MEETING MINUTES  
PLAN COMMISSION  
Wednesday, May 29, 2019  
7:00 P.M.  
Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, James C. Lytle Council Chambers

Members Present: Peter Isaac (Vice-Chair), Terri Dubin, Carol Goddard, George Halik, Andrew Pigozzi

Members Absent: Colby Lewis, Jennifer Draper

Staff Present: Scott Mangum, Planning and Zoning Manager

Presiding Member: Vice-Chairman Isaac

1. CALL TO ORDER / DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Vice-Chair Isaac called the meeting to order at 7:10 P.M.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: April 10, 2019

Commissioner Dubin made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Halik. The Commission voted unanimously, 5-0, to approve the minutes of April 10, 2019.

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Text Amendment  
Office Use in Residential Districts  
19PLND-0041

A Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment pursuant to City Code Title 6, Zoning, to Chapter 8, Residential Districts of the Zoning Ordinance, to allow office uses and revise special conditions for office uses within Residential Districts.

Ms. Jones provided a brief review of the proposed text amendment, emphasizing that the amendment would affect R5 and R6 General Residential Districts, where office uses are currently allowed as Special Uses, that are adjacent to Downtown Core Districts. There would be one Section in the Zoning Code revised as part of the text amendment if approved by City Council.

Vice-Chair Isaac opened the hearing to questions from the Commission.
Commissioner Dubin asked why the proposed amendment was needed. Mr. Mangum responded that the proposed amendment comes from an Aldermanic referral to the Plan Commission from Alderman Fiske and shared her views on possible benefits of the amendment being approved including increasing the local tax base, supporting the transit systems with increased commuters, being compatible with height and setbacks within the zoning districts, and preserving community involvement by requiring Council approval amongst other benefits.

Commissioner Halik inquired about the current vacancy rate. Ms. Jones responded that the vacancy rate for office space in Evanston has been low, typically single digits. Mr. Mangum stated that a recent CoStar information used in Evanston’s Economic Development 2018 reports have the office vacancy rate under 5% with rents at $30 per square foot.

Commissioner Pigozzi asked what possible negative effects there would be on housing in these areas. Ms. Jones responded that it may be possible but difficult to say for certain then added that the staff report states some concern of possibly expanding the downtown into more residential areas. That is part of the reason for keeping the Special Use process as part of project reviews.

Vice-Chair Isaac asked how many parcels would be affected. Ms. Jones referenced the zoning map included in the packet and Mr. Mangum stated that there are approximately 7 different areas this amendment would affect and that instead of individual parcels, zoning lots likely made up of multiple parcels of common ownership would be considered.

Vice-Chair Isaac asked what ground floor uses would be in the office buildings. Ms. Jones responded that they would likely be lobby space, especially since retail use is not permitted within the R5 and R6 districts. Vice-Chair Isaac then asked if there are any restrictions for parking above the ground floor. Ms. Jones responded that she does not believe there is anything that prohibits that use.

Commissioner Halik inquired about how the proposed text amendment would affect the proposed library parking lot development. Mr. Mangum responded that the amendment would allow for future office development without the need to change the zoning as previously proposed. It would permit an office use to be built to zoning standards of the district and not only be within an existing residential housing structure. The library lot project was tabled at by the City Council so that project would not be reconsidered under these regulations unless a new planned development application was submitted.

Vice-Chair Isaac asked if any applicant would have to come before the Commission and City Council and what the voting difference would be for the library lot development. Mr. Mangum responded that it depends on the size of the development. A development meeting thresholds for a planned development would come before Plan Commission
versus ZBA. If there is opposition to a possible map amendment, a petition of 30% of property owners within 500 feet of the property, a super-majority vote of 7 out of 9 is required from City Council.

Vice-Chair Isaac then announced that there is ability of property owners within 500 feet of the affected properties to submit a written request for a continuance of the hearing to refute information presented by the petitioner. A request for continuance was submitted by Marcia Kuhr who wished to have additional time to think about the proposed amendment.

The public hearing was then opened to the public for questions. A total of 9 members of the public spoke with the following questions:

- Janet Steidl inquired as to whether or not this amendment should have gone before the Zoning Committee and if the amendment is targeting these particular properties for office development. Mr. Mangum responded that the amendment came from an Aldermanic referral to the Commission and staff is unable to answer what the full intent of the referral.

- Vicki Burke with the Women’s History and Leadership Organization in the Women’s Club asked how the affected properties came to be included since the most concentrated area incorporates the Women’s Club of Evanston, the WTCU historic property and several residential properties that were a part of the petition against the library lot development. Mr. Mangum referenced the aldermanic referral stating it deals with properties within the R5 and R6 properties that are adjacent to the D2 and D3 districts. Vice-Chair Isaac stated that the affected areas are adjacent to D2 and D3 districts as well as within the R5 and R6 districts.

- Kiera Kelly inquired about the library parking lot needing to be approved with a super majority vote and being brought back to Council for reconsideration and if passing the text amendment would change the threshold for the vote. Mr. Mangum responded that if the amendment were approved, an office could be reviewed and if of a certain size, would be considered a planned development needing Plan Commission review and Council approval. A map amendment which triggered the library lot petition would not be needed. The applicant for the library lot development would need to submit a new application and begin the review process from the beginning. The proposed text amendment would not change the process of the current application.

