CITY OF LUDINGTON
PLANNING COMMSION
MINUTES 10/07/08

A meeting of the Ludington Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, October 7, 2008. The meeting was held at the Ludington Municipal Building, 400 S. Harrison St., Ludington, MI and was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Tom Coleman, Chairperson.

ROLL CALL: The roll call showed the following results:

Present: Robert Garrett, Chris Gamble, Clay Olmstead, Gary Schnitker, Tom Coleman, Joe Moloney and Mike Nekola

Absent: Kaye Holman, excused and Chris Pontz, absent

Also Present: Recording Secretary, Carol Ann Foote and City Manager, John Shay

AGENDA APPROVAL:

Commissioner Moloney made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Nekola. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:
Peggy Dunnill, 604 E. Lowell St., stated that in 2007 the City purchased property on Dowland St. for $95,000, earmarked for the new fire department. She asked if the City had the surplus money for the purchase of more property. She wanted to know how much it would cost to purchase the property and demolish the existing Varsity Cleaners. Even though the property is zoned commercial, the side of the property facing Lowell is well kept residential property. She said that the property around N. Washington and Lowell may be significantly devalued lowering the SEVs, creating less revenue for the City in property taxes and creating a less desirable neighborhood. Is this a sound financial decision for the taxpayers of Ludington? Would the money saved by using the property originally purchased on Dowland be better used on roads, parks, etc.? She said that the problems of logistics should also be considered. The majority of the fire and rescue vehicles would be traveling south on Washington and east and west on Tinkham. This would take all of the vehicles past the Ludington Middle School or the Ludington High School. The vehicles may interfere with school related traffic, children crossing N. Washington or Tinkham going to and from school, vehicles dropping students off and picking up, school buses loading or unloading, children using the new tennis complex, basketball courts, soccer field and swimming pool. This could be a dangerous situation and also slow the response time of emergency vehicles. The move to the N. Washington property from the Dowland St. property could be undesirable, both financially and logistically. She thanked the volunteers and emergency responders, but would like everyone to reconsider the location of the new fire station.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:
Commissioner Olmstead made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2, 2008 meeting, seconded by Commissioner Moloney. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:
To consider a request by the City of Ludington to rezone the following described property from C-2, General Retail District, to G-1, Government Service District: MANUFACTURERS' ADDITION LOTS 24 THROUGH 28, INCLUSIVE, BLOCK 21, also known as 901 N. Washington Ave.

City Manager, John Shay, explained that the City was requesting that the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council that the described property be rezoned to Government Service District. The City has been evaluating a couple of sites, one on Dowland St. and this one on N. Washington. It is true that they did purchase the property on Dowland for a fire station, then after the purchase the property on N. Washington became available. They are looking at the fire station as being a long term presence in the City. When this property became available, it was larger and is better situated to locate the fire station. It is also the property that the fire department has recommended in terms of responding to calls and for having access in and out of the site. He said that he was not aware of any instances that locating a fire station would devalue someone's property. The intention of rezoning the property is linked to Western Land Services' proposal to build a six story multi-use building to relocate their headquarters to downtown Ludington. They have 300 employees nationwide with about 80 in Ludington. Those 80 employees would transfer to the downtown site and they have indicated employing up to 40 more employees in the next two years. They want to build the building at the location of our current fire station. That is what is necessitating the need to build a new station. We feel that the N. Washington property is the best location. We could build on the Dowland St. property, but that would also bring in some cost aspects. Western Land Services would put the money upfront for the construction of the fire hall, and we would be repaying it through a brownfield plan with the taxes generated on the new development.

~~Denise~~ Elise Knudsen, 1160 N. Washington Ave.(Pere Marquette Township), stated that the Dowland St. property is more centrally located. She said that she has seen men driving to the fire station, and she was sure that they do not all live in the north part of town. There are two large apartment complexes in the area, one with mentally challenged residents. She said that she agreed that it would be too close to the schools.

Peggy Dunnill wanted to know why that would be a better site and what the criteria was. With the station in the northeast section of town and most of the calls being south of town, although I am not sure about that, what would make it a better site?

Close Public Hearing

John Shay responded to Ms. Dunnill's question. He said the site was larger that the one on Dowland. Current standards for construction of new fire stations call for drive through bays. The current fire station was built in the 70's and all of the trucks have to be backed in. The property on Washington would allow drive-thru bays. We would have to put the offices on a second floor on the Dowland St. property which would actually add cost to the project. A big issue is functionality. He said that the comment about more structure fires on the south side of town was not necessarily an accurate assumption. From what he recalls, there were 13-15 structure fires all year. Most calls are medical emergency calls, downed wires, etc. He said that one way to look at the comment about being too close to the school was if there was a fire at the school, they would be that much closer.

Commissioner Moloney asked if Western Land Services stated a preference in the site. Mr. Shay stated that they had not stated a preference for either site. Commissioner Moloney asked about the size of the Washington Ave. property. Mr. Shay told him it was 250 ft. of frontage on Washington by 200 ft. on the Lowell St. side. He said that the Dowland St. property is approximately 240 ft. x 140 ft. Mr. Shay explained that they had anticipated development on the "Bowling Alley" block so they started looking to secure a piece of property. The Dowland St. property was purchased so that they would not be backed into a corner if a development came and the City would not have anywhere to put the fire station. The Varsity Cleaners property came on the market after we purchased the Dowland St. property. We took a look at it because we felt that if this kind of investment was going to be made, we wanted the best site for the fire department. Commissioner Moloney asked if first responders had to live in the City. Mr. Shay said that they did not. Mr. Shay explained that the City is approximately 3 ½ miles across and getting from one side to the other takes just a matter of minutes. So the exact center of the City is not the main criteria.

