

**PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION  
CITY OF PALMER, ALASKA**  

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**REGULAR MEETING  
THURSDAY, April 21, 2011  
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 Madar at 7:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL, DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

Present and constituting a quorum were Chairman Madar, Commissioners Campbell, Kerslake and Kircher. Commissioners Preslar and Weir were not in attendance. Also present were Sandra Garley, Community Development Director, and Ron Anderson, Recording Secretary. A quorum was established.

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

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

E. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING:

1. The minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 24, 2011 were approved, as presented.

F. PERSONS TO BE HEARD:

There were no persons to be during this meeting.

G. PUBLIC HEARING:

1. Consideration of a Conditional Use Permit to allow the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church of Palmer, Alaska, to construct a Youth Worship Facility adjoining the existing structure on Lot 3, Promissory Point Subdivision, Palmer, Alaska.

COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER CAMPBELL, to approve the request to issue a Conditional Use Permit to the First Baptist Church, for the construction of a Youth Worship facility at the current First Baptist Church, located at 1150 E. Helen Drive, Palmer, AK.

COMMISSIONER MADAR asked for a staff report.

Ms. Garley reported the following:

A permit was submitted and a public hearing date was set for April 21, 2011.

On April 6, 2011, 101 public hearing notices were mailed to property owners within the 1,200' of the site in accordance with 17.80.030. Notification of the public hearing was published in the Anchorage Daily News on April 13, 2011. 2 comments have been received in response to these mailings. One response was in support of the application and one response against.

The lot is 12.5 acres in size and is currently designated a R-1, Residential District. The Residential District permits church facilities to be constructed upon issuance of a conditional use permit

The surrounding properties are a mix of residential, high density residential and some Industrial (with special limitations on that particular zone).

Fact 1) The conditional use will preserve the value, spirit, character and integrity of the surrounding area:

Staff finds that the proposed use will preserve the value, spirit, character and integrity of the surrounding area because the Youth Worship facility will be located upon the existing 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church property. The construction will be accomplished in a single phase, and will maintain and enhance the overall appearance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church.

Fact 2) The conditional use fulfills all other requirements of Title 17.72 pertaining to the conditional use in question.

Staff finds that the request fulfills all other requirements of Title 17.72 because:

- a) The Single-family Residential District permits a church to be constructed after issuance of a conditional use permit;
- b) The Youth Worship facility will be limited to 35 feet in height;
- c) The lot size covered by the application is in excess of 12 acres or 522,700 sq. ft.; the minimum lot size required in a Single-family District is 8,200 sq. ft. The lot width is in excess of 300 feet and is adequate to permit construction of this Youth Worship facility.
- d) The existing structure, including the proposed addition, is well under the maximum lot coverage of 30% for this district.
- e) It is anticipated that, at full capacity, the Youth Worship facility will have a capacity of 115. One Hundred Ninety Seven parking spaces (9'x20' in size) are currently provided along with five (13'x20') ADA compliant spaces. The addition allows for an expansion of the parking area due to the large lot size.

- f) Landscaping and lighting will be provided as required by code and will comply with section 17.64.080 of the Palmer Municipal Code.
- g) All signage will comply with the requirements of PMC Title 14, Signs.

Fact 3) Granting the conditional use permit will not be harmful to the public health, safety, convenience and comfort of the neighborhood.

Staff finds that granting the conditional use permit will not be harmful to the public health, safety, convenience and comfort of nearby property owners because there is no evidence of harmful emissions, odor, vibrations or glare, having been produced by any facility of this type. Church facilities are commonly located in single-family residential districts.

It is not anticipated there will any substantial increase in traffic at the location because there is already an existing congregation. The church is accessible from both E. Helen Drive and S. Felton Street. Therefore, the current circulation plan is still acceptable.

Fact 4) Sufficient setbacks, lot area, buffers, or other safeguards are being provided to meet the conditions.

Staff finds that because of the 12 acre lot size, there are sufficient setbacks, lot area, buffers or other safeguards.

Fact 5) If the permit is for a public use or structure, is the proposed use or structure located in a manner which will maximize public benefits.

Staff finds that the structure is not a public use facility because it is privately owned. However, the proposed structure will enable the church to increase its current services for the public and to develop additional services to benefit the community, such as;

- Public school concerts and events
- Facilities for community groups such as the Matsu String Orchestra
- The Palmer Fire Department awards dinner

These are all activities that the community has enjoyed in the past. The lot size allows for ample parking to accommodate the proposed addition.

Therefore staff recommends approval of the Conditional Use Permit to allow construction of a Youth Worship facility; and with the following conditions:

- 1) Parking and landscaping requirements shall meet the requirements of PMC 17.64.
- 2) The maximum building height shall be 25 feet above grade. Appurtenances shall not exceed 35 feet in height.
- 3) Project and site use must comply with all laws, statutes, and ordinances of Local, State, and Federal governments.

The Public Hearing was opened at 7:10 p.m.

COMMISSIONER MADAR reminded any person wishing to speak, that comments would be limited to 3 minutes.

