

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
CITY OF PALMER, ALASKA
REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2009
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 Kircher at 7:02 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL, DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

Present and constituting a quorum were Chairman Kircher, Commissioners Madar, Kerslake, Bower, Hamming, and Silva. Also present were Sandra Garley, Community Development Director, 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:

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 16, 2009 were approved as corrected.

F. PERSONS TO BE HEARD: None.

G. PUBLIC HEARING: None

H. UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

I. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Introduction of the Highway Corridor Landscape Committee

Ms. Garley introduced the Consultants from Sustainable Design Group, Luann Urfer and Eric Morey and citizen volunteer member Ron Bissett.

Ms. Urfer provided a power point presentation addressing the goals and plans for the landscape ordinance.

- Objective: Create an ordinance to promote and support Palmer's values and goals
- Goals: Improve road system; improve sidewalks and trails; support regional transportation; encourage depth of business district; increase vehicular-pedestrian safety
- Opportunities: gateway enhancements; character and use of Glenn Highway; pedestrian friendly streets; neighborhood and street treatments
- Addressed "livable streets"
- Addressed special issues such as snow, wildlife, history, lighting
- Talked about the next steps to take in the process

Commissioner Madar inquired of the boulevard type of setting for the Glenn Highway and pointed out specific areas that present hazardous pedestrian crossings; as an example he addressed the intersection of the Glenn and the Palmer/Wasilla Highway, (at the southwest corner) MacDonald's restaurant crossing. He also addressed turn lanes from the Glenn Highway onto Evergreen to go downtown.

Commissioner Kircher inquired as to when the Commission would be able to provide input for the ordinance; the consultant advised it will be an ongoing process and the comments would be welcome at any time. Ms. Garley stated the input needs to be provided prior to the finalization of the document to ensure any concerns are addressed ahead of time.

Commissioner Madar again requested pedestrian safety at intersections be addressed by the consultants. In response, Ms. Urfer discussed speed bumps versus speed dips, alternate surfaces at pedestrian crossings, adequate lighting and stated there are a number of options to look at to reduce safety concerns.

Ms. Garley explained the landscape ordinance needs to be in place prior to the design of the gateways into the city being finalized to ensure the city will have more input on the designs of the intersections and roadways.

Commissioner Kircher advised of a type of sidewalk lighting/reflector system he had seen in Ohio which was built into the road surface; the consultants took note of the location.

J. PLAT REVIEWS: None.

K. PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

L. STAFF REPORT:

Ms. Garley stated she attended the Annexation Strategy meeting on May 20, 2009 with Agnew::Beck, the consultants for this project. The meeting was very fruitful, and everyone who wished to speak had the opportunity to do so. People in attendance had very substantive questions about the process of annexation. By raising the questions early on in the process, staff and the consultants have the opportunity to research the issues and provide answers in a timely manner. The consultant will spend the summer months meeting with small groups of people to address their concerns and document the issues raised.

The Chamber of Commerce sponsored a meeting on Tuesday, with ADOT/PF to discuss the couplet, Ms. Garley attended the meeting; she advised the commission that the couplet is a very hot issue with the downtown merchants right now. Ms. Garley stated the downtown streets should be studied very carefully to make sure they can carry enough vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and cyclists to adequately serve the area. While the city may not have trees along its streets, the city could add bulb extensions to the sidewalks to ensure pedestrians do not have to cross such a wide span of asphalt as they are trying to cross the roadway. The City Manager's office has sent a letter to DOT requesting they do "context sensitive design" which is a specific public process procedure, involving a lot of contact with the people in the area to be affected. Once the citizens have identified the issues, DOT will need to take measures to ensure the items identified are addressed. DOT has stated they are committed to doing a context sensitive design which means not only will they hear what was

said, but that they will take steps to address what was said.

