

City of Ashland – Plan Commission Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Ashland Plan Commission was held on **Tuesday, August 18, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.** via GoToMeeting.

Committee Members Present: Katie Gellatly, David Mettillie, John Beirl, Matt Mackenzie, Mayor Lewis

Committee Members Absent: Laurie Gregor

Staff Present: Megan McBride, Lucas Phillips

Mayor Lewis opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Agenda

1) Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda by John Beirl, seconded by Mayor Lewis. Passed unanimously.

2) Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the minutes from the June 23, 2020 Plan Commission meeting by John Beirl. Seconded by Katie Gellatly. Passed unanimously.

3) Public Comment (non-agenda items)

None

4) Projects/Discussions

- a) Discussion and recommendation to Council regarding a request to vacate the portion of undeveloped 44th Avenue East located north of Lake Park Road

Megan McBride provided background information regarding the requested Right-of-Way vacation, and informed Commission members that the right-of-way in question is adjacent only to properties owned by the applicant. The right-of-way requested for vacation stretches from Lake Park Rd to Lake Superior, and Public Works has no intended future use for it. The applicant would like to vacate the portion of right-of-way for the purpose of consolidating their land into a single parcel. Additionally, it was brought to Megan's attention by City Attorney Tyler Wickman that this property owner has had issues in the past with fishers and smelters leaving litter on this property under the assumption that this is public land, so vacating this ROW will allow the property owner to enforce trespassing violations, as well as consolidate their property.

Motion to recommend approval of the right-of-way vacation request and forward to City Council by Matt Mackenzie. Seconded by John Beirl. Passed unanimously.

5) Discussion Items

a) Discussion related to community property maintenance and Comprehensive Plan recommendations

Megan McBride provided updates regarding the City's Code Enforcement efforts, as the Comprehensive Plan had recommended increased enforcement of existing Property Maintenance ordinances. Commissioner Mackenzie recommended continuing to increase enforcement, as existing efforts have been successful, but have also shown that there is still a need for continued and possibly increased property maintenance enforcement in the community. Commissioner Mackenzie recommended requesting that Property Maintenance enforcement is expanded to possibly include the police department helping with enforcement, as he feels that the existing need for enforcement is too great for one person to handle.

Megan McBride explained how Property Maintenance has been impacted by COVID-19. She explained that the priorities for this summer have been shifted to focus solely on long grass and garbage, with primary structure concerns (siding, roofing, garages, etc.) having been granted extensions to summer 2021. She explained that vacant properties have been mowed at the City's direction, with the costs being forwarded to the property owner via a lien on the property. She explained the Property Maintenance enforcement process, and how the City gives property owners several chances to comply before moving forward with citations or other legal actions.

Mayor Lewis explained that the City had also experienced difficulties in finding someone to mow grass on behalf of the City this summer, but this has since been rectified and now the City is able to address these properties with excessively long grass.

Megan McBride elaborated that the Planning department has been evaluating a more efficient way to handle Property Maintenance concerns throughout this summer – evaluating priorities and processes for handling concerns in a way that does not rely solely on neighbor complaints. She encouraged Commission members to provide feedback on what they have seen, or any feedback they receive from the community.

John Beirl cited concerns over long grass and weeds out at the Timeless Timber site, and suggested that the City should address that as a way of setting an example, but also improving the chances of having a successful RFP at that site.

Matt Mackenzie recommended that the City consider hiring an LTE during the summer, or find some other way to increase staff time to address property maintenance concerns.

6) Announcements/Reports/Questions

a) Updates on Main Street Program and Downtown Building Improvement Grant Program

Megan McBride updated the Commission on the progress of the Downtown Building Improvement Grant program (formerly referred to as the Façade Improvement Program), and how the focus has shifted to not only focus on façade/cosmetic

improvements, but also health and safety improvements to the structure. The RFP has been released, and proposals are due back the beginning of September.

Megan also provided additional updates on developments that are ongoing in the City, including that the 509-515 Main St W buildings have finally sold. The property owner is soliciting feedback on what the community would like to see. The new property owner will be working with the Main Street Program and WEDC to market the storefronts, and they currently plan to develop the upper floors into a mixture of market-rate and affordable housing, as well as potential commercial uses.

b) Updates on Strategic Demolition planning activities

Megan McBride explained that the City has the ability to utilize CDBG Housing Revolving Loan Fund money to address residential slum and blight properties within the City, as is identified as a goal in the Comprehensive Plan. She explained that the County is considering partnering with the City to pass along parcels that are up for auction due to back taxes. Megan said that she has already been in touch with a few developers with backgrounds in affordable housing to gauge interest. Megan has been working on putting together an inventory of potential houses for demolition to see how much it would cost to obtain the properties that are of a highest concern.

7) Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by David Mettille. Seconded by John Beirl. Passed unanimously.
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Meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm. Minutes done by Lucas Phillips.