

FARMINGTON PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS
Monday, March 9, 2009

Chairperson Gronbach called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Farmington City Council Chambers, 23600 Liberty Street, Farmington, Michigan.

ROLL CALL

Present: Bowman, Buck, Christiansen, Crutcher, Gronbach, Ingalls, Scott, Sutton.

Absent: Kuiken.

A quorum of the Commission was present.

OTHER OFFICIALS PRESENT: City Clerk Halberstadt, City Manager Pastue.

OTHERS PRESENT: Sherrin Hood, LSL Planning, Inc.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION by Bowman, seconded by Buck, to approve the agenda as submitted. Motion carried, all ayes.

APPROVAL OF ITEMS ON CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION by Sutton, seconded by Bowman, to approve the items on the consent agenda as follows:

- Regular meeting minutes of February 9, 2009

Motion carried, all ayes.

SPECIAL LAND USE APPLICATION – AUTO XL DRIVING SCHOOL, 23339 ORCHARD LAKE ROAD

Proponent: Paul DeMars, Vice-President of Operations, Auto XL Driving School

Review of Special Land Use Request and Site Plan – LSL Planning

Sherrin Hood, LSL Senior Planner, advised the proposed site for Auto XL Driving School at 23339 Orchard Lake is suitable for the proposed use. It provides adequate parking and sufficient space for vehicle staging for drop offs.

Hood briefly reviewed the standards for special land use relative to the site. She indicated the proposed use meets each of those standards.

In a review of the site plan, Hood indicated no changes are planned for the property. She recommended approval of the site plan and special land use with the condition that any proposed wall signs must be submitted to the city for administrative approval.

Public Hearing

Chairperson Gronbach requested a motion to open the public hearing.

MOTION by Christiansen, seconded by Buck, to open the public hearing to receive public comment on the site plan and special land use request from Auto XL Driving School for property located at 23339 Orchard Lake Road. Motion carried, all ayes.

Hearing no public comment, Gronbach requested a motion to close the hearing.

MOTION by Christiansen, seconded by Buck, to close the public hearing. Motion carried, all ayes.

Consideration to Approve Special Land Use Application and Site Plan

Scott expressed concern regarding drivers from Auto XL driving around the back of the building where children from the Montessori School may be playing. Mr. DeMars responded there will be no need for drivers from the school to drive behind the building.

Buck asked about safety procedures the driving school will implement to ensure the safety of the Montessori School children. Mr. DeMars responded the drivers from the school will not exit through the rear drive. He discussed the safety features of the instruction vehicles that include an additional brake and mirrors installed for the instructors.

Responding to a question from Christiansen, Mr. DeMars stated the traffic circulation of Auto XL will be confined to the front of the building during daytime school hours.

Responding to a question from Chairperson Gronbach, Pastue stated a site plan was not provided to the Commission because there are no proposed changes to the site.

In regard to the existing site plan, Ingalls suggested the Commission may want to consider more landscaping, changes in lighting, and upkeep of the building.

MOTION by Christiansen, seconded by Scott, to approve the special land use application and site plan request from Auto XL Driving School, 23339 Orchard Lake Road, with the following conditions: traffic circulation during the Montessori school hours is restricted to the front parking area only and wall signs must be submitted to the City for approval; and it is noted the existing site plan was reviewed by the City Planner and was found to comply with current ordinance requirements. Motion carried, all ayes.

PRELIMINARY SITE PLAN REVIEW – GRAND DRY CLEANING, 32871 GRAND RIVER

Present: Vincent Conteldo, Infuse Architects; Selim and Sevdije Vllasaliu, proponents

Pastue provided a background on the proposed site plan and possible demolition of the existing building at 32871 Grand River. He stated the site plan was forwarded to the DDA Design Committee for review and comment due to its location in the Central Business District. He advised the site plan was also forwarded to the Historic Commission given that the structure proposed for demolition was built in 1919. He stated the Historic Commission completed an initial review, but requested more time to conduct further research. The Commission will provide its recommendation at the April meeting.

