

# **City of Duluth Planning Commission**

**August 9, 2022 – City Hall Council Chambers  
Meeting Minutes**

## **Call to Order**

Vice-President Gary Eckenberg called to order the meeting of the city planning commission at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 9th, 2022 in the Duluth city hall council chambers.

## **Roll Call**

### **Attendance:**

Members Present: Gary Eckenberg, Jason Hollinday, Samuel Lobby, Danielle Rhodes, and Andrea Wedul

Members Absent: Jason Crawford, Margie Nelson, and Michael Schraepfer

Staff Present: Adam Fulton, Robert Asleson, Theresa Bajda, and Brett Crecelius, and Cindy Stafford

## **Approval of Planning Commission Minutes** -

Planning Commission Meeting – July 12, 2022

**MOTION/Second:** Hollinday/Wedul approved

**VOTE: (5-0)**

## **Public Comment on Items Not on Agenda**

None

## **Consent Agenda**

(Item PL 22-118 was removed from the consent agenda and placed under public hearings.)

PL 22-036 Interim Use Permit for a Vacation Dwelling Unit at 619 W Skyline Parkway by Dawn M. Holmberg

PL 22-078 Interim Use Permit for a Vacation Dwelling Unit at 612 N 58th Avenue W by Antonio Valdovinos

PL 22-100 Variance to Parking Maximum at 3815 Prosperity Road by American Precision Avionics

PL 22-113 Minor Subdivision at 140 W Mankato Street by Alex Bruckelmyer

PL 22-115 Vacation of Sunrise Parkway, a Portion of Daybreak Overlook, and Portions of Two Alleys at 1225 Harbor Highlands Drive by Duluth Housing and Redevelopment Authority

PL 22-122 Planning Review for Parking Lot Expansion at 916 E 3rd Street by Jefferson School, LLC

**Public:** No speakers

**MOTION/Second:** Wedul/Hollinday approved as per staff recommendations

**VOTE: (5-0)**

### **Public Hearings**

PL 22-118 Vacation of Platted Cherry Street, and Unnamed Platted Right of Way, and a Platted Alley at 3401 Grand Avenue by Brent Dahlstrom

**Staff:** Deputy Director Adam Fulton gave an overview. The applicant is requesting to vacate an unimproved 40-foot wide portion of the platted right of way for Cherry Street west of Grand Avenue, a 33-foot wide unimproved platted right of way north of Cherry Street with 16.5 feet retained for a utility easement, and a portion of a 16-foot unimproved wide alley, all in the recorded plat of Centredale Addition to Duluth, located in the Denfeld neighborhood. The vacation will help create an approximate 2-acre site for the development of an affordable multi-family housing complex. Staff recommends approval with the conditions listed in the staff report, and an added condition that the DEDA board approves. Chair Eckenberg noted in the staff report – Comp Plan Governing Principle #5 – would this allow for open space? Deputy Director Fulton noted the designation was made according to the 2006 Comp plan. This site was previously a Holiday gas station. The proposed use is consistent with the broader plan.

**Applicant:** Did not speak.

**Public:** No speakers.

**MOTION/Second:** Wedul/Lobby recommended approval as per staff recommendation

**VOTE: (5-0)**

PL 22-114 UDC Map Amendment for Changes to R-P District at 1225 Harbor Highlands Drive by Duluth Housing and Redevelopment Authority

**Staff:** Theresa Bajda introduced the applicant's proposal requesting to amend the approved Harbor View/Central Hillside Revitalization Traditional Neighborhood Development Regulating Plan to allow for changes to building types, lot configurations, and design standards for three parcels within the existing Harbor Highland Development (Tracts D, E, and F) to allow future construction of a 70-unit affordable senior housing apartment and up to 40 units of affordable housing amongst five distinct buildings (2, 9, and 10-plex buildings). Any amendment to the Regulating Plan that involves changes to land use, density, or height is required to follow the rezoning process and receive approval from the planning commission and city council. Staff received one public comment regarding a housing voucher, which they will ask the developer to follow up on. Staff recommends approval based on the reasons listed in the staff report.

**Applicant:** Jake Morgan of HRA, and Heidi Bringman of LHB addressed the commission and welcomed questions. Morgan said they are excited to move forward on the project, which will help fill the need for senior housing.

**Commissioners:** Danielle Rhodes noted page 67 in the staff report which shows duplexes. Now an apartment building is being proposed? Bajda stated logs of changes have been made from the original plan. Andrea Wedul asked what the change in density will be. Jake Morgan doesn't have an exact number but referred to Tract I – which will be kept as open green space. Wedul stated the change in density looks considerable. Deputy Director Fulton noted the greater level of mixed housing. The density is consistent with the goals of the community. They continue to work with MNDOT to provide pedestrian safety. They are not close to maximum

allowed density, and there are no utility concerns. Wedul stated this is a great infill, and is excited to see the project move forward.

