

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

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**REGULAR MEETING  
THURSDAY, June 02, 2011  
7:00 P.M. - COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

A. CALL TO ORDER:

The special meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission was called to order by Chairman Madar at 7:11 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL, DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

Present and constituting a quorum were Chairman Madar, Commissioners Kerlake, Kircher and Weir. Commissioners Campbell and Preslar 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 Kerlake.

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

E. PERSONS TO BE HEARD:

There were no persons to be heard during this meeting.

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of proposed new Central Business District and draft ordinance to present as a recommendation to the Palmer City Council.
2. **COMMISSIONER KIRCHER** moved to enter into the community of the whole to allow for discussion of proposed new Central Business District and draft ordinance to present as a recommendation to the Palmer City Council. Motion was seconded by **COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE**. There were no objections to this motion.

**Commissioner Kerlake** mentioned the fact that several of the sample Central Business District ordinances from other cities were very extensive and overly complicated. He preferred a simpler approach to writing a new ordinance. He did recognize that there was also a version that might be too simple which would allow for too much interpretation.

**Commissioner Kircher** also preferred the simpler approach to drafting an ordinance.

There was a matrix or table in the boiler plate template for a Central Business District (CBD). This table spelled out, in a very direct format, what was permitted, what required a Conditional Use Permit and what was prohibited.

**Commissioner Madar** stated that he preferred limiting the proposed CBD to Limited Commercial activities. He felt that Commercial General or a Heavy Industrial use would not be suited for inclusion in an ideal CBD.

**Commissioner Weir** had presented no opening thoughts for the group.

The range of resulting discussion seemed to address four main areas of general concern:

- 1) How best to include a residential element in the Central Business District.
  - a. There are a number of residents included within the new CBD. All felt that for a downtown area to remain vibrant, a core population that lived downtown would be critical. This group can be developed in two different ways.

The first is to continue to allow single family or multiple family housing to remain in the CBD. These residents would then be able to walk to stores for their shopping and enjoy all the benefits that a thriving city center can provide. A movie theatre was mentioned as well as a bowling alley and similar forms of family entertainment. By living in the heart of the city, these individuals would also be shareholders in the growth and well being of the downtown district. Since it would be their neighborhood, they might be more motivated in its upkeep and growth.

The second approach would be to allow a business to rent out a second story of a building for use as an apartment. This approach has all the benefits associated with single family residents, but would attract a slightly different clientele. Perhaps younger families or persons wanting to rent without the bother of home ownership would be attracted to this arrangement. There would be no lawn to mow and again they would be centrally located for shopping, libraries and other services.

Businesses would also benefit from this core population. This would provide for a year round base to support future growth. Condos were also mentioned as an alternative housing solution in this new district.

Design issues were mentioned in conjunction with housing. There is a small town feel to build right up to the sidewalk, with parking either provided for on the street or behind the business. The idea was suggested that if this approach was implemented universally, the overall feel or aesthetic look might not be what was desired. Allowing any set back from the sidewalk was also determined to cause problems as well. Perhaps an average set-back can be determined on a block by block basis to correct this.

If there is sustained growth what would happen to property taxes? For a single family residence, an increase in property value would be a good thing. This would help to build equity for the property holder. Perhaps, property tax would not have a negative impact on the owners. Taxes are proportioned by the appraised value of the property by the Borough. This would allow for perhaps significant increase in value before the tax is reapportioned.

Additionally, it was felt that perhaps a 'zero lot line' style of construction be considered for this district as well. This would support the building of condos and other similar styles of housing.

2) The general sign code, currently in place, does not adequately address the specific applications that businesses may want to employ to advertise their shops.

a. Signage has to be tailored to Palmer. Several signs have been lost to the wind. It was established as one of the goals for the draft CBD regulation, that this be adequately addressed.

It was agreed that there needs to be some control over both the type and the number of signs allowed in the core business district.

Staff was directed to draft proposals for a sign code section of the new CBD regulation. This district can also be covered by the basic sign guidance from the existing sign code.

3) Parking will need to be addressed.

a. There currently exists a need to provide adequate parking for both the current businesses and to support the anticipated growth in business as well. One of the suggestions dealt with the current 'wavier' system that accidentally allows for a shortage of ample parking.

If businesses are to thrive, parking must be addressed. If pay for parking spaces were to be able to generate monies for improvements, then downtown parking would become a viable option and help to encourage and support expansion of this new district.

4) Special areas within the CBT that would need to be addressed, such as the current Historical District.

a. The intent of the new CBD is to encourage diversity and to sustain growth. One of the issues that will need to be addressed is special 'mini' districts within the Central Business District.

One existing area that can serve as an example is the Historic District.

This is geographically within the CBD but must be dealt with in a slightly more specific way.

These 'mini' districts need specific language to address signage, set back requirements and design standards. It was felt, that if this is done correctly, these small enclaves can fit into the CBD and add flavor and variety to this core section of Palmer.

**COMMISSIONER KERSLAKE** moved, seconded by **COMMISSIONER WEIR** to leave the community of the whole. There were no objections to this motion.

The Commission directed staff to compile a list of current businesses within the proposed Central Business District. In this way, it is hoped that the number of legal-nonconforming properties will be kept to a minimum.

Staff was also directed to present an 'intent' statement for the draft regulation. The hopes were, that a simple regulation could be crafted that encompasses the concerns with expansion and still encourage growth.

G. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:

**Commissioner Kerlake** had no additional comments for the Commission.

**Commissioner Kircher** suggested that perhaps the Board of Economic Development could approach any small businesses currently located in Anchorage that might be displaced due to re-zoning or land use issues. These businesses would be a welcome boost to the business sector in Palmer. This suggestion was to be offered at the next regularly scheduled Board of Economic Development meeting by a representative from the Planning and Zoning Commission.

**Commissioner Madar** had no additional comments for the Commission.

**Commissioner Weir** had no additional comments for the Commission.

H. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

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Michael W. Madar, Chairman

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Ron Anderson, Recording Secretary