

CITY OF ITHACA
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 10, 2018
7:00 PM

The regular meeting of the Ithaca Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Wilson at 7:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Present: Chair John Wilson, Commissioners Alison Jerome, Dale Sherman, Richard Teal, Jerry Timmons, Doug Wright and Mayor Alice Schafer

Staff Present: City Manager Chris Yonker and Deputy Clerk Cathy Cameron

Audience Present: Philip Schafer

Motion by Timmons, second by Sherman to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held March 13, 2018 with correction of removing Jim Gruesbeck from being present at the meeting; motion carried.

Public Comments

Chair Wilson asked for any public comments; none were given.

Public Hearing

Monition by Timmons, second by Wright to open the public hearing for variance requests on the proposed construction of two new residential duplexes at 930 East North Street; motion carried. Chair Wilson opened the public hearing at 7:02 p.m.

Manager Yonker stated that the proposed new construction would require three different variances and includes the demolition of the existing farmhouse and detached small garage. The first variance is for not meeting the minimum lot size requirements for two duplex units on one parcel, which is at 21,780 sq. ft.² (minimum required is 20,000 sq. ft.² per single or two-family unit; with two, 2-unit buildings, the minimum lot size should be 40,000 sq.ft.²). The second variance is for exceeding the maximum lot coverage limit of 15%; the two proposed structures would create a lot coverage ratio of 27%. The third variance is for exceeding the number of units allowed per parcel in the R-2 zone, which allows only one two-unit structure.

Commissioner Sherman stated that because the property is across the street from the Senior Activity Center and Atkinson Park, it was a great location for the development of senior housing. He also commented that even though there are variances, the proposed construction meets all setback requirements. Commissioner Wright asked the contractor Mr. Schafer if the units would be handicap accessible. Mr. Schafer replied that none of the four units are being built that way.

Motion by Wright, second by Timmons to close the public hearing; motion carried. Chair Wilson closed the public hearing at 7:08 p.m.

Motion by Sherman, second by Wright to approve all three variances; one for lot size, one for lot coverage and one to allow two units per parcel; motion carried.

Public Hearing

Motion by Schafer, second by Jerome to open the public hearing for approval of the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan; motion carried. Chair Wilson opened the public hearing at 7:09 p.m.

Manager Yonker presented the final draft of the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan. He stated that under State statute, the Planning Commission provides a recommendation to the City Council for its final approval as drafted. He further informed the Commissioners that State statute also requires that this plan be reviewed and updated every five years.

Motion by Timmons, second by Sherman to close the public hearing; motion carried. Chair Wilson closed the public hearing at 7:18 p.m.

Motion by Sherman, second by Wright to adopt Resolution PC-2018-01: “Approval of the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan & Recommendation to the City Council for Adoption.” Motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: (7) Timmons, Wright, Wilson, Sherman, Jerome, Schafer & Teal
Nays: (0) None
Abstain: (0) None
Absent: (0) None

New Business

The City Manager inquired of the Commission its desire to discourage residential living units on the ground floor of buildings in the downtown area. Zoning Code for the C-1 Central Business District reads “dwellings, including apartments, townhouses and terrace or row houses” are permitted by right. There is no mention of which floor, or if they could be detached units. Currently there are apartments on the second level of several downtown buildings. Discussion was held whether we should allow residential units on the ground level of commercial buildings or only on upper floors.

Commissioner Sherman stated that there is one apartment unit on the ground level (behind the store front) located at 145 East Center, which also has two upper-floor apartments. This building had a complete restoration in June of 2011 with façade & rental rehab grant funds. Commissioner Wright inquired how that was permitted, if there were variances granted and requested the information be shared at a future meeting. Further discussion was held. It was the consensus of the Commissioners to maintain the ground floors of downtown businesses for only retail, commercial, service and/or office uses, while allowing living units and/or office spaces on upper floors.

Manager Yonker informed the Commissioners that he had received a request from the property owner at 450 South Elm Street to again change the zoning of this parcel to accommodate a commercial hair salon. The Assessor records show that the parcel was originally zoned Industrial but was changed to R-1 Rural Residential at the property owner’s request back in 2007. The zoning designation for the parcel immediately north of this one was also changed from Industrial I-1 to R-1. Therefore, the proposed commercial use would be a non-conforming use and not in keeping with the surrounding R-1 zone. To rezone the subject parcel would result in an undesirable spot zone. Discussion was held and it was the consensus of the Commissioners that the parcel remain zoned as R-1 in accordance with the zoning code and the Gratiot Countywide Master Plan.

Old Business

None

Transmittals

Manager Yonker highlighted the City Manager Activity Reports for March 16 & 29, 2018.

Public Comments

Chair Wilson asked for any additional public comments; none were given.

Motion by Timmons, second by Sherman to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m.; motion carried.

Dale Sherman, Commission Secretary

Cathy Cameron, Recording Secretary