

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
CITY OF PALMER, ALASKA
REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2008
7:00 P.M. - COUNCIL CHAMBERS

A. CALL TO ORDER:

The regular meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission was called to order by Chairman Brown at 7:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL, DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

Present and constituting a quorum were Chairman Brown, Commissioners Madar, Kerlake, Hamming, AlLee, Silva, and Kircher. Also present were Sara Jansen, Community Development Coordinator, David Meneses, Deputy Director of Planning and Building, and Dawn Webster, Recording Secretary.

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge was led by Commissioner Madar.

D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA: The agenda was approved as presented.

E. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING(S):

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 20, 2007 were approved as corrected.

F. PERSONS TO BE HEARD: None.

G. PUBLIC HEARING: None.

H. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Ms. Jansen advised of the reorganization and relocation of departments within the city and of her new position as Public Affairs and Economic Development Coordinator. David Meneses was introduced as the new Deputy Director of the Department of Community Development. Ms. Jansen advised that Sandra Garley has been hired as the Director of Community Development; Ms. Garley will begin work on February 4, 2008.

Mr. Meneses provided background information on his many years of experience with the city.

I. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of a request to increase the area of the Central Business District, PMC Chapter 17.64.050, for the purpose of reviewing the existing parking requirements.

Ms. Webster restated the request by the Planning and Zoning Commission to place the item on the next agenda for discussion. Also included in the request was a review of efficiency

apartment definitions.

Commissioner Brown reviewed the comments prepared as discussion items. Commissioner Madar spoke to increasing the size of the Central Business District and applying Performance Zoning to the area. He does not believe that only one person would occupy an efficiency apartment. He recommended that the district be increased to include the area from Arctic Avenue south on the Glenn to the Y on the south end of the city.

Commissioner Silva inquired as to whether Commissioner Madar was stating one parking space was adequate for efficiency apartments. Commissioner Madar disagreed; he thought performance zoning would work in an expanded Central Business District; the Council could grant a waiver if necessary.

Commissioner Hamming inquired of staff whether a one bedroom apartment required only one parking space; review of the code for the Central Business District indicated one parking space per dwelling unit; discussion was held regarding the fact that a dwelling unit could have more than one bedroom. He also inquired about waivers; the ability to purchase parking spaces; and the ability to count existing on-street parking spaces is available. Ms. Jansen advised those options were only available in the Central Business District.

Ms. Jansen addressed structures built before 1978 that have no designated parking spaces stating if the building is remodeled, and the use remains the same, there is no requirement to provide additional spaces; if the use changes, new parking spaces must be provided. Commissioner Hamming stated he would be in favor of making the Central Business District larger but he would prefer the parking spaces be increased to 1.5 per one bedroom unit. Ms. Jansen advised the goal of the code was to allow for densification of the downtown area and provide an district for people who may or may not own vehicles.

Commissioner Hamming inquired as to where the one bedroom was referenced; Ms. Jansen responded Multifamily, one parking space per dwelling unit. Commissioner Hamming restated that the code does not refer to bedroom, it refers to dwelling unit.

Commissioner Kircher agreed with the idea of expanding the Downtown Business District.

Commissioner Silva expressed concern regarding expansion of the district; stated there is plenty of available parking around the block; how far would the block expand; and is additional parking available? How far can the Central Business District be expanded and still have plenty of available parking? Ms. Jansen advised there is only one publically designated parking lot; it is the Depot lot. Implementation of the Palmer Urban Revitalization Plan would enlarge the existing lot. Funds were requested in this budget for the purchase of land for additional parking spaces downtown; however it was not approved for this year's capital projects.

Commissioner Brown stated his concurrence with the expansion of the district without increasing the number of parking spaces for a one bedroom unit. Unfortunately, the code does not address one bedroom units; therefore he thinks a code change is required to spell out the difference between a dwelling unit and a one bedroom unit apartment.

Commissioner Madar voice his objection to having only one parking space for one dwelling unit, he would prefer to see 1.5 spaces and have one set of rules for the whole city. He would like to see the Central Business District be changed to a Business Improvement District (BID). He wants to promote commercial development.

Commissioner Hamming inquired of the process required to create a BID. Ms. Jansen advised that a BID needs to be initiated by the property owners.

Commissioner Silva asked how increasing the Central Business District will address the problem of the parking spaces when there are no spaces available for people to buy.

Commissioner Madar addressed the issue of parking spaces on the street and the ability to count them and perhaps buy them; Mr. Meneses stated the spaces that could be purchased must be within 600 feet of the business and that funds raised from the selling of the parking spaces would be put in a fund to purchase land to provide additional parking spaces.

Commissioner AlLee advised of other cities with the same problem and they solved it by allowing parking on the roof of the structure.

Commissioner Silva addressed efficiency apartment and the definitions.

Commissioner Brown addressed the restriction to one resident per unit; the responsibility of the landlord enforcing the rules; the unit size be limited to 450 s.f.; the occupant with two cars; he does not believe that it would not be a reasonable situation. Commissioner Madar disagreed and stated people live together in smaller places. He stated he felt the restrictions would be unenforceable especially if you have an absentee landlord.

Commissioner Madar stated we should be looking toward the future in our planning.

Commissioner Silva suggested the commission work on a definition for efficiency apartment.

Commissioner Brown suggested we look at the number of bedrooms permitted in a one dwelling unit apartment. Commissioner Silva agreed.

Commissioner Brown stated he would like to see efficiency apartments limited to the Central Business District and increase the size of the district.

Commissioner Madar inquired about the minimum size of an apartment; Mr. Meneses stated he believed it was 220 s.f. per dwelling unit according to the Uniform Building Code.

COMMISSIONER MADAR moved, to ask staff to obtain information on square footages for apartments for single bedrooms, two bedrooms, three bedroom apartments, minimum sizes in other cities. Motion failed for lack of a second.

Mr. Meneses stated that most cities use the Uniform Building Code to establish minimum structure size.

Commissioner Silva inquired as to why the number of parking spaces established in the chart for the Central Business District was written this way; was it an oversight or an error. Ms.

Jansen responded that the primary reason the Central Business District was adopted was to loosen the parking requirements. To have a residential unit in the Central Business District it must be located on the second floor above a commercial use; the thinking being the parking spaces occupied by the business during the day would be available for the residential units during the evening thereby maximizing the use of the parking spaces downtown.

Commissioner Kircher stated he didn't believe Palmer has a parking problem but we should prepare for the future. More commercial development will bring more money into the city allowing the city to purchase land for additional parking spaces.

Commissioner Madar stated that he would like to keep the small apartments in the Central Business District.

Commissioner Kircher stressed the need for more flexibility in the code by using performance zoning standards.

COMMISSIONER KIRCHER moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE to ask staff to research the expansion of the Central Business District and provide the commission with suggested boundaries for discussion.

COMMISSIONER MADAR moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE to amend the main motion to direct staff to look at Arctic Avenue, Cottonwood, Gulkana, Fireweed, all the way down Colony Way down to the Glenn Highway which will be the westerly boundary.

Commissioner Silva asked if the proposed changes would be ready for the February 21, 2008 meeting, staff advised the schedule for that meeting will be very full and the March 20, 2008 meeting would be a better date.

VOTE ON MOTION AMENDING MAIN MOTION: MCU

VOTE ON MAIN MOTION: MCU

J. PLAT REVIEWS: None.

K. PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

L. STAFF REPORT:

Ms. Webster advised:

- she has moved into her new location at 645 E. Cope Industrial Way;
- looking forward to having Sandra Garley join the city on February 4th;
- will be on vacation from February 4th to February 18th; and
- currently working on staff reports and recommendations for the meeting of February 21st which will include two conditional use permit requests for the Alaska State Fair (a time extension for the motorized sporting contests and two RallyCross events) to be held outside the regular fair time.

Ms. Jansen advised the commission:

- be very aware of the laws regarding Ex Parte contact with regard to the conditional use

- permits; and
- it has been her pleasure to work with the Planning and Zoning Commission of the city of Palmer, stating "we are truly blessed to have a commission that has the best interest of the city at heart," and thanked them so much.

Mr. Meneses stated:

- he was pleased to be here and his office is always open to the commission for building questions; and
- will be available as support to the staff when needed.

M. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioners ALee, Kircher, Silva, Madar, Kerslake, Hamming, and Brown all extended their thanks and deep appreciation to Sara for the time and effort she has provided to the Commission.

Commissioner Madar inquired as to the status of the public meeting regarding the Agricultural District; Ms. Jansen advised the meeting has not been set up; she is leaving it to Sandra Garley to schedule.

COMMISSIONER HAMMING moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER MADAR request staff bring 17.64.050 back to the commission for their review.

Commissioner Brown advised the commission the MEA ballots would be in the mail soon and he requested everyone read the information and vote.

N. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Kevin Brown, Chairman

Sara Jansen, Community Development Coordinator