

MINUTES
MOUNT VERNON PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
May 27, 2020

Due to the nature of the Novel Coronavirus, now known as Covid-19, and the restrictions placed on group gatherings by Governor Reynolds State of Public Health Disaster Emergency for Iowa, the City Planning and Zoning Commission believes it would be both impossible and impractical to hold a meeting in one location. With that being said, the Planning and Zoning meeting was held via the Zoom application. The public was invited to participate via telephone by calling 1-929-205-6099 and prompted to enter the following information: Meeting ID: 839 7670 1887. Password: 533419. If assistance was needed before the meeting began the public could contact City Administrator, Chris Nosbisch at 319-359-8613. The following commission members were present: Truman Jordan, Jenna Wischmeyer, Matt Nelson, Trude Elliott, Joan Burge and Jay Willems. Absent: Rich Hileman. Also in attendance, City Administrator, Chris Nosbisch and City Planner, Laura Eckles. Meeting was called to order by Jordan at 5:38 p.m.

Approval of Agenda and February 12, 2020 minutes. These documents stand approved unless otherwise indicated by Commission members. Motion made by Willems, seconded by Elliott to approve agenda and minutes as presented. Carried all. Hileman absent.

Discussion and possible action on amendments to the zoning code relating to on-site parking of RVs, campers, recreational vehicles, etc. Nosbisch started by saying that last year the commission made recommendations for a few changes to this ordinance and forwarded on to City Council for review. When City Council received it, a few members of the community stepped forward and asked for even looser restrictions. Instead of kicking it back to the commission for further review, Council went ahead and approved the changes that had been made by Planning and Zoning and is now asking the commission to determine if there is any desire to look at the loosening these restrictions. Right now the City does not allow the parking of those vehicles in the established side and rear yards. Council is asking if the commission has any desire to further open that door and allow encroachment in the rear 25 feet or the side 5 feet setback. One concern Nosbisch voiced with parking in the side yard setback is the proximity of combustible materials. The five foot setback allows homeowners to maintain the minimum 10 foot separation required by fire code. One option would be a permission form signed by the neighbors that could be recorded. If neighbors refuse, it would not be allowed. Elliott asked what would happen if one house was sold. Willems said usually that type of agreement would be based on the land and would move on to the new owner. Elliott asked about allowing parking in the rear yard. Nosbisch said the rear setback is 25 feet so there is more area to work with. Nosbisch said the City was holding off on enforcing the current ordinance to determine if there was any desire by P&Z to make any changes. Right now as the ordinance is written, a personal vehicle, as defined in the ordinance, can

park anywhere in the front, side or rear yard setback as long as it is on hard surface or gravel, year round. Wischmeyer asked Nosbisch about concerns with fire protection with those vehicles. He said it was not a concern because typically they are not lived or stored for those reasons. Wischmeyer said the seasonal timeframe for the parking of the recreational vehicles makes sense. She went on to say if parking of these vehicles is allowed in the front yard if it is on a hard surface or gravel, why not extend this to the rear and side if it is only for a certain timeframe and meets the other requirements of the ordinance. Nosbisch clarified that right now parking is allowed in those areas if it does not encroach in the required setbacks. Wischmeyer said she is ok with the ordinance as written and does not see any need for changes. The rest of the commission agrees with Wischmeyer. Nosbisch will inform Council that they do not feel any changes are needed at this time.

Discussion and possible action on amendments to the zoning code relating to 1st story apartments in the CB Central Business District. Nosbisch came up with some requirements for the commission to consider that would include no more than 50% of the first floor square footage shall be used for single or multi-residential uses; the 50% of the first floor square footage used for dwelling purposes cannot be adjacent to the street (meaning the store front must remain commercial) and the 50% of allowable square footage contains enough square footage to meet the minimum square footage requirements for dwelling units. There are not a lot of buildings in the downtown area that would meet these requirements but there are some. Elliott said she knows someone that was on the previous commission years ago when this issue was addressed and at that time they were adamant that this was a good rule that was put in place. Elliott also asked what the depth requirements was for a storefront. Nosbisch said there is no depth requirement, it would be 50% of the square footage and there would have to be enough square footage that it would meet the minimum requirements for an apartment. Willems did not like the idea of being able to access the living quarters from the main level (as it is written in the above proposed requirements) but Jordan said that there are several stairways accessible from the street front that go up to the top floor living quarters not. Nosbisch said if there was any interest in by the commission to look at the proposal that he has given them, we can meet again on the subject. If there is no interest, he would let Council know that staff put a proposal together but the commission has chosen to recommend against it. He also said that ultimately, City Council can decide to put it in place but it takes four fifths of them to override a recommendation from the commission. Nosbisch also said one option would be to allow it as a conditional use but warned that once the first conditional use permit was issued, it would be difficult to deny another one, but also said the nice thing about them is that you can set the conditional uses as needed. Nelson had concerns about reducing the requirements for square footage in a commercial space. Wischmeyer did not feel the need to explore changing the code for this and felt that with the bypass going through it is even more critical to keep the character of the uptown areas as it is. Elliott said the City has done a good job of keeping the downtown

area viable and needed to continue to do that, especially with the bypass coming through. Remaining commission members agreed and did not wish to see any changes made.

Discussion of by-pass plan and timeframe for the approval process. Nosbisch is asking for how the commission feels about a joint meeting with City Council. The challenge is getting both groups together on a Zoom meeting with some type of control. The question he is posing is does the commission want him to continue to try and plan a joint meeting with Council or are they comfortable starting the process knowing full well that Council may change some of their recommendations. Willems asked if there were specific discussion items or if it would be open ended. Nosbisch said the biggest point out there that he sees would be to allow retail outside of the downtown area for the first time since zoning has been in Mount Vernon. He knows that Mount Vernon has worked hard to keep retail out of that area but things are changing. Elliott said she would like to have a joint meeting but realized that would be difficult and does not want to stop the process. Nosbisch said that each member of the commission has a right to be at a Council meeting and make recommendations. Willems asked if the meeting would be open to the public for potential land owners to ask questions. Nosbisch said the meeting would be open to the public to attend but it would be up to the Mayor to allow comments. Jordan said that the commission had never actually discussed the plan itself and asked if they would want to have a meeting where they actually did talk about it. Nosbisch said the first step in the recommendation process for moving this forward starts with Planning and Zoning and they would have at a minimum of two meetings to discuss it. The question is does the Commission want to meet with City Council and know where they stand as it relates to certain items before they start their discussion or do they want to start the discussion without going through a joint meeting. Jordan wants to make sure that the commission members understand what the plan says before discussion starts. Wischmeyer suggested starting the discussion process at their next meeting if members spend time reviewing the document. Nosbisch felt that having a joint meeting with Council could potentially delay the process by about a month and said that a one-on-one meeting between Planning and Zoning and the consultant would be best in keeping the process moving. He would like to invite the consultant to the next commission meeting and discuss the plan in detail.

Old Business. None.

New Business. None.

Meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m. on May 27, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,
Marsha Dewell
Deputy Clerk

