

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES, IL
PLAN COMMISSION
TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2015**

Members Present: Vice Chair Tim Kessler
Brian Doyle
Dan Frio
James Holderfield
Laura Macklin-Purdy
Tom Pretz
Tom Schuetz
Michelle Spruth

Members Absent: Chairman Todd Wallace

Also Present: Russell Colby- Planning Division Manager
Ellen Johnson- Planner

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Vice Chair Kessler.

2. Roll Call

Vice Chair Kessler called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Introduction of new Plan Commissioners

Vice Chair Kessler introduced new members Dan Frio and Michelle Spruth.

4. Presentation of minutes of the May 5, 2015 meeting.

Motion was made by Mr. Doyle, seconded by Mr. Scheutz and unanimously passed by voice vote to accept the minutes of the May 5, 2015 meeting.

5. Plan Commission training session

Mr. Colby explained the agenda for the session. He suggested new and existing members introduce themselves and explain their interest in and experience on the Commission. Then Commissioners may discuss how they have observed processes and procedures in terms of how applications have been handled by the Commission, staff, and the Planning & Development Committee. He said about a year ago, he had a discussion with Vice Chair Kessler about restructuring how the Plan Commission recommendation is presented to P&D Committee. The format of some of our documents have changed and the Plan Commission is now included in other steps of the process, like having Vice Chair Kessler or Chair Wallace attend P&D Committee meetings. Mr. Colby asked for feedback on how those changes are going. He also requested the Commission discuss the type of additional training they feel they need.

Vice Chair Kessler began the introductions. He said he has lived in St. Charles for 40 years and is a Fox Valley native. He has been on the Plan Commission since 2006. His background is in construction and development and works with commercial construction companies as a controller.

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He likes being on the Plan Commission because he is very interested in his community and likes having a say in the community.

Mr. Schuetz said he is from the south side of Chicago and has lived in St. Charles for 20 years. He is a medical device sales person. He is interested in the Plan Commission because he was a landscape architect before going into sales so he has long had a general interest in land planning.

Mr. Holderfield said he has been a resident of St. Charles for about 40 years. He taught at St. Charles High School for 35 years. His focus was architectural drafting and design and he oversaw the building trades program, which built about 20+ student designed houses in the Fox Valley, with 15+ in St. Charles and Geneva. He has always had an interest in architecture.

Ms. Macklin-Purdy said she has been a resident for 15 years. She grew up in Crystal Lake. She has two kids at St. Charles East. She works for the St. Charles Chamber of Commerce and has had two businesses in St. Charles. She brings the business point of view to the Commission.

Mr. Doyle said he moved to St. Charles in 2005. He has two sons at Richmond. He is from Oak Park. His first participation with the Plan Commission was during the public hearing process for the Towne Centre proposal. He said his family moved to St. Charles because it has a strong sense of historical place. He loves strategic planning and being part of deliberation and civil discourse.

Mr. Pretz said he moved to St. Charles in 1983 with his wife and two daughters. He and his wife are retired. He is on the Historic Preservation Commission. He said being on the Plan Commission, he found out how much he didn't know about the City of St. Charles. It took two to three years to understand the dynamics of the City. There are many new and exciting challenges.

Ms. Spruth said she has lived in St. Charles for one year. She has two sons. She was born in St. Charles and grew up in Hoffman Estates. She is a civil engineer and specializes in environmental engineering, specifically solid waste. She worked for Waste Management in the Midwest and then lived in the UK for 13 years where she worked for the public and private sectors on the waste side. Her experience with planning committees has been as an applicant requesting approval. She has American/French citizenship. She said how things look and community have always been important to her. She moved back to the area because St. Charles delivers that. She said she believes the Plan Commission is very important due to the impact it can have on the locality and on the region.

Mr. Frio said he is from West Virginia. He has lived in St. Charles for 23 years and is in the mortgage industry. He has a daughter at East, a son who just graduated from Eastern Illinois, and a son who is a freshman in college. He was interested in joining the Plan Commission to get more involved in the community. He joined the Chamber last October.

Vice Chair Kessler said the Commission being engaged with each other helps with discussions amongst themselves when things are presented to them. He said the Commission speaks as a voice when its recommendation goes to P&D Committee. He suggested discussing some of the applications that have recently come before the Commission.

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Mr. Colby said Mr. Frio was present at the last Plan Commission meeting and Ms. Spruth attended the meeting before that.