Mr. Bruce Rowell signed in and identified himself to the Commission as the First Baptist Church representative and that he would be happy to answer any questions the Commission might have. He also stated that the proposed addition was rather small and would only add an additional 10% to the overall size of the facility. The facility may also be used as a multipurpose building as well as a Youth Worship facility. It was his hope that all ages would benefit from this new addition.

Mr. Noel Kopperud signed in and spoke in favor of this addition. He stated he had been a long time neighbor of the church and had no issues with its expansion. He was concerned that all set-back requirements be met.

There were no questions from the Commission.

There being no other persons coming forward to testify, the public hearing was closed at 7:15 p.m.

The Chair opened the discussion for comments from the commissioners.

**Commissioner Kerlake** said that he was very familiar with the existing facility and would completely support this application. He felt the church provided services for the community and was looking forward for its completion.

**Commissioner Campbell** also supported this application. He indicated that there were no issues that he could see to prevent this project from going ahead.

**Commissioner Kircher** supported the application but was somewhat concerned about increased levels of traffic. He felt that the Hidden Ranch Subdivision may be slightly impacted by a large increase in traffic on those adjoining roads.

**Commissioner Kircher** also asked if a notice of public hearing was also advertised in the Frontiersman Newspaper.

Mrs. Garley stated that the City of Palmer had contracted with the Anchorage Daily News for this service. All notices were run in that newspaper. She also indicated that staff had begun running a second, larger ad as well for Public Hearings.

**Commissioner Madar** also concurred with allowing the project to proceed. He felt the facility would have minimal impact on the surrounding communities and the environment. He felt that the city would benefit from these resources and this service will benefit the entire City of Palmer as well.

**ROLL CALL VOTE ON MOTION [recommending approval]: Carried Unanimously.**

Discussion on Findings of Fact:

<b>Campbell</b>	<b>Kerslake</b>	<b>Kircher</b>	<b>Madar</b>	<b>Preslar</b>	<b>Weir</b>	
1. The proposed change is in accordance with the borough and city comprehensive plans.						
	Y	Y	Y	A	A	
2. The proposed change is compatible with the surrounding zoning districts and the established land use pattern.						
	Y	Y	Y	A	A	
3. Public facilities such as schools, utilities and streets are adequate to support the proposed change.						
	Y	Y	Y	A	A	
4. Changed conditions affecting the subject parcel or the surrounding neighborhood support the proposed change.						
	Y	Y	Y	A	A	
5. The proposed change is consistent with the public welfare and does not grant a special privilege to the owner(s).						
	Y	Y	Y	A	A	

COMMISSIONER KIRCHER moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER MADAR, to approve all five findings of fact as submitted by staff.

**ROLL CALL VOTE ON MOTION [recommending approval of findings]: Carried Unanimously.**

H. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. There was no unfinished business for discussion at this meeting.

I. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of proposed new boundaries for the Central Business District to present as a recommendation to the Palmer City Council.

COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE moved to enter into Committee of the Whole, and was seconded by COMMISSIONER KIRCHER.

The Commission entered into Committee of the Whole at 7:22 p.m.

The Chair opened the discussion for comments from the commissioners.

To start the discussion, Commissioner Madar asked for a staff report.

Mrs. Garley explained that this has been an on-going effort to establish a Central Business District that would encourage the growth of a strong business sector in Palmer. She indicated that she felt this effort would be positively supported by the City Council. City Council established a Board of Economic Development and charged this Board with developing a strategy for future economic development in the City.

The Board of Economic Development recognized that there was a goal in the 2006 Palmer Comprehensive Plan that mandated finding a way to develop more commercial property in the City to allow for this expansion.

She outlined two approaches to achieve this goal. The first was wholesale annexation of property. The second method was to create either a unique Central Business District (CBD) or an overlay for a predetermined area to permit growth. The current code recognizes an area for business and affords some accommodations. The current code does ease some of the base restrictions that may be in place.

To avoid simply playing with the boundary lines we could establish a separate business district. Another approach would be to develop an overlay for the business district. This overlay would not change the zoning designation of an area, if included in the CBD, but would apply the new zoning requirements of the new district. This could ease parking requirements for example. A Central Business District is perhaps cleaner, but both can address the main issues.

**Commissioner Kerlake** asked for an explanation of where discussion had ended. He recalled that the consensus was for moving ahead to suggest something.

**Commissioner Kircher** agreed that the boundaries were defined and most wanted to proceed, and he thought an overlay approach with its flexibility of parking seemed to garner support.

**Commissioner Madar** felt the emphasis was on boundaries, flexibility of parking and encouraging Planned Unit Developments (PUD).

There was a general discussion to establish which boundary of the three offered would be most advantageous. After careful consideration, the map depicted on page 37 of the meeting packet was selected as best representing the group's ideas. This boundary did not cross the Glenn Highway and excluded a few residential houses on the northern portion of the new district.

**Commissioner Madar** mentioned that he had had conversations with city officials and they seemed to support a new district, not an overlay. Commissioner Madar also felt that it should be a mixed use district, with a limit as to what degree of industry would be allowed.

