if having the extra touchpoints with large cases would increase the applicant's timeline. She agreed that the heads-up or homework would better equip them to answer questions. Planner Anderson explained the timeline and said they already tell applicants the process will take about three months. Commissioner Milliken added that in most of the cases they're talking about, the applicant would be the City. Planner Anderson agreed that they will fit the touchpoints in the normal schedule of preparations and public participation.

Commissioner Milliken asked about projects coming up and their first touchpoint meeting. Planner Anderson said they have three neighborhood focused cases they would like to bring first. She would also like to have a presentation of the Public Participation Plan for NFP Phase II for February or March.

Commissioner Milliken said he will look forward to seeing how that goes and providing feedback on the process as it evolves.

F. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

G. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

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

Mr. Richard Stuart called to express concern that City staff follow the minimum requirements by law for notification. He believed they have the email addresses for the Southtown Neighborhood. Mr. Stuart said that notices go to the wrong places, and notices aren't posted on doors. He doesn't believe there is a good faith effort. Mr. Stuart said they are still trying to file the Southtown Neighborhood Plan to be considered for the 2025 Master Plan. He said their plan seeks to protect the natural features the NFP designated behind Stockbridge and Lake just east of John Street. Mr. Stuart voiced concern regarding a development project for that area. He also shared that the Southtown Neighborhood would like to keep the Portage corridor in the business district CC zoning. Mr. Stuart said there is a need in the market for CC zoning and zero demand for LW-1 and LW-2.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

None.

J. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

None.

K. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Vyas thanked Planner Anderson for hosting and organizing this meeting and answering questions. She let her know she is valued, and her work is appreciated.

L. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 5:03 pm.

Planning Commission

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid blue horizontal line.

Christina Anderson,

City Planner

Community Planning & Economic Development