

Community Development Department

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MINUTES PLAN COMMISSION May 1, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. City Council Chambers

Members Present: Scott Morrissette, Lisa Moody, Susan Reese, Bill Stuessel, Dan Toland, Craig Hinzman, Michael Woolsey
Members Absent: None
Staff Present: Brandy Howe, Sam Wessel, Amy Peterson, Reid Wronski
Others Present: Brian Sweeney, Cohen-Esrey Development Group

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting convened at 6:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moody asked for clarification on the 8:26 adjournment time. Peterson confirmed that it was a staff error that would be corrected; 8:26 reflects the time the Commission adjourned the workshop.

M/Morrissette, S/Reese – motion carried 6-0

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

CURRENT PLANNING

None.

UPDATES AND INFORMATION

Housing Assessment Study Presentation

Peterson provided a presentation on the highlights from the 183-page housing study. In the fall of 2017 the City and the River Falls Housing Authority hired Maxfield Research & Consulting to prepare the housing study. The scope included population and employment projections, current housing stock, supply and demand analysis. The market area includes both the City of River Falls (described as primary market area – PMA) as well as the River Falls School District. Highlights from the study: 1) strong employment and housing growth is projected, 2) confirmation that 4,300 people work outside of the City and 3,500 come in to the community daily for work, 3) 71% of jobs in the City are workers from outside of the City, 4) 11% of workers coming in to the City come from a distance 50+ miles, 5) 51% of the existing housing market is rental and 45% are detached single-family homes. The study also discussed housing affordability; according to HUD, households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing are in situations where the housing is not affordable. In River Falls, 51% of rental households and 18% of owner-occupied households are cost-burdened. The study found that the demand for rental and for-sale housing is 1,518 housing units by 2030 and an additional 571 senior housing units are needed by 2022. The housing study breaks down the data further into the type and cost of housing units needed over the projected time. All of these factors confirm

anecdotal evidence that there is strong housing demand in the City and suggests that if the City were able to expand its housing stock, there is demand in the market for all market segments.

Morrisette commented that while the City acknowledges its need for low- to moderate income housing, there are many households that are in entry-level housing that desire to move up to the next level but there is a shortage for those housing units as well. One of the ways to relieve some of the demand for low- to moderate income housing is to increase the availability of the “step-up” housing. Peterson added that a portion of the entry-level housing stock has been converted to rental units in the community which further tightens that segment of the market.

Woolsey asked if the scope of work included an analysis of impact fees, which can play into affordability of housing as well. Peterson confirmed that it was not included in the scope of the housing study, but is something that could be included in the annual work plan. Mayor Toland suggested the Commission could review impact fees at a future workshop.

Presentation by Brian Sweeney, Cohen-Esrey Development Group on 700 S. Main Street

Peterson provided a brief background on the project. The Cohen-Esrey Development Group brought this item to the City Council in November 2017. At that time, they were planning on applying to WHEDA for a low-income tax credit project and WHEDA required projects to demonstrate community support in order to gain points. The Council had some concerns about the project and was not able to provide that support. Cohen-Esrey submitted an application anyway and they were put on hold for that round of applications. In 2018, the state passed legislation to provide additional funding through WHEDA for these types of projects. Cohen-Esrey is looking at that funding for 2018 and asked to come to Plan Commission to provide a project overview. Peterson noted that at times the WHEDA process is such that WHEDA requires communities to sign off on a project without the benefit of having fully laid out plans; it can feel challenging to decision makers to not have all of the details.

Mr. Sweeney walked the Commission through the development concept. He indicated that his organization works to develop affordable workforce housing, which is a need in the community based on the Maxfield study. He noted that last year the proposal called for a modern, 70-unit apartment building on the 700 block of South Main Street. They received feedback from the community that River Falls would prefer a more traditional-looking building; the 2018 design is a brick building with individual entrances from Main Street to provide more connection to the sidewalk and the street. The building is proposed to be for families with 1, 2, and 3-bedroom units with a play area in the back and many of the existing trees being preserved on the site.

Mayor Toland commented that it was not a matter of the Council being opposed to the project last year, but rather it was a bit rushed in getting approvals. He noted that he personally likes the project and prefers the traditional architecture to the more modern design.

Stuessel asked why this site was selected for workforce housing. Mr. Sweeney noted that there is a high walk score in the area and a family-friendly neighborhood. Morrisette added that this is one of the few larger development sites in the community that would accommodate this project. Morrisette asked how Cohen-Esrey would be able to prevent the project from becoming more student housing, which would further exacerbate the existing parking issue in the area around the university. Mr. Sweeney answered that it is a requirement to receive the WHEDA funding that students are generally prohibited. Grad students in a family situation might be an exception to that rule.

Reese asked about the possibility of connecting streets and whether a connection from Broadway to Church Street would be possible. Peterson noted that if this project moves forward, that opportunity would go away. Morrisette noted that every project has pluses and drawbacks; this is one of the drawbacks. He

added that this is an opportunity to make Sycamore a real street with this project; the benefits of this project outweigh the drawbacks. Moody asked about landscaping along the sidewalk. Mr. Sweeney confirmed that trees are planned between the sidewalk and the building. Moody asked where storm water facilities are planned. Peterson confirmed that it is a City requirement that storm water be taken care of on the site; those details will be forthcoming during site planning. Woolsey asked how the property would be managed. Mr. Sweeney responded that their group would be responsible for management.

CALENDAR

The next Plan Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 5, 2018.

AJOURNMENT

Morrisette made a motion to adjourn at 7:10 p.m. and move into the Plan Commission workshop.
M/ Morrisette, S/Woolsey– motion carried 7-0

Respectfully submitted,



Brandy Howe, AICP, Senior Planner