**Commissioner Kircher** indicated that if all the districts were to be zoned the same, residential property owners would then be taxed at the higher rate for an Industrial District.

Mrs. Garley suggested an opinion from the Borough Tax Assessor might clarify this issue. This letter would explain the impact on these property owners.

**Commissioner Madar** mentioned that the University of Washington Study encouraged a mixed use district. People could live and work in the city-center.

**Commissioner Kircher** expressed a sense of urgency to encourage growth of businesses this summer.

Mrs. Garley suggested first sending the suggested boundary changes forward to City Council, with the additional information that the Planning and Zoning Commission would be working on establishing a Central Business District. A time line would help to win support of City Council in accomplishing this work. Perhaps to suggest to Council that draft language would be ready by September. That way we too, have a deadline.

There were no additional comments.

COMMISSIONER KIRCHER moved to exit from the Committee of the Whole, and was seconded by COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE.

COMMISSIONER KIRCHER moved to prepare a Resolution to be forwarded to the City Council to establish new boundaries for a Central Business District and was seconded by COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE.

The Chair opened the discussion for comments from the commissioners.

There were no further comments.

**ROLL CALL VOTE ON MOTION [recommending approval]: Carried Unanimously.**

2. Board of Economic Development Report.

**Commissioner Madar** attended the April 4, 2011, regularly scheduled meeting. He indicated that he still did not receive a packet prior to the meeting. This made it very difficult to prepare for the meeting and do the necessary research for his input on the issues.

The first topic for consideration was a Review of the Economic Strategy for the City of Palmer. Mr. Jesse Jones, from the Chamber of Commerce presented a Tax Survey that had been recently compiled. This survey asked business owner their opinions on taxes on business, business license practices and ways to improve the business climate in Palmer. Commissioner Madar informed the Board that the Planning and Zoning Commission was working on establishing new boundaries for a Central Business District to attract new businesses into Palmer.

The Second topic was a Review of the City Code Regarding Sales Tax and Business License. The Planning and Zoning Commission agreed that this was one area that required additional work. For Temporary businesses there is currently a three tier approach:

- A One day Event License with a \$10.00 fee
- A three day Event License with a \$15.00 fee
- A State Fair License with a \$25.00 fee

The difficulty with these short term license seems to be the burden of reporting sales. There are associated penalties for not filling these reports, but filing these reports may almost discourage the growth of these small businesses in Palmer. This review was scheduled to be discussed at the May meeting as well.

Commissioner Campbell indicated that he was scheduled to attend this May meeting, but would be out of State for mandatory training. Commissioner Madar volunteered to attend this meeting in his stead. Commissioner Madar also indicated that he would be willing to attend all future meetings, and the Commission agreed to this arrangement.

Commissioner Madar requested that copies of these reports be provided to all members of the P & Z Commission. Staff was charged with mailing copies to all of the members.

J. PLAT REVIEWS:

There were no plat reviews for discussion at this meeting.

K. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were no public comments during this meeting.

L. STAFF REPORT:

Mrs. Garley introduced three topics for the Planning and Zoning Commission to consider. These three items came from the joint meeting between the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Palmer City Council. All three issues need to be reviewed during the May P & Z meeting and a time line established for each item.

1. This task is taken from the Palmer Annexation Strategy developed by Agnew::Beck. Paragraph 2 on page 49 of that report addresses several issues with annexation. The paragraph indicates:
  - a. Proactively addressing three issues that may arise during the annexation process. Those are;
    - i. Revised Zoning for agricultural lands
    - ii. Creation of a Rural Residential District
    - iii. Revised standards for services in low density, residential areas.
  - b. These three items may take as long as a year to complete.
2. Northern Economics, Inc. provided a report that identified 5 specific areas for possible annexation. Several of these areas included sub-areas as well. The Commission needs to develop a priority for these areas to be annexed. It is hoped that this recommendation would be formalized by the end of the year, for presentation to the City Council.

3. Review suggestions in the Agnew::Beck report on how to better conduct the annexation process. The City may have improved success with the process, if more involvement by the community is encouraged. Town meetings are also an excellent tool to inform the most people and help achieve the desired results.

Commissioners discussed current city services that were available for all borough residents to enjoy. These included the Palmer Library, the Ice Arena, the Palmer Airport and golf course. Annexation would continue to provide these services but would have a larger base to support these function.

Commissioner Kerlake highlighted the fact there was a need for organized growth in the Palmer area. This would benefit both the property owners and the City of Palmer. With the proper zoning districts in place, growth could be sustained and all stake holders would benefit from this as well.

M. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

**Commissioner Kerlake** wished to thank staff for the new binders that were prepared. This new compact format was easier to use.

**Commissioner Campbell** also expressed his thanks to staff.

**Commissioner Kircher** asked for the dates of the Annual Palmer Clean-up day. Mrs. Garley offered to provide him with a flyer. Commissioner Kircher also asked about junk vehicles. Was there anything in place to allow a person to have an unwanted vehicle towed? Staff was tasked to provide research on this issue.

**Commissioner Madar** also thanks staff for their support.

N. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

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Michael W. Madar, Chairman

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Ron Anderson, Recording Secretary