Commissioner Nekola stated that the Commissions job was to look at how the zoning fits, not what is going to be put there. That is a political issue of the City Council. Chairman Coleman said that their function, as a planning group, was recommending zoning.

Commissioner Garrett pointed out that it would be close to industrial and commercial. Mr. Shay said that the foundry was just up the street. Also close by was Ludington Beverage and Flora Craft.

Commissioner Gamble asked if there were any plans for residential quarters. Mr. Shay said that it was getting harder finding volunteers to work in the fire department. They do a great job and get paid very little money to be interrupted to respond to calls. Five or ten years from now, if we could not get volunteers, maybe an office could be converted into a bedroom. But the way it is designed right now, there are offices spaces, meeting room and an apparatus bay. There are no sleeping quarters. It does have shower facilities. The intent is to operate it as a volunteer fire department.

Commissioner Olmstead reported that the sub-committee did meet. The property is currently zoned C-2. They examined the other zoning in the area. The City is the applicant for the request but there is a statement from the property owners approving of the request. We know that the City's intent is to locate a fire department there, but the question for the Planning Commission is solely a zoning issue. It is the consensus of the sub-committee that the rezoning to Government Service District is merited.

Commissioner Olmstead made a motion to recommend to City Council to approve rezoning the following described property from C-2 (General Retail) to G-1 (Government Service District): MANUFACTURERS' ADDITION LOTS 24 THROUGH 28, INCLUSIVE, BLOCK 21, also known as 901 N. Washington Ave., seconded by Commissioner Garrett.
Commissioner Moloney voted against the motion. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:
None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
Comprehensive Plan:

East Ludington Avenue Architectural Preservation:
Commissioner Schnitker reported that the committee did not meet this month, but he had made contact with Ms. Amy Arnold, State Preservation Planner, who has been assigned to assist them. She has suggested two options that we will be pursuing in the near future. One is a national register of historic places, more honorary with not a lot of restrictions. That would be for protection of the property historically and architecturally. The other option is a local historic designation that would be approved by the community. This option would protect the resources/buildings. Both of the options would provide tax credits to the property owners, so there is some incentive.

Vendors:
No report.

US-10 Access Management:
Chairman Coleman reported that the final draft of the Access Management Plan is still being reviewed by Williams and Works.

Planned Unit Development Consolidation:
Chairman Coleman told the Commission that the revised PUD text would be given to the members before the November meeting.

Daycare:
Commissioner Nekola reported that his committee has not met, but intends to have a recommendation for discussion at the next meeting. They are looking at the possibility of requiring group daycares to be a certain distance apart. They are looking at 900 to 1,500 feet apart.

Downtown Walk ability:
Commissioner Moloney reported that he attended Pere Marquette Township's Planning Commission meeting last month, and they were very appreciative that the Ludington commissioners reviewed their proposed Comprehensive Plan. Pere Marquette is looking at ways to improve the corridor coming into Ludington. Commissioner Moloney stated that he has contacted a source from the Michigan Department of Transportation and will have more information regarding moving forward in that area. He stated that he talked to Cal Dekuiper regarding the Safe Route of Schools program which he was receptive of. He said he will organize a meeting for a walking evaluation of the neighborhoods and schools around town to give the City and the schools feedback on safe routes.

SITE PLAN REVIEW REPORT:
None

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS:
Chairman Coleman told the Commissioners that there was an informal meeting with Pere Marquette Township's Commissioner, Al Deemester, Terry Wahr, Zoning Administrator and Mary Reily, Mason County Zoning Administrator to discuss how the City can work better with the Township and County. He said that they had much in common. He said that there would be an informal joint planning meeting to discuss their mutual goals.

Chairman Coleman reminded the Commissioners that the November meeting would be held on Wednesday, November 5.

Chairman Coleman told the Commissioners that when Carol received site plan reviews, she would pick three members that have signed up for site plan. If the Commissioner cannot make the site plan, it will be up to them to find a replacement.

Chairman Coleman announced that there were 8,500 stems of dune grass planted.

Commissioner Olmstead told the Commissioners that he was investigating placing armed forces recognition flags on the west boulevard. He said that he was proposing six flags, one for each of the armed forces divisions (including Merchant Marines) flying from poles resembling the street light poles. The City would be helping with the poles.

Chairman Coleman said that track plaques are being prepared for Cartier Park. Commissioner Garrett said that there would be a self-guide for walking the park. He said that he has put together a chart of animals, and with the help of Shawn McDonald and other City workers, had it mounted in Plexiglas and hung at the park. He also has animal prints on cedar wood blocks. When you open it, it tells you what kind of animal the print belongs to. He also had a copy of the original deed, dated 1910, giving the park to the City blown up and framed.

Commissioner Olmstead read chapter 4 of the City Charter. Commissioner Garrett reminded people that they could find a copy of the Charter at the library and also on the City web site.

ADJOURNMENT:
The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Ann Foote, Recording Secretary

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Tom Coleman, Chairperson