Sherrin Hood advised LSL Planning generally strives to maintain the character of the downtown in its review and comments of proposed site plans. She stated the overall concern of the proposed site plan is the loss of a potential historic home. She strongly encouraged the applicant to make every effort to use the existing building. She noted an adjacent site may be available. She confirmed the proposed use is allowed in the Central Business District.

Hood recommended the following revisions be made to the site plan prior to Planning Commission approval:

- Strongly recommended the applicant reconsider re-use of the existing residential building given its historic character.
- The parking lot layout must still be revised so it does not occupy more than 40% of the Grand River Avenue road frontage. In addition, details of the proposed method of stormwater retention must be provided.
- The site plan must be revised to include all of the required information as outlined in Section 35-163 of the Code.
- The driveway location must provide the proper alignment or offset with opposing driveways.
- The building design does not meet the Downtown Design Standards and those in the Farmington Zoning Ordinance for CBD.
- A landscape plan showing the location, size and species of all plants as outlined above must be submitted for review.
- All screenwalls must be constructed of brick, with details provided on the site plan.

- A detailed lighting plan, including a photometric grid and fixture details, must be provided. All lighting needs to be downward directed cutoff fixtures.

Vincent Conteldo, Infuse Architects, provided an overview of the proposed site plan. He indicated the plan is preliminary without the detail of a final plan. He emphasized the proposed use will not be a dry cleaning plant. He stated the reason for an overhead door is due to the size of the dry cleaning equipment.

Chairman Gronbach asked for clarification on whether the proposed use would fall within the guidelines of a proposed ordinance for dry cleaning facilities. Pastue confirmed the proposed use would meet the guidelines for a C-2 District.

Conteldo stated there is no rational way to use the existing house for the proposed use. In a review of the proposed site plan, he stated the intent is to use the existing driveway. He purposely moved the building back 5 ft. in order to provide a generous amount of landscaping as a buffer.

Conteldo stated he attempted to bring the scale of the front of the building down slightly, but offered to make it two stories if the Commission so desired. He advised the front of the building is for receiving customers and the remainder would be used for processing clothes. He noted the second story of the back area will be used for additional storage.

Christiansen confirmed with Conteldo that the second story would expand the width of the building and the rear portion would be used for storage and office. In light of the CBD requirements for a complete two-story building, he asked if the proponent would be willing to make the building a complete two-story.

Conteldo indicated the proponent would be open to a complete two-story building.

Christiansen complimented the proponent on the design and scale of the proposed building. He asked about the viability of using the existing building which would be in the best interest of the community. He further asked if the proponent would make a two-story building fully functional or provide a false façade in the front portion. He recognized the proponent's challenge of specifically addressing the requirements of the CBD. He questioned the adequacy of the parking lot in terms of maneuverability.

Hood stated if the proponent redesigned the site she envisioned a wider and shallower building with the parking lot wrapped around the rear.

Conteldo noted widening the building would push customer access even further away.

Responding to a question from Buck, Conteldo stated there would be 4-6 people working in the facility.

Buck asked regarding chemical odors emanating from the building. One of the owners, Ms. Vilasaliu, responded that with the installation of new technology no chemicals would be used. She agreed to allow visitors to park in the parking lot during off hours for City special events.

Responding to a question from Christiansen, Mr. Conteldo stated there would be a screened mechanical on the roof and a mechanical room inside housing a mechanical board to serve equipment.

Christiansen asked if the coin laundry components are considered an accessory part of the facility. Conteldo responded the coin operated washers and dryers would be used by the employees with limited customer use.

Gronbach stated the City needs to make sure the coin laundry components meet code. Hood asked the proponent to identify the gross floor area for the coin laundry components. She stated this space would not count towards the parking requirement for the remaining service facility.

In a discussion of the two-story building, Scott noted there are two means of egress and an elevator, providing an opportunity for multi-tenants in the future. He expressed concern regarding adequate parking. He noted some of the square footage numbers for the building did not seem to follow or make sense. He stated his main concern is parking for the upper level of the building.

