

Community Development Department

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MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
May 4, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.
Virtual and City Council Chambers

Members Present: Dan Toland, Lisa Moody, Patricia LaRue, Diane Odeen, Craig Hofland, Chris Holtkamp
Members Absent: Rebecca Prendergast (excused)
Staff Present: Amy Peterson, Crystal Raleigh, Brandy Howe, Sam Wessel
Others Present: Jim and Teri Renslow, property owners, Riverside Cottages
Gordon Awsumb, developer, Riverside Cottages
Jim Sullivan, 135 Cascade Court

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting convened at 6:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

M/Holtkamp, S/Moody to approve minutes. Motion carried 5-0.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jim Sullivan, 135 Cascade Court, was in attendance to learn about Riverside Cottages and reiterate concerns as a neighbor. He is not against development but is concerned about the increased traffic on Cascade Court and State Street since the road is more like a driveway, having no gutters, being 24' wide, and a driveway apron entrance. Currently, snowplows can't use the road and smaller trucks plow all the snow to the end of the court, and cars have to pull over to pass each other in winter. Jim would prefer single family homes on the two buildable lots, but he does like the Main Street access if the density must be higher. He is concerned people will cut through the new development to Main Street when cars are lined up on Park Street to turn on Main Street coming out of Glen Park, increasing traffic on the smaller streets. He is also concerned that student housing will bring noise and parties like they've had in the neighborhood in the past. He would also like to know if there is enough room for existing homeowners to back out of driveways and room for snow storage if Cascade Court is partially vacated. Finally, the purpose of this meeting is to discuss Planned Unit Development (PUD) flexibilities for things like lot area and setbacks, and that a 50% reduction in setbacks seems excessive.

PUBLIC HEARING

Riverside Cottages General Development Plan at 641 South Main Street.

Howe gave a presentation about the project, highlighting that it features 8 platted small-lot homes with 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms. The project proposes vacating part of Cascade Court in exchange for frontage on Main Street that will accommodate its future design. She mentioned the other multifamily options presented for the site that were not received favorably by neighbors and Plan Commission. The small lot design resembles the City's earliest plats and smaller homes are in short supply in River Falls. The design differs from surrounding homes in that it has front-loading garages rather than side or rear

garages. Flexibilities include reduced setbacks, lot area, lot width, and the use of a private street rather than a public street. Community benefits of the project include parkland dedication along the South Fork for a future trail shown in the Kinni Corridor Plan (2019). Staff anticipates an increase in traffic on Cascade Court and State Street, but the roads are already constructed to accommodate the traffic. Staff received a call from a neighbor who asked questions but did not provide comments. Some revisions to the GDP and preliminary plat are in the works and may be ready for Plan Commission to vote at the June meeting.

Gordon Awsumb mentioned that they've worked hard for a year and a half to make the project work, balancing needs of the bank, neighbors, and future tenants. This small site is hard to make the economics work so there is little chance that fewer units could move forward, but the product is high-quality and net-zero design. Since sending in the elevations, they've decided to go with high-quality horizontal siding, each unit a different color, with high quality finishes on the inside. They are not restricted to students, but higher rents are targeted towards a different demographic, and they will screen applicants who are able to afford them and won't abuse the site. Gates or speed bumps are possible to keep traffic from cutting through.

Jim Sullivan asked about the percentage of site coverage, Awsumb said it is around 40% or lower and the buildings are over 100 feet away from the river. Awsumb is willing to provide exact figures and contact information for anyone interested.

Holtkamp wasn't as concerned with traffic cutting through because the exit from the development is right turn only onto Main Street. Odeen asked if any photo examples of cottage style homes could be found. Awsumb explained cottage homes have many variations and usually cottages surround a central common area, but because of snow in Wisconsin, it's better to have garages in the middle and the front porches and riverfront act as the common amenity. He also mentioned distance between houses is now commonly 10 feet in non-cottage homes because of rising land and construction costs. Holtkamp also asked about screening. Awsumb said there's room along Main Street for screening but it is tighter on the west side of the property where snow storage is needed.

LaRue thanked Awsumb for providing a net-zero project while remaining flexible and designing them with varied colors to show people that an energy efficient home can be cool to live in. Hofland asked about rent and Awsumb is estimating \$1,950/month for the south 4 homes at 5% vacancy, and a little more for the other 4 homes because they have walk-out finished basement. The rent is high for River Falls since \$1,750 is the upper end of the market, but the low energy bills make up for some of it. Hofland noted that students aren't likely to pay that kind of rent and he supports the net-zero approach. Hofland said snow removal will have to be worked out and traffic will go up for those who need to head north on Main Street, but his cul-de-sac has more homes on it than this development and traffic is still quiet.

Raleigh said that Public Works is working with Awsumb to arrange snow removal procedures. At this time, curb and gutter is not planned for State Street or Cascade Court.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Resolution to approve a certified survey map creating Lot 1 – Dawes Place

Howe presented the certified survey map (CSM) which meets all City and State requirements. The only reason that it needs Plan Commission and Council approval is because the CSM crosses a subdivision boundary since it is combining lots in Highview Meadows 1st and 2nd additions.

M/Moody, S/Odeen to recommend approval of the CSM for Dawes Place Phase 1. Motion carried 5-0.

Ordinance to repeal and replace Section 17.104.040 of the Municipal Code related to special use permits

LaRue expressed concern about taking decision power away from elected officials by leaving Council out of the special use permit process. Mayor Toland clarified that it is more a decision of whether Plan Commission or City Council is the decision maker to meet state requirements, and that Plan Commission is more used to evaluating planning and zoning decisions. Peterson verified that because of the quasi-judicial decision requirement by state law, it can't go to both. Odeen stated the advantage of Plan Commission review allows appeals to go to the Board of Appeals rather than Circuit Court, keeping decisions local. LaRue is concerned that constituents don't have contact information for commission members to comment on proposed special use permit. Peterson mentioned that as a quasi-judicial process, discussion outside the meeting cannot occur, but everyone has a chance to present information at the public hearing. LaRue said that it is harder to know all the reasons for or against a special use permit without elected officials making the decision. Odeen mentioned that Plan Commission has more knowledge about special use permit decisions so she is comfortable designating Plan Commission rather than Council, and that Plan Commission members are still public servants who can be lobbied. Mayor Toland mentioned that either way, both Plan Commission and City Council members are held to the same communication rules in a quasi-judicial decision. Peterson verified that more details will be presented to Plan Commission about meeting logistics and requirements. Hofland mentioned that Plan Commission will hear public comments just like Council would. Holtkamp mentioned that special use permit public hearings may decrease if zoning amendments are made to reduce the number of them in the zoning ordinance following the Comprehensive Plan project.

M/Hofland, S/Holtkamp to recommend the proposed ordinance and map amendments. Motion carried 4-1.

REPORTS/DIALOGUE

Director's Report

Peterson mentioned the open positions for Project Engineer, Planning/Engineering Technician, and Planner.

ADJOURNMENT

LaRue made a motion to adjourn at 7:28 p.m.

M/LaRue, S/Moody; motion carried 5-0

Respectfully submitted,



Sam Wessel, AICP, Planner