

On Thursday, January 17, 2019, at 7:00 p.m., a regular meeting of the Plan Commission was called to order. Roll Call. Present: Chair Rene Morris, Doug Freed, Aurelio Gallardo, Eric Larson, Dick Linville and Jamie Schwingle. Absent: Steve Munson.

Also present were: Planner Dustin Wolff, Building and Zoning Superintendent Amanda Schmidt, City Attorney Tim Zollinger, Assistant City Clerk Monique Castillo, Alderman Retha Elston and City Manager Scott Shumard.

Larson made a motion to approve the minutes of September 17, 2018 as presented. The motion was seconded by Gallardo. Voting – Ayes: Morris, Freed, Gallardo, Larson, Linville and Schwingle. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris asked staff for reports of Council Action. Schmidt reported the council approved the annexation and zoning of Casey's.

Chair Morris asked staff if there were any updates relating to the petition from Kunes requesting a Special Use to expand a parking lot for employees. Schmidt reported there has been no new updates regarding this matter. Zollinger suggested the commission remove this item from the table.

Linville made a motion to remove from the table the petition from Kunes Country Auto at 2811 Locust for an Expansion of a Special Use for an employee parking lot. The motion was seconded by Schwingle. Voting: Ayes – Freed, Gallardo, Larson, Linville, Schwingle and Morris. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris stated the Sterling Parks District would like to annex and zone, to Light Manufacturing (LM), the Northwest corner of Lynn Boulevard and West LeFevre.

Schmidt noted this is mostly land we would like to bring in and mark as permanent zoning LM. That is it. There are no plans to make any changes to the area. Schmidt further mentioned the findings comply with the recommendation and both vacant properties to the left are currently zoned I-1 by the County.

Planner Wolff recommends the approval of the zoning of this area based on his findings as they are consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Linville made a motion to Annex and zone to LM, Light Manufacturing the Northwest corner of Lynn Boulevard and West LeFevre adopting the findings of the Planner. The motion was seconded by Freed. Voting: Ayes – Morris, Freed, Gallardo, Larson, Linville and Schwingle. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris stated the Sterling Industrial Development Corporation would like to annex and zone, to Light Manufacturing (LM), the Northeast corner of Lynn Boulevard and West LeFevre.

Schmidt noted this is the same scenario as the previously mentioned annexation with Sterling Park District and is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The main concept is to bring in to city and mark as permanent zoning LM. There are no plans to make any changes to the area.

Planner Wolff recommends the approval of the zoning of this area based on his findings as they are consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Schwingle made a motion to annex and zone to LM, Light Manufacturing the Northeast corner of Lynn Boulevard and West LeFevre adopting the findings of the Planner. The motion was seconded by Gallardo. Voting: Ayes – Freed, Gallardo, Larson, Linville, Schwingle and Morris. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris introduced Jolene Rodriguez. Mrs. Rodriguez and her husband, Juan Roman, recently purchased the building at 12717 Lawrence Road, formerly a religious facility, and wish to convert the building into a banquet hall for family oriented activities such as birthday parties and baby showers. Rodriguez noted the facility would not allow alcoholic beverages, late nights and only be operated during the weekend.

John Kelly, resident within 250 feet of the property, spoke up about the inconveniences this establishment would bring to his neighborhood. Kelly also had a petition objecting the zoning change from residential to business. Of the 9 adjoining properties, within 250 ft, Kelly was able to get 6 signatures in objection of a zoning change.

Dave Twining, Hopkins Township Board, submitted a letter of objection from the Hopkins Township Board, stating the plan is not in compliance with the City's Comprehensive Plan. There are no sidewalks, no street lights and it is out of place for any kind of business in that area.

Dan Garvey, lives directly next door to the establishment. While he has nothing against the proposed plan nor the owners, he expressed his major concern is what type of business would be allowed in the future should the proposed business fail.

With no further discussion, Larson made a motion to recommend City Council send a letter of objection to Whiteside County with regard to the re-zone of the property located at 12717 Lawrence Road from R-1 to B-1 for a banquet facility. The motion was seconded by Schwingle. Voting: Ayes – Gallardo, Larson, Linville, Schwingle, Morris and Freed. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris stated SolAmerica Energy is proposing to put a Solar Farm on Stouffer Road – West of Gregden Shores. Mike Butler from TRC Sterling gave a short presentation on behalf of SolAmerica to explain the proposed Solar Farm.

Butler gave a brief history of his company, explained how the company basically takes care of everything from hauling in equipment, setting everything up, landscaping and tear down/removal of all equipment once the program is complete.

Wolff explained while the City is very supportive of solar farms, we cannot support the areas these companies tend to choose as they are preserved as potential growth areas. Wolff further explained it would be in everybody's interest if these companies would take the extra time to speak with City to find a space that works for both parties, such as one of the many Brownfield areas.

Tom Jensen, 1714 Gregden Shores, explained his neighborhood currently has 50 homes, many that overlook this area. The current view is breathtaking. Adding a solar farm in the area would definitely alter the view. Additionally they are hoping to build another 3 to 5 homes.

Planner Wolff explained to the Commissioners the task is to determine if this is the best site for a solar farm. Wolff reminded the Commissioners of the City of Sterling Comprehensive Plan that calls out mixed residential and rural holding area for the proposed location. These designations are used to preserve the agricultural uses but insures that the use does not become incompatible for expansion of the City of Sterling. Unfortunately, there is no indication that the project is designed to connect to local residences, or serve as a solar array for a mixture of local commercial or residential locations within the City of Sterling. Wolff noted the main issue is these companies do not even contact us to see if the site location is practical and if not discuss alternative sites.

After due consideration, Freed made a motion to recommend that City Council authorize sending a letter of objection to Whiteside County in regards to the proposed solar farm. The motion was seconded by Gallardo. Voting: Ayes – Larson, Morris, Schwingle, Morris, Freed and Gallardo. Abstain – Linville. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Schmidt noted the Comprehensive Plan was last adopted in 2005. Next month we will look at updating the current plan.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Monique Castillo, Assistant City Clerk