Discussion followed regarding planned use of the second floor for storage and small office only.

Scott expressed concern regarding the limited accessibility to the dumpster enclosure by a garbage truck. He stated the site seems to drop off in the rear and expressed concern regarding the placement of a retaining wall. He asked about possible relocation of the historic home currently on the site.

Conteldo stated his client is working to have the home moved to another location. He would appreciate help and support from the City in this effort.

Ingalls asked if the elevator is planned in order to meet ADA requirements. Conteldo responded the elevator would be used for moving items and would meet the ADA requirements. He noted it will require a small penthouse that would be concealed.

Gronbach noted the Commission had referenced the design guidelines of the CBD a number of times relative to the site plans. He recommended the proponent obtain a copy of the CBD Master Plan containing the design guidelines. He stated a number of conflicts with the guidelines were noted.

Hood advised the applicant to mask the building along the frontage rather than the parking. She stated deepening the landscape beds should be the last option. She suggested widening the building and tucking the parking in along the side.

MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Review of Comments – LSL Planning

Hood highlighted the comments on the Master Plan made by Oakland County and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). She stated Oakland County commended the City's efforts on the Master Plan including the redevelopment options and the Downtown Plan. She recommended review of the Plan once a year.

Hood noted the comments from MDOT were primarily points of clarification and permit requirements. She stated the only concern noted was the high amount of traffic in the downtown as reflected in traffic counts.

Hood advised comments from MDOT could be incorporated into the Master Plan Draft without the need for another review period.

Hood recommended the Commission schedule the public hearing on the proposed Master Plan update. In the meantime, she will include any minor changes from the previous review of the plan. She confirmed the final adoption of the Master Plan would stay with the Planning Commission.

Hood noted the Historical Commission has expressed opposition to three parcels on Thomas Street being added to the Central Business District (CBD).

Planning Commission Discussion

Christiansen was pleased with the supportive comments on the Master Plan made by both Oakland County and MDOT.

Responding to a question from Buck, Hood stated the traffic counts cited by MDOT are based on peak traffic hours.

Gronbach expressed his opinion that it would be unnecessary to include traffic counts in the Master Plan.

Pastue advised there are three parcels at the southwest corner of Thomas and Warner Streets that have incompatible designations. They are currently in the Historic District, but are zoned as R1P which is residential that can be converted to parking. He stated Historic Commission members have suggested zoning the two parcels on Thomas Street as CBD and the larger home on Warner as residential.

Pastue noted an issue with another parcel just east of the Heeney Sundquist parking lot zoned as CBD. He stated this problem has been corrected with the future land use plan therefore no action is necessary.

Pastue suggested treating the two parcels on Thomas Street as a sub-planning area. For example, if there is further development along the north side of Grand River in that immediate block those parcels could be converted for additional parking.

Pastue recommended finding a resolution to these three parcels since they have remained in limbo for many years. He would like to see an agreement between the Historical Commission, the DDA, and the Planning Commission, that the two parcels on Thomas Street be considered CBD, but would not be used for parking unless there has been additional development on the north side of Grand River in that block. He recommended keeping the house on Warner Street as residential.

Responding to a question, Pastue stated it is the preference of the Historical Commission to keep all three parcels as residential. He stated they are currently zoned R1P which means they could be used for parking.

The Planning Commission concurred to direct the City Manager to meet with the Historical Commission and DDA in regards to rezoning the three parcels as recommended.

Consideration to Schedule Public Hearing

MOTION by Buck, seconded by Christiansen, to schedule a public hearing on April 13, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. to receive public comment on the proposed master plan update. Motion carried, all ayes.

