

Council Proceedings

Joint Council/Planning Commission Work Session

January 31, 2005

Pursuant to due call and notice, a Joint City Council/Planning Commission Work Session was held on Monday, January 31, 2005, at 5:30 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers, President Pro-tem Downs presiding.

Upon roll call the following were declared present:

Council: Hellquist, Meuers, Downs, Erickson, Johnson, Markeson

Planning Commission: Albrecht, Smith, Moberg, Landgrebe, Slinkman, Negard

Staff: Minke, Oakes, Sherman, Felix, Freeberg

Others: Bill Thibault, Planning Consultant

President Pro-tem Downs called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and noted that the purpose of the meeting was for the City Council and Planning Commission to jointly review three draft ordinances, which were prepared by Planning Consultant Bill Thibault. The Planning Commission reviewed the ordinances in detail during their November and December meetings and voted to recommend City Council approval. Copies of the proposed ordinances were provided to the Council for review prior to this meeting.

Proposed Green Space Ordinance

Consultant Bill Thibault noted that the current off-street parking ordinance, covering all zoning districts, requires that no more than 60 percent of the front yard be used for off-street parking, driving or maneuvering areas open to the sky, but does not require the remainder of the front yard to be landscaped. Also, the zoning ordinance does not appear to require any other yard areas to be landscaped.

The proposed amendment requires that, in all districts, not more than 50 percent of the front yard be used for off-street parking, etc., and adds a landscaping provision in all districts that requires at least 50 percent of the space not used for buildings, driveways-circulation, patios, pools, and similar features to be landscaped.

Downs asked if there was any provision to require a reasonable percentage of landscaping in large commercial parking lots to control pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Johnson agreed, noting that large, open parking lots create safety issues, and suggested that landscaping and medians would help to control traffic patterns. There was Council consensus to add such provision. Thibault suggested a separate subsection within the Central Business District concept – perhaps parking lots greater than a certain square footage.

Amendments to the proposed Green Space Ordinance will be considered by the Planning Commission before coming to the Council.

Proposed Parkland Dedication Ordinance

Thibault stated that Bemidji is growing but the amount of parkland for active and passive recreation remains almost unchanged. Currently there are 205 acres of parks (approximately 2.6 percent of the land in Bemidji). He noted that the proposed ordinance

applies to commercial, industrial, and residential developments, and requires dedication of parks and trails as part of the platting process. Thibault described the public purpose as:

- To protect the public health, safety and general welfare
- To ensure that new development contributes to achieving orderly, stable and wholesome community environment
- To ensure conformance with Bemidji's adopted Comprehensive Plan and the Bemidji Parks, Open Space and Trail System Plan.

The draft ordinance requires a minimum of one acre per 25 dwelling units in residential subdivisions and a minimum of 4 percent of the gross area (excluding wetlands) in non-residential subdivisions. The City will have the authority to designate where the park should be. Developers must enter into an agreement to ensure that the park is actually completed.

The draft ordinance also provides that in the event the subdivision is too small for practical dedication of public land, or no land in the subdivision is suitable for such use, or there is no need for the public land within the subdivision, the city would accept the land's equivalent market value in cash rather than the dedicated land. The Planning Commission agreed that the Council should determine what amount developers should pay per acre in lieu of parkland.

Concerns were expressed about the possibility of establishing an appropriate amount per acre, given the broad variation of market values within the city. Slinkman suggested using the average value of an acre of land in the City and reviewing annually.

It was also suggested that data be collected from other cities to determine what their ratio of parkland is and find out what levels of dedication for parkland they use.

Minke agreed to provide the requested data at the February 7th Council Meeting.

The Parkland Dedication ordinance will be placed on the February 7th Council Agenda.

Tree Preservation and Replacement Ordinance

The ordinance as drafted would apply to commercial and industrial properties and residential subdivisions. If passed, healthy trees eight inches or more in diameter that are removed for development must be replaced by the applicant when 10 percent or more of those trees are removed.

Thibault reviewed a variety of changes recommended by the Planning Commission at their December 21st meeting. He also noted that the Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District expressed concerns about the recommended species list contained in the ordinance as many are not native to Beltrami County and are prone to numerous health problems. Thibault explained that there are reasons to include non-native trees – such as for ornamental planting in the downtown area.

City Engineer Freeberg also questioned the impact the draft ordinance would have on the current Forest Management Plan for harvesting mature timber on airport property. He noted that removal of dense stands of Jackpine or aging Aspen or diseased trees is not undesirable and often necessary. He suggested including language in the ordinance that provides for forest management by a certified Forester for certain developments.

Council agreed that the ordinance should include some type of exemption to account for those situations without totally deviating from the ordinance. The Council emphasized that they don't want commercial development to level all the trees on a piece of property without having a city-approved program for tree replacement.

The Tree Preservation and Replacement ordinance will be amended as discussed and will be reviewed by the Planning Commission for recommendation before coming to the Council.

Adjourn

There being no further business for discussion, motion by Meuers, second by Hellquist to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Sherman
City Clerk