- Sarah Vanderwicken inquired about height requirements within the zoning districts, notification requirements and whether or not there is a new project at the library lot site could the City provide the land for affordable housing. Ms. Jones reviewed the permitted heights within each of the affected zoning districts and stated that any new office use would still have to go through a Special Use review process for approval of the use or Planned Development process if it meets the minimum thresholds for that type of development. Mr. Mangum stated that the proposed text amendment was noticed within the Evanston Review and
no mailed notices were required, if there is a map amendment then mailed notices would be sent within a certain radius. He added that taxpayer information is obtained through the Cook County Treasurer for that purpose and it is public information. Zoning allows for affordable housing at the library lot site, however, selling the lot would be City Council’s decision.

- Tina Paden stated that the Alderman should be present to answer questions then asked how the parcels were chosen and how this relates to the rezoning within North Downtown Plan. Mr. Mangum stated that the aldermanic referral language created the affected parcels and that the North Downtown Plan was not adopted. Ms. Jones added that the North Downtown Plan is a separate document that was not approved by City Council and does not affect this or other rezoning cases. Ms. Paden then asked if her property that is within the R6 district would be affected. Ms. Jones stated that based on the location of that property, it would not be affected by the proposed text amendment.

- MaryAnn Benveniste asked what effects this amendment would have and if they were taken into consideration. Mr. Mangum stated that the immediate effect would be allowance of more office use within the R5 and R6 districts. Ms. Jones added that the staff report for the proposed amendment mentioned both possible positive and negative outcomes including increased office use and the possibility of being viewed as expanding the downtown into residential areas.

- Anna Roosevelt of the Southeast Evanston Association stated that some answers provided to questions did not clarify the issues with the proposed amendment.

- Harris Miller asked how historic properties would be affected and if properties could be grandfathered in to keep the historic nature. He also inquired about possible effects on Francis Willard grants and variance requests. Mr. Mangum stated that if those properties fall within the guidelines of the text amendment the property may be able to have an office use constructed. Vice-Chair Isaac added that the text amendment would not change the historic nature of the existing buildings or the regulations that govern historic properties within Evanston. There would be no required change to the uses of those properties with this amendment. Mr. Mangum added that this text amendment itself would not have specific impacts to specific properties; individual projects would have more specific effects on adjacent properties.

- Mark Tendam asked if parking would be permitted on lower levels and how bad building aesthetics could be avoided. Vice-Chair Isaac stated that in the R5 and R6 districts, residential uses would still be required to provide parking and would be similar to office uses in that regard. Ms. Jones responded that parking could possibly be permitted on the lower levels. The aesthetic aspect would need to be addressed by staff through the Design and Project Review Committee or through the ZBA or Plan Commission during their review; ultimately it is the final decision of the City Council. Mr. Tendam asked if staff is recommending approval of the amendment. Vice-Chair Isaac responded that staff is not providing a
recommendation but is presenting information for the Commission to make a recommendation regarding the proposed amendment.

Vice-Chair Isaac opened the hearing up to public testimony. A total of 8 people spoke and provided the following comments:

- Kiera Kelly asked for clarification on when the ZBA would look at this item. Ms. Jones clarified that the proposed text amendment will not be reviewed by the ZBA; however, if a project that is affected by the text amendment is applied for, the code would call for that project to be reviewed by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Vice-Chair Isaac added that should a developer propose to build an office building, they would go before the ZBA which will review possible effects on surrounding areas.

- Sarah Vanderwicken expressed confusion regarding the purpose of the continuance. Vice-Chair Isaac explained that the purpose is to present additional information and refute what was already presented. The commission and the public would have the ability to ask questions regarding any new information. Mr. Hugh DuBose added that staff will not present new information and that the purpose is for the continuance requester to prepare information rebutting the statements and evidence presented to this point.

- Tina Paden stated that the City is now in dire need of office space, however, the E2 buildings sit on a site that was originally an office building that sat vacant. It looks like the City is making up a need.

- Anna Roosevelt stated that it seems like the change will reduce neighbors’ attitude toward the project and have no need for a majority vote. The view is the text amendment will assist the library lot project and other effects are not the goal. It would also change required vote for the development. Ms. Roosevelt continued explaining that there are wide implications possible and that it is much more logical to change goals for downtown and outside the downtown. 5 to 10 year goals should be considered and a broader view is needed to connect this project to a longer term plan.

- Harris Miller does not recommend following though and is concerned about the aesthetics of buildings by Chicago and Church. He also suggested talking with other business owners who could be affected. It would be a shame to see changes to the area and some things considered inappropriate for changes.

- Marge Gambow with the Women’s Club of Evanston stated that the organization has not changed its position on the library parking lot.

- Mark Tendam stated that he agreed with Anna Roosevelt and does not see this amendment stopping regardless of staff and Commission recommendations and that raises concerns. He stated that he is not opposed to development but the library parking lot development is flawed and he has concerns about ram rodding the proposed text amendment through. He does not feel the development is what the City should have.

**Commissioner Goddard made a motion to continue the item to the June 12,**
2019 meeting. Commissioner Pigozzi seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken and the motion passed, 5-0.

Ayes: Dubin, Goddard, Halik, Isaac, Pigozzi
Nays:

Vice-Chair Isaac stated that the statement of the continuance date at the meeting is the only notification that will be provided for this case.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Janet Steidl inquired whether the current meeting is a special meeting or not and added that had this been a regular meeting, the continuance would have been one month. Vice-Chair Isaac responded that there is no required minimum amount of time required between meetings. Ms. Steidl added that it is unfair and unfortunate and that the proposed text amendment affects a lot of properties. Not many people are aware of this text amendment and present at the meeting. One month should be provided for the purposes of notification. She then asked if the Zoning Committee would review the proposed amendment. Vice-Chair responded that the Commission will take up once all testimony is completed and deliberations are taking place.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Pigozzi made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Goddard seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved by voