



**City of Cedar Rapids
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES
City Hall Training Room
Monday, June 30, 2014
4:00 p.m.**

The meeting was brought to order at 4:08 p.m.

Present: Council members Vernon (Chair) and Weinacht. Staff members present: Jeff Pomeranz, City Manager; Jennifer Pratt, Interim Community Development Director; Paula Mitchell, Grant Programs Manager; Seth Gunnerson, Community Development Planner; Joe Mailander, Development Services Program Manager; Jeff Hintz, Community Development Planner; and Alicia Abernathey, Community Development Administrative Assistant.

Council member Vernon stated the Development Committee meets monthly and the purpose of the committee is to review development and economic issues that involve the community. Items are brought forward to the agenda from City staff, Council members and sometimes citizens.

Council member Vernon called for a motion to approve the minutes from May 21, 2014. Council member Weinacht made a motion to approve the minutes from May 21, 2014. Council member Vernon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

Recommendation Items:

1. Low Income Housing Tax Credit Policy

Paula Mitchell, Grant Programs Manager, stated Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is a financing tool for incenting the construction of workforce rental housing and is administered by the Iowa Finance Authority (IFA). In order for projects to compete successfully in IFA's scoring system projects need to have some type of City participation. As a result, an increasing number of requests have been received for City support and staff is expecting this will continue. In May 2013, City Council adopted a pro-active policy for reviewing LIHTC requests as in years past staff has reacted to proposals as they were received. Last year was a learning year under the new policy and staff is now recommending changes to support better quality projects and provide a level of support that makes the projects competitive.

Ms. Mitchell identified issues that arose last year including a lack of standard application and financial worksheet package, lack of sufficient lead time for proposal vetting and a lack of objective design standards. Ms. Mitchell stated proposed policy changes include deadlines for submission, adoption of design standards consistent with other City programs and adoption of underwriting standards that match IFA's criteria.

Council member Weinacht made a motion to move the request for LIHTC policy changes forward to the full City Council. Council member Vernon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

2. 400 – 500 1st Street SW

Seth Gunnerson, Community Development Planner, stated 10 properties along 1st Street SW in the 400 block were acquired through the Voluntary Property Acquisition Program. The properties are located in the Kingston Village Viable Business Corridor and several letters of interest were received for the properties. The properties have been identified in the Kingston Village Plan and the Downtown Vision Plan as potential sites for residential development or mixed use. Mr. Gunnerson identified the proposed criteria for requests for proposals.

Council member Vernon asked if parking issues have been resolved that involved a property that was sold in the area. Jennifer Pratt, Interim Community Development Director, stated the property was sold but the Development Agreement contained a clause that there was uncertainty of how the other half of the block would be developed. There is a provision to look into if there is a way to collaborate on the potential redevelopment with the understanding there are parking needs that need to be satisfied. There is potential for overall redevelopment of the entire block.

Jeff Pomeranz, City Manager, asked if there is a way to hold developers accountable for completing steps of the project in a timely manner. Ms. Pratt stated in the Resolution staff is now including a timeline for which the project has to be under a Development Agreement. The Development Agreement has milestones for when things need to be completed such as plans completion, deed restrictions are taken care of, construction has started, etc.

Council member Weinacht made a motion to move the request for City-owned property along 1st Street SW forward to the full City Council. Council member Vernon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

3. Knutson Request for Proposals

Ms. Pratt stated the Knutson Building is one of the oldest remaining west side commercial structures and it was previewed with Development Committee in February 2013. The Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the request in April 2014. Staff is requesting a recommendation from the Development Committee to open the building up for a competitive proposal process. The building was acquired by the City with non-federal funds so there are no deed restrictions. The property borders the Cedar River, amphitheater, Police Station, Mott Building and Festival Grounds and is located within the Kingston Village Overlay District. Ms. Pratt identified the proposed criteria for requests for proposals with emphasis on integration with the City's flood management system or relocation of the structure outside of the construction area, consistency with the Kingston Village overlay district requirements and preservation of the structure's historic integrity. Ms. Pratt stated Linn County is embarking on a similar process for the Mott Building and have agreed to do it using a similar timeline. Staff has heard from developers that there may be interest in both the Knutson Building and the Mott Building.

Mr. Pomeranz asked how the developers will work with the consultants that are working on the Flood Management Plan. Ms. Pratt stated once the proposals are received staff will work with the consultant to ensure anything proposed coordinates with the Flood Management Plan.