Vice Chair Kessler said it is to the Commission's credit that things are not just passed through; we ask questions. The Commission voted to recommend approval of the Salvation Army parking lot, with conditions. The neighbors objected to it, particularly after Salvation Army said they would like to buy more houses. He said he made a recommendation to deny to show that there is an issue with expansion. P&D Committee voted to deny approval. The Committee was concerned about the neighbors and they did not follow the Commission's recommendation.

Mr. Colby said in his experience, the Council is sensitive to situations involving a change in land use that neighboring property owners could not have anticipated when they brought their property, and where there could be an impact to someone's enjoyment of their property. For Salvation Army, the Committee acknowledged and appreciated that the Plan Commission included conditions that were meant to address the potential negative impacts of the use.

Vice Chair Kessler said the Plan Commission's recommendations are the first thing you see in the staff materials to the P&D Committee. He said it was Mr. Doyle that motivated him to get involved in improving how the Plan Commission is presented to and interacts with P&D Committee.

Mr. Doyle asked if Mr. Colby has heard any comments from P&D Committee on the changes and if there is a change in perception of the Plan Commission.

Mr. Colby said he has not gotten direct comments about the changes, but P&D Committee members seem more interested in the Plan Commissions deliberations, which is likely because the Commission's recommendations are placed more prominently in the staff materials. They have come to expect direction from the Commission. The new P&D Committee chair is Alderman Todd Bancroft. He has suggested it would be useful for him and his vice chair to meet with the Plan Commission chair and vice chair to further that relationship.

Mr. Pretz said he has noticed in the last several meeting that the Commission's dynamic has changed. There is a harmony to the questions asked and how we go about our discussion to get all of the details we need to make the best decision we can. Regardless of rejection of our recommendation by P&D Committee, this reflects how we do our duty in the proper manner. Residents and Council can see how thorough the Plan Commission is. Recently it seems like the dynamics are very alive and healthy. For a period of time, it seemed stale, like the mechanics were a drag. We were not thinking as a single entity and it feels now that we do.

Mr. Shuetz asked if P&D Committee members ever attend Plan Commission meetings.

Mr. Colby said the aldermen occasionally attend meetings for larger projects. They are familiar with how the meetings are run.

Ms. Spruth said when she attended a Plan Commission meeting, she thought the Commission was great and one of the best she has seen in terms of their interaction. The discussion painted a picture

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of the deficiencies and strengths of the application. She suggested inviting P&D members to attend meetings.

Mr. Doyle said since the Commission is charged to conduct the technical analysis, it is important the findings of fact and recommendations do not get buried by political dynamics. He said one thing that motivated him to get involved in the Commission was concern for promoting comprehensive development, such as a unified sidewalk network. The Comprehensive Plan deals with development concerns that are spread across the community and cannot be achieved through piecemeal, parcel by parcel recommendations. They will be achieved through some sort of program. What is the role of the Plan Commission in building consensus and will for some sort of programmatic effort for implementing the Comprehensive Plan? It is something people in the city are concerned about, but it does not seem like there is a mechanism to address that.

Vice Chair Kessler said the Commission does not spend enough time with findings of fact. Anything we deliberate about hinges on the findings of fact, including taking into consideration the Comprehensive Plan, ordinances, and zoning. The Commission could use training on how it should use findings of fact.

Mr. Scheutz questioned whether the Commission can discuss each finding in front of the community.

Mr. Colby said during the public hearing, the Commission can ask the applicant to address a finding they feel there is not adequate information to support. Questions can be raised amongst the Commission once the public hearing is closed. To improve how the Plan Commission goes about making recommendations, walk through the findings individually and see if there are any comments or questions. The Commission can adjust the findings based on the discussion; information can be added or removed based on the information that was provided. Staff no longer drafts findings; the findings are from the applicant. When staff was drafting the findings, we were making assumptions about the application prior to the meeting and doing some of the Commission's work by reaching conclusions. Now that the onus is back on the applicant to support their findings, the Commission should feel free to question the applicant on how they are meeting the findings and to suggest modifications to the findings when you are deliberating. When conditions are added to the recommendation, make reference to the findings to help justify the conditions.

Mr. Doyle said the Commission should have discussions about the findings in front of the community because it helps those present understand that we have a framework by which we need to predicate our recommendations. If the framework is made explicit it can help people attend to what it is we have to attend to.