**Public:** No speakers.

**MOTION/Second:** Wedul/Holliday recommended approval as per staff recommendation

**VOTE: (5-0)**

PL 22-119 Variance to Shoreland Setback at 3401 Grand Avenue by Brent Dahlstrom

**Staff:** Brett Crecelius introduced the applicant's proposal for a variance from the shoreland setback to build an approximate 90,000 square foot, 80-unit apartment complex comprising of a mix of 1- and 2- bedroom units. Impervious surface will be 0' from the ordinary high-water level instead of the required 50' in a General Development Shoreland. This was previously a Holiday gas station. No public, agency, or city comments were received. Staff recommends approval with the conditions listed in the staff report. Wedul asked about condition #2. Will the stormwater and landscaping plan be brought back to the planning commission? Per Deputy Director Fulton, the plans will be approved by staff prior to issuing the building permit. Eckenberg asked about governing principle #4 – mixed-use income, and should it read, mixed-use "housing". Crecelius affirmed "housing" is correct. Wedul asked if there will be any market rate housing. Per Crecelius it is a mixture of affordable and workforce housing which includes 80% AMI (Area Median Income).

**Applicant:** Chad Ronchetti of Kraus Anderson addressed the commission. This is a 20-25 million dollar project going into West Duluth. The complex will be easily accessible to Wheeler Field. The owner will retain property for ten years, and the owner takes good care of their buildings. This project is good for the neighborhood, and wetland impacts are minimal. The unnamed stream on the site is not a stream of high importance. Chair Eckenberg noted city staff identified the stream after the site was presented and the project was selected and awarded ARPA funds. Per Ronchetti, the stream relocation did create an additional hurdle, but the owner still would have moved forward with the site. There is a dedication to the community, and it is a good site even with the constraints. Chair Eckenberg asked if it will be section 8 eligible. Ronchetti noted tenants will need income verification, but it is not eligible for section 8. He noted they will have maximum parking, and they are on a bus line. Wedul asked about the underground stormwater storage. Ronchetti stated the stormwater treatment will enhance water quality downstream.

**Public:** No speakers.

**Commissioners:** Chair Eckenberg noted the proximity of the project to the railroad tracks. The city should be conscious of how it uses ARP money. He finds it hard to see this as mixed-income housing. Deputy Director Fulton noted this is mixed income housing, and is adjacent to dock 5, which is not utilized. This is a high-value location with a view of the bay, and close to Wade and Wheeler fields. It hits the mark for more housing in the community. The site has been vacant for two decades, and he is very pleased with the developer's proposal. Ronchetti shared he took his kids to the site and a train came by. There was no horn. The train was at low speed, and the noise was minimal. He understands the concerns, but the benefits of the sight outweigh the concerns. Commissioner Rhodes shared her insight on property value and trains. There is sought after property at 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue East where people want to be close to the trains. She asked commissioners to be cautious when thinking trains are a barrier to value. Wedul noted the shoreland variance and the treatment of streams. They provide connectivity, and better the environment. Commissioner Samuel Lobby agrees with Wedul. He noted he works in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. The new apartments there are expensive. This project

seems like a good opportunity for the neighborhood. Chair Eckenberg stated he appreciated the commissioners' conversation.

**MOTION/Second:** Holliday/Rhodes approved as per staff recommendation

**VOTE: (5-0)**

PL 22-121 Variance to Front Building Setback at 3401 Grand Avenue by Brent Dahlstrom

**Staff:** Brett Crecelius introduced the applicant's proposal for a variance from the front yard setbacks to build an approximate 90,000 square foot, 80-unit apartment complex comprising of a mix of 1- and 2- bedroom units. The proposed variance would require allowing a 25' setback compared to the 40' setback for buildings in an MU-N district above 35' in height. The decreased front yard setback allows all fire response vehicles to safely access all sides of the building. Staff recommends approval with the conditions listed in the staff report.

**Applicant:** Chad Ronchetti of Kraus Anderson addressed the commission. He echoed Chair Eckenberg's comment on the last agenda item in that he appreciated the commissions' thoughtful conversation. He welcomed questions. Chair Eckenberg asked about access, and changes to the intersection. Ronchetti noted the intersection is confusing, but improvement with better signaling will help. There will be no additional curb-cuts or egress/ingress added.

**Public:** No speakers

**MOTION/Second:** Wedul/Lobby approved as per staff recommendation

**VOTE: (5-0)**

## **New Business**

### **Election of Officer**

Deputy Director Fulton gave an overview. Due to previous President Sarah Wisdorf taking a job out of state, they need to appoint a new planning commission president. He opened the floor for nominations.

Vice-President Eckenberg (serving this month as Chair) nominated Margie Nelson. Her previous role as President is not consecutive, so she is eligible to serve as President again. There were no other nominations.

**Margie Nelson for President**

**VOTE: (5-0) - Approved**

### **Communications**

Land Use Supervisor (LUS) Report – Deputy Director Fulton gave an overview. Projects staff are working on include: Broadband, I-35 traffic study and Lot D.

Heritage Preservation Commission – Deputy Director Fulton gave an overview. The HPC approved the certificate of appropriateness for the demo of 118 East First Street. The HPC's decision to deny the certificate of appropriateness for the demo of the Astoria Hotel last month is being appealed to the city council.

Joint Airport Zoning Board – Chair Eckenberg stated there have been no recent meetings.

Duluth Midway Joint Powers Zoning Board – No update.

**Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

Respectfully,

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Adam Fulton – Deputy Director  
Planning & Economic Development