Council member Weinacht made a motion to move the request for the City-owned Knutson Building property forward to the full City Council. Council member Vernon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

4. Window Vinyl Signs

Mr. Gunnerson stated what is referred to as window vinyl signs refers to the graphics applied to windows of buildings. In some cases these signs are taking up large amounts of the window. There is a misconception from a lot of businesses that posters are not considered a sign but they are considered signage per the code. Staff has not been enforcing it as it is very difficult to enforce in regards to permitting and business owners change their window signage on a regular basis. Options for addressing the issue include enforcing all window signage as wall signage, exempting window signage from permitting or developing standards for large format window graphics. Staff recommends developing standards for large format window graphics that would exempt patterns and non-advertising portions from calculation and allowing percentage of window area to be covered without a permit.

Council member Vernon asked if staff feels they will be able to enforce the standards. Ms. Pratt stated one of the recommendations is to count the window signs toward the overall signage total and will limit the number of signs. The windows should be pedestrian friendly and allow people to see in. Other communities have codes that require a certain percentage of the window always be open from signage. Mr. Gunnerson stated within the City's overlay districts buildings are required to have transparent windows. There are concerns that businesses will use every window surface as signage area. It is difficult for staff to enforce the current code and not allow someone to use the windows for signage when someone else has posters in the window. Some communities take what is allowed for the wall sign and allow that same amount to be used on the first floor window of the business.

Council member Weinacht asked how staff will deal with current signs already in windows of businesses. Mr. Gunnerson stated staff hasn't determined a solution as some of the signs are professionally installed and cannot be easily removed. Staff has considered asking the owners to receive variances to keep the existing signs based on how the code is changed.

Ms. Pratt stated staff will look into different options including counting the signs toward the overall signage, looking into percentages of transparency and determining a solution to address the existing window signage. Council member Vernon stated she would like staff to look into signs placed in the City right of way and how long banner signs can be placed on businesses.

5. Sandwich Boards

Mr. Gunnerson stated a permit process is currently required for sandwich boards and most signs around town are unpermitted. The code also only allows sandwich boards in the downtown SSMID and several businesses around town have them. Staff is recommending eliminating the permit requirement and establishing placement standards to maintain accessible sidewalks. Staff recommends allowing sandwich boards in all core neighborhoods near building entrances.

Council member Weinacht made a motion to move the sandwich board recommendation forward to the full City Council. Council member Vernon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

6. Annexation of Camelback Hills

Joe Mailander, Development Services Program Manager, stated discussion of the Camelback Hills annexation request began in October 2013. The request is to annex property south of Highway 30 on Ivanhoe Road. There are other subdivisions in the area that have been annexed into Cedar Rapids. The proposed annexation parcel is approximately ½ mile from the current City limits. As part of the annexation the City would have to acquire ½ mile of Ivanhoe Road to reach the proposed annexation parcel. The site is approximately 67 acres and will have approximately 125 single family homes with a price of approximately \$350,000. There is currently no sewer in the area so there would have to be a private or public lift station. There is City water along Highway 30 but there will be a ½ mile extension to get to the proposed annexation parcel. Mr. Mailander stated issues and concerns for the annexation request include the location being ½ mile from the Urban Service Area, traffic safety as the only access is to Highway 30, Fire and Police emergency response times, etc. Mr. Mailander stated the City currently has some initiatives that will impact the development including addressing lift stations, policy update of the Comprehensive Plan, researching construction of a regional lift station to serve the project area and a Highway 30 East Area Plan.

Council member Vernon and Council member Weinacht expressed concerns with growth in the area impacting the College Community School District and suggested looking into setting different school district boundaries.

Council member Weinacht made a motion to deny the request at this time. Council member Vernon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

Informational Items

1. Alley and Right of Way Vacation

Jeff Hintz, Community Development Planner, stated historically alleys have been used for waste and debris storage, service accesses, pedestrian paths, emergency accesses to buildings, garage access and a place to put utilities. Alleys are currently used for the same purposes with the addition of pedestrian and bike routes and outdoor seating. When staff looks into vacating an alley the main concerns for property owners include retaining access for owners and services to the parcels. When vacating an alley there has to be a consensus of property owners. Utilities in alleyways can be relocated to retain utility access. When vacating an alley an alternative location for debris and waste would need to be determined.

2. Zoning Code Update

Mr. Hintz stated there are four types of zoning including Euclidian, Conditional, Form Based and Performance. Mr. Hintz described elements of each zoning and identified benefits and limitations for each zoning type.

The meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alicia Abernathey, Administrative Assistant II
Community Development