Mr. Scheutz said it is critical the community understands that we are homeowners and volunteers. That would provide a greater trust on their part. They assume we are City employees.

Vice Chair Kessler said there is no way around that, since we are sitting behind a City desk. We should have the findings of fact available to the audience. They need to know about the findings and that we use them to deliberate.

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Mr. Holderfield said residents come in emotional. They do not know the framework that we work in. They will be emotional and we do a good job handling that. It will always be the case.

Vice Chair Kessler said we are looked at as part of the City, but we could engage the residents in what, how, and why we do things.

Mr. Holderfield mentioned that the Towne Centre project will likely be coming back. It will be a big challenge for the Commission. He wondered how the Commission could prepare for it.

Mr. Doyle said with Lexington Club, feedback from the community resulted in real changes to the plan and community members were happy with the result. He questioned whether it is the place of government to compel a private land owner to do better because we want them to. Is it government's role to request developers to do things differently based on our personal preferences? That is not based on findings of fact. With Lexington Club, the applicant voluntarily did better. Is it our role to press the applicant to do what we or the community want? Part of our responsibility is to let the facts speak for themselves as much as possible.

Vice Chair Kessler said the one thing that makes the Commission not make subjective decisions is that Commissioners are deliberative about how they question the application.

Mr. Holderfield said he would like to get the meeting materials sooner than the Friday before the meeting to allow more time to prepare.

Vice Chair Kessler said that is not a new concern. If we do not feel we have enough information, we do not have to make a recommendation; we can move the item on to the next meeting.

Ms. Spruth said you have a good application when you do not have a lot of opposition, because the applicant is supposed to do their work and talk to their neighbors. She said she has developed waste facilities that the neighbors have supported, which took a long time; applicants have to plan that into their timeline before they submit.

Mr. Colby said the aldermen are supporters of neighborhood meetings where applicants engage with neighboring property owners before coming before the City. He said one thing we should consider doing in preparation for bigger projects coming up is reviewing sections of the Comprehensive Plan to update everyone on some of the information. A challenge for the Commission arises when an application does not quite fit with the Comprehensive Plan. The Commission is a technical advisory body, but is also charged with weighing in on land use changes. There is tension related to how flexible is the Comprehensive Plan and who are the policy makers. The Council are the decision makers who set policy, but the Plan Commission to some extent works with proposing policy changes in response to development proposals.

Mr. Doyle said one option is to amend the Comprehensive Plan when tension exists.

Mr. Colby said the Comprehensive Plan is not set in stone. You can still have litigation over findings and decision making. There is no easy answer. It is trying to balance conflicting goals and

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legal requirements and trying to make a decision that satisfies all parties, within the context of what the City has previously planned. I think that concept is worth discussing with the group.

Mr. Frio asked about why Vice Chair Kessler objected to Salvation Army and whether the Commission can object based on knowledge of future expansion.

Vice Chair Kessler said his point was that it is a land use issue. Technically what the Salvation Army proposed would bring them closer to meeting their parking requirement. He asked if the Commission is allowed to make recommendations for something that does not meet City Code.

Mr. Colby said the use is already established so the amount of parking is considered a legal nonconformity because it was established legally in the past. Salvation Army is not obligated to provide more parking because when the use was established, they had sufficient parking based on the codes at that time.

Mr. Doyle said we cannot guarantee what the Commission will do in the future. But decisions and recommendations have been made based on a long term planning vision and trying to shape the pattern of development. It is within the Commission's purview to think about the future and make decisions based on the future; we just cannot guarantee what a future body is going to do.

Vice Chair Kessler suggested staff send the P&D Committee agendas to the entire Plan Commission, rather than only the chair and vice chair. He said future Plan Commission training should focus on reviewing the Comprehensive Plan, how we use findings of fact, and the types of findings of fact that we may encounter for large projects.

Mr. Schuetz suggested a workshop type format.

6. Meeting Announcements

a. Plan Commission

Tuesday, June 2, 2015 at 7:00 pm Council Chambers

Tuesday, June 16, 2015 at 7:00 pm Council Chambers

Tuesday, July 7, 2015 at 7:00 pm Council Chambers

b. Planning & Development Committee

Monday, June 8, 2015 at 7:00 pm Council Chambers

Monday, July 13, 2015 at 7:00 pm Council Chambers

7. Additional Business from Plan Commission Members, Staff, or Citizens.

There was no additional business.

8. Adjournment at 8:39 p.m.