

On Thursday, August 20, 2020, at 7:07 p.m., a regular meeting of the Plan Commission was called to order in-person and via Zoom. Roll Call. Present: Chair Rene Morris (zoom), Doug Freed, Aurelio Gallardo, Steve Munson, Jamie Schwingle (zoom) and Joe Strabala-Bright. Absent: Skip McCloud.

Also present were: Planners Dustin Wolff, Brian Carranza and Mark Sauer of Mead and Hunt, Building and Zoning Superintendent Amanda Schmidt, Attorney Tim Zollinger, City Manager Scott Shumard, Alderman Retha Elston, Alderman John Stauter, City Clerk Teri Sathoff, and Assistant City Clerk Monique Castillo.

Freed made a motion to approve the minutes from July 16, 2020 as presented. The motion was seconded by Munson. Voting – Ayes: Freed, Gallardo, Munson, Schwingle, Strabala-Bright and Morris. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Schmidt noted Council approved the recommendation to annex the Steelton Subdivision – Group 8 and 407 East Avenue as well as the vacation of the alley at 102 8th Avenue.

The Public Hearing for the request to rezone with a special use to allow for a cell tower at 2601 E Lincolnway was tabled to the next regular meeting.

Chair Morris opened a Public Hearing at 7:09 p.m. to hear the recommendation to Annex/Zone property contiguous to the city; Steelton Subdivision – Group 9.

Zollinger noted this is the continuation through this subdivision. As with the previous annexations/rezones, all properties have sewer access and pre-annexation agreements stating they would hook on when they became contiguous.

Wolff noted, as with the previous annexations, these properties are single family and will be rezoned to SR-8 to keep the properties legal and conforming as they all have small/side setbacks.

With no further discussion by staff, commissioners or guests, Chair Morris noted publications were made, fees were not applicable, notification requirements were met, signage notifying the public of the hearing was not applicable. There were a few phone calls referencing general information on the garbage program and how taxes would be affected. No written comments were received.

The Public Hearing was closed at 7:11 p.m.

Munson made a motion to approve the Annexation and Rezoning of the properties contiguous to the City, in the Steelton Subdivision – Group 9. The motion was seconded by Strabala-Bright. Voting – Ayes: Gallardo, Munson, Schwingle, Strabala-Bright, Morris, and Freed. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Wolff introduced Mark Sauer to the group noting he worked with us in the past with the roundabouts. Wolff noted Sauer will be reviewing all things pertaining to the Downtown/Riverfront revitalization plan then Carranza will follow with a review of the East Lincolnway Employment District.

Sauer suggested the commission take the time to review the plans and speak up if there is something they would like to see added or altered. Sauer noted this is the time to be passionate and bring to fruition what we want to see and do in the Downtown/Riverfront district.

Sauer briefly described the characteristics of the Downtown business district and dissected it into 3 areas; East Downtown, Riverfront and West Downtown. He noted while all three areas have different characteristics, all have surface parking in common. He also noted the Riverfront is the main asset but unfortunately there are only 2 access points.

Wolff noted many of the characteristics Sauer pointed out have a negative appeal but he reminded the commission at one point in time, this was a well-functioning area for the mill and its employees. Now we have an opportunity to break down the barriers left behind due to the fall of this era.

Sauer provided a plan to eliminate the divides in the Downtown Business District. Tearing down the concrete building in that area would be a great start and essentially open the view of the river. By doing this, we create a destination, then we can focus on gaining access to the area and building on commercial demand. He made note this plan is similar to that in 2011 where the goals were to be place-oriented, connected and denser.

Sauer noted this area is place-oriented but we need to make it more accessible and more appealing for visitors and developers alike. We need to consider reusing buildings such as Lawrence Brothers and Stanley National, considering these as venues for rooftop weddings and other private events or even as hotels.

Sauer noted the area must be connected. He suggested a pedestrian connection at the overpass on First Avenue and a connection at Avenue E to Pike Street. Currently, Avenue B is the only connection.

Shumard stated a pedestrian connection at the overpass on First Avenue is ideal but realistically the Railroad is very difficult to deal with.

Wolff reminded the commission the plans to decouple one-way pairs, revitalize the downtown business district and riverfront are supported by community involvement. He highlighted the successes of other communities with a similar identity to Sterling and stated we need to continue to focus on our branding initiatives with products such as road banners and signs or liven up spaces with paintings.

Sauer noted the area should be denser. Adding more residential space would be an ideal way to meet this need. Wolff noted we do not want to see high-rises as there is such

potential to add brownstones or townhomes. Wolff is hopeful prospective developers, perhaps even business owners, could utilize an underdeveloped land, such as the parking lot adjacent to Midas. He also noted there is a great demand for added residential space per community discussion.

Sauer touched base on surface parking in the downtown area stating 81% of the parking is not more than a 5 minute walking distance from 1st Ave and E 3rd St (known as the 100% corner or the center of the downtown). However, the safety of pedestrians is an issue due to high traffic, mainly caused by the one-way streets.

Sauer reviewed the discussion points, emphasizing on the vision, land use mix and focus approach. He stated the downtown has all types of amenities but it is not easily accessible. If we add commercial uses, we can focus on 2 catalytic projects; making the Riverfront accessible and decoupling one-way pairs.

There was a brief discussion regarding accessibility to the Riverfront and the one-way pairings. Munson stated there is an obvious need to increase the access points in order to improve the area. Strabala-Bright noted it would be a great idea to shift our focus to the railroad for a possible working relationship.

Freed inquired to the status of these projects and if they are simply suggestions or projects that we are actually working on. Wolff noted this has been a daunting task but work has been done and projects have been completed, unfortunately progress is moving slowly. Shumard noted we are in the works of getting this site shovel ready. Wallace Street needs to be reconstructed, Stanley National is working on removing the contaminated soil and will eventually be leveling this site out. Once all this is done, the area will be more useable.

Strabala-Bright likes the idea of new residential multi-unit constructions, stating it may force the current property owners to improve their tired rentals.

Shumard also noted a survey was sent to several residents regarding the one-ways, of the responses returned, 18 were negative and 11 were positive. Strabala-Bright suggested we decouple just one and hopefully by virtue of experimentation the residents will come around to be ok with the idea.

Munson raved about the Marketplace and what a wonderful asset it is. He was in amazement that 20 years ago this was envisioned and we are still making progress towards our goal. He stated we are far from finished but he is very encouraged to continue working with this group to see final outcome.

Carranza reviewed the East Lincolnway Employment District, showing the existing land use pattern and how each piece builds on the character of the area. He explained the current land use is 66% Regional Business and 34% mixed land use but there are no bicycle or pedestrian paths.

The proposed land use will be a combination of infill developments, which will help to increase density, allow for shared parking and additional access for inter/intra connections, and adaptive reuse of existing structures such as turning the old K-Mart Plaza into a regional car sales lot. The possibilities are endless and many of the buildings still have a lot of life.

Carranza also noted adding bicycle and pedestrian connections would promote alternate transportation methods and reduce the need for parking.

Strabala-Bright noted the K-Mart area is a very sad looking area with great potential. He is quite impressed with the proposed plan.

The next Plan Commission meeting is September 17, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. We will have a Public Hearing; Steelton Group 10, Public Hearing to rezone with a Special Use for a Cell Tower and continue discussion with the Comprehensive Plan. Hopefully we will be able to meet in person.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Monique Castillo
Assistant City Clerk