REVIEW OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO CITY CODE DEALING WITH OFF-STREET PARKING OF VEHICLES IN A RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT AND CONSIDERATION TO SCHEDULE PUBLIC HEARING

Pastue reviewed a proposed amendment to City Code dealing with vehicle parking in residential districts. He discussed some of the proposed changes that include:

1. Requirement that parking of vehicles in a residential district must be on a hard surface. Previously, it allowed parking of vehicles on a gravel area.
2. It restates the requirement that all vehicles must be licensed and operable.
3. It prohibits parking in the area between the sidewalk and street.
4. Parking in the side yard is limited to the driveway.
5. Parking in the rear yard is limited to the driveway and hard surfaced area. It also cannot exceed 35% of the lot area. The lot area limitation is to prohibit a property owner from hard surfacing their entire back yard to store vehicles. The intent is to acknowledge this is a residential area and not allow the rear yard to become a vehicle storage lot to the detriment of the adjoining property owners.

Christiansen pointed out in item number 4 of the ordinance, the second sentence is stated twice. He noted on Oakland Street there are areas of stones and gravel between the sidewalk and curb where cars regularly park. He asked if this area is grandfathered or does the ordinance mandate no parking. He also cited unique situations where there is a very short driveway to the garage and the cars hang over the sidewalk. He asked if this situation would be grandfathered also.

Pastue responded he could justify grandfathering the second situation because of the existing buildings. He discussed the uniqueness of Oakland Street between Wilmarth and Gill where there is higher density and smaller lots.

Responding to a question, Pastue stated the City expressed concern to the Traffic and Safety Committee regarding parking on Oakland and suggested limiting parking to one side of the street between Cass Street and Whitaker. He advised the Committee did not recommend any changes.

Gronbach pointed out there have been times during the summer when he was unable to drive through on Oakland because of parking on both sides of the street. He stated a review of that street this time of year does not provide an accurate picture of the problem.

Pastue stated he would request the Public Safety Director along with the Committee take another look at Oakland Street this summer.

Christiansen stated the problem is on Oakland between Gill and Grand River where there is no curbing. He noted another problem is the placement of boulders by homeowners to prevent people from parking on their lawns.

Buck concurred with Christiansen that there are times Oakland Street is not passable.

Gronbach questioned item no. 2 of the ordinance which allows parking on lawns or other unpaved areas on residential lots where on-street parking is permitted in a public or private street. He felt this was too broad and needed further definition.

Sutton stated this provision would allow parking on her lawn because parking is allowed on her street.

Pastue stated the intent of the ordinance is to prevent drivers from parking on lawns if there is a curb, but where no curb exists parking on the shoulder is allowed.

Responding to a question, Pastue stated parking is allowed if there is no sign stating otherwise.

Sutton stated the intent is to distinguish between a situation where there is parking allowed on a residential street in front of the home except where there is a curb versus a residential street where parking is allowed and there is no curb.

Pastue stated he would have the City Attorney take another look at the ordinance to add language that more clearly defines its intent.

Responding to a question from Christiansen, Pastue stated the City is not allowing residents to petition for hard surface in front of their houses. Christiansen pointed out residents may want areas paved where there is gravel or grass if the City prohibited parking on those surfaces.

Bowman pointed out the words *loading* and *requirements* were misspelled in the introduction of the ordinance.

Discussion followed regarding alternative parking surfaces available.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Laura Myers, 33601 Shiawassee, spoke regarding the proposed demolition of the historic home on Grand River. She stated Farmington is unique because of the historic homes in downtown Farmington. She pointed out the home is in excellent condition. She expressed concern regarding the viability of the historic home next door if the demolition occurred.

Sharon Bernath, 33810 State Street, expressed concern regarding the odors that may emanate from a dry cleaning facility and the impact on the home next door. She pointed out the downtown already has a dry cleaner.

Gronbach asked the administration to provide a communication to the Commission regarding the historical significance of the house.

Pastue advised that if the site plan completely met code the Planning Commission would have to give its approval in spite of the historical significance of the home.

COMMISSION COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Buck confirmed with the City the base of a projecting sign is not considered part of the sign face area. He encouraged the Historic Commission to act quickly in their response to the proposed demolition or relocation of an historic home.

Buck stated the Historic Commission may be able to use this situation as leverage in gaining support for an ordinance that would protect the historic district.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ingalls, seconded by Scott, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried, all ayes.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Secretary