M. BOARD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: No report

N. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

Commissioner Madar stated he felt he did not have the opportunity to make his thoughts known during the last meeting regarding the need for a conditional use permit for the emergency shelter use on Tract C, Cope RSB; he stated the use occurring at Alaska Family Services more closely fits a residential care facility than a transient housing facility because the use requires more scrutiny than a hotel/motel which is a permitted use in the General Commercial district. He stated the permit issued was appropriate, and he wanted to ensure the city would continue to have the opportunity to review this type of use.

Staff was requested by Commissioner Madar to provide definitions for an Emergency/Homeless Shelter and a Boardinghouse. He also requested the uses be added as a conditional uses in the Limited Commercial (C-L) and General Commercial (C-G) districts. Commissioner Kerslake seconded his request.

COMMISSIONER MADAR stated he attended the annexation meeting and felt the same thing is occurring again; people are resisting change. He stated he hopes the annexation area is more substantial in size and that it goes down the Palmer/Wasilla highway for the revenue.

Commissioner Hamming questioned the intent of the Highway Corridor Landscape Ordinance and stated the direction the consultants were taking went beyond what he believed to be the intent of the scope of work. He inquired as to whether the ordinance would provide standards for road design in subdivisions as the consultant had stated. Ms. Garley advised the consultants are a new company and as such, they might produce more work than originally requested; however, any design standards would come before the commission for review. The consultants may provide recommendations for roadway designs for areas such as Alaska Street. Additionally the consultants may provide suggestions for appropriate plantings and trees for the area including vegetation that will not attract moose. Their suggestions for road design are not part of the highway corridor landscape ordinance. He also addressed the process for transmitting comments on the landscape ordinance to the consultants and wanted to ensure all commissioner comments were discussed at a meeting and not sent by individual commissioners; Ms. Garley recommended comments be discussed at the monthly commission meetings and then forwarded to the consultants.

Commissioner Hamming also addressed the debate process during the last meeting; thought it got short-circuited at the last meeting because the facility at Alaska Family Services is a use for which there is no definition in the code; he further stated he would not change his recommendation for rezoning the property from P, Public Use, to CG, General Commercial district.

Commissioner Silva stated she attended both the Couplet meeting and the Annexation meeting; and provided the commission with a brief overview of the couplet meeting and what future actions may be taken by the merchants. The merchants are bringing up a consultant next month to make a presentation to the city council regarding why one-way streets aren't a good option.

Commissioner Silva stated there were some very interesting and valid concerns brought up regarding annexation and the value of some farm lands.

Commissioner Silva has been reading the Palmer Urban Traffic Study, by Kinney Engineering, and wondered if it might be appropriate to appoint a task force to help with the plan. COMMISSIONER SILVA moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER MADAR, to appoint a task force to help with the Palmer Urban Traffic Study. No vote was taken on the motion.

Commissioner Bower stated he had the same concerns as Commissioner Hamming regarding the scope of work by the consultants for the highway corridor landscape ordinance and questioned when it would be appropriate to submit comments to the consultants. Ms. Garley addressed the issue and advised interim reports will be given by the consultants on the progress of the project. Ms. Garley requested the commission not wait until the document has been finished before submitting their comments; if the commission feels the consultants are going in a direction they do not feel appropriate, they should let the consultants know. The commission will have the opportunity to submit comments on the document prior to finalization and submittal to the city council for approval or disapproval of the ordinance. Commissioner Hamming wanted to ensure any comments submitted by the public go through the commission prior to being sent to the consultants. Commissioner Madar agreed with Commissioner Hamming's concerns as did Commissioner Silva. Commissioner Hamming suggested a summary be given by staff, to the commission, regarding progress of the project.

Chairman Kircher also addressed concerns from farmers regarding annexation and the issue of the agricultural deferment given by the Borough. Commissioner Madar stated that the Borough goes back seven years on the taxes and adds interest on the back taxes.

Chairman Kircher stated the merchants who are opposed to the couplet seem to be reacting without having all the necessary information to make an informed decision; he has been following the issue closely and has not made up his mind either way about the decision. He is looking for the rationale behind a proposed initiative coming from the merchants, and stated that some people do not like change of any kind.

O. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.

Michael A. Kircher, Chairman

Dawn U. Webster, Recording Secretary