

City of Gem Lake
Planning Commission Meeting – April 11, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Planning Commission Chair Joshua Patrick called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Commission Members Don Cummings, Stephanie Farrell and Art Pratt were present. Not present was Commission Member Derek Wippich. Also present: City Attorney Kevin Beck, City Planner Evan Monson, Acting City Clerk Melissa Lawrence, White Bear Montessori Head of School Marnie McPherson, Justin McPherson, City Councilmember Jim Lindner and Resident Dan Marier.

April 11, 2023 Agenda

A motion was made by Commissioner Cummings to accept the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Pratt. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, agenda accepted.

Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Pratt to approve the March 14, 2023, Planning Commission Meeting minutes, seconded by Commissioner Farrell. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, minutes are approved.

Public Hearings

Requested Ordinance Amendment to the Consolidated Lane Use Ordinance – White Bear Montessori School

The White Bear Montessori School (WBMS) operates at 1201 County Road E East, at the southwest corner of the city. The parcel is zoned Executive Residential (RX), and is also identified as being within the Institutional Overlay zone (the 2017 zoning map refers to the Institutional Overlay as a ‘Conditional Use Institutional’). The Consolidated Land Use Ordinance states in Section 15.1 that the purpose of the Institutional Overlay is for permitting uses that serve the public, and that are providing uses on a nonprofit basis. Section 15.2 lists ‘religious institutions’ and ‘private child care and education facilities’ as uses that are permitted within the zone; Sections 15.3 and 15.4 lists accessory and conditional/interim uses permitted in the overlay.

The overlay zone establishes limitations on uses within the zone. WBMS would be considered as a ‘private child care and education facilities’ use in the ordinance. WBMS is considering improvements to their facility, and is requesting changes to the ordinance that would allow for an increase in students, as well as potential expansion of their existing facilities. The requested increase in students would be to establish a new maximum of 182. The applicant has also requested allowing structures on the site to occupy up to 30% of a lot in the Institutional Overlay, and that the minimum amount of green space on a lot in the Institutional Overlay be reduced from 25% of the lot to 20%.

Marnie McPherson shared that the school as is right now can hold 140 students if they changed the common room that they have into a classroom, but the school would prefer to keep it as a common room.

Commissioner Cummings introduced a motion to open the public hearing on the matter at 7:07 p.m., Commissioner Pratt seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried.

Councilmember Jim Lindner shared that the building used to be a church before it was turned into a school. Councilmember Lindner feels that from a resident’s perspective these changes should have been made a long time ago and sees nothing wrong with the plan.

Head of School Marnie McPherson shared that the school has never grown beyond 120 students and does have a wait list about a year and a half out. Currently there are 115 students enrolled. The school is hoping to expand their elementary program and leave the preschool as is.

Commission Chair Patrick asked those in attendance if anyone else had any comments on the matter. The public had no other comments.

Commissioner Pratt introduced a motion to close the public hearing on the matter at 7:12 p.m., Commissioner Farrell seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried.

Commissioner Pratt asked how they were planning to expand the building. Mrs. McPherson responded that the building could be added onto, but the plan is to add an additional building in the field instead like one of the Montessori schools did in St. Paul.

Commission Chair Patrick asked what the field is currently used for. Mrs. McPherson responded that the field is currently a prairie restoration project, which used to be called the "Field of Dreams". There are three (3) rain gardens located in the field and many box elder trees have been cut down.

Commissioner Cummings feels that this request is reasonable.

City Planner Evan Monson recommends approval based on the recommendations prepared by himself which include:

1. Redlined Ordinance with proposed amendments (Page 7 of Staff Report)
2. 2017 Gem Lake Zoning Map

Commissioner Pratt introduced a motion to recommend approval to the City Council based on the recommendations by City Planner Evan Monson, seconded by Commissioner Cummings. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, Zoning request will be forwarded to the City Council for approval.

Old Business

Discussion of Nuisance Ordinance No. 86

City Planner Evan Monson shared that at the previous month's meeting there were several items that the Commission wants to consider. Commissioner Cummings would like to see some alignment with White Bear Township and White Bear Lake as the City uses both for certain services. His main areas of concern are noise and lighting. He would also like to see some language added that references the Consolidated Land Use Ordinance and Home Occupation Ordinance.

Commission Chair Patrick has received two (2) calls regarding opinions or suggestions on the Nuisance Ordinance. One call was from a business over in the business district of Scheuneman Road. The owner was concerned after reading the Newsletter and hearing about a possible parking ban on Scheuneman. Commission Chair Patrick assured him that this is in regards to the residential section of Scheuneman and not the business district. Another call was from a resident on Scheuneman Road calling about a certain property located near him and how it ties into the Nuisance Ordinance.

Resident Dan Marier shared that he feels it would be unfair to all other residents that live on Scheuneman Road to put a no parking ban on all of Scheuneman because of one problem property.

City Planner Evan Monson is going to work on putting together a draft Ordinance for review for the May meeting.

New Business

None

Open Items for Commission Members to Bring Up

None

Future Meetings

City Council Meeting, Tuesday, April 18, 2023 at Heritage Hall, and Planning Commission Meeting, Tuesday, May 9, 2023 at Heritage Hall.

Attendance Inquiry

Commissioner Chair Patrick surveyed the Commission to see if any of the members would have any issues attending the May 9, 2023 meeting. At this time all Commission Members in attendance have no conflicts and Acting City Clerk Melissa Lawrence will check with Commissioner Wippich closer to the date.

Adjournment

Being there no further business, following a motion from Commissioner Pratt, seconded by Commissioner Cummings, the meeting adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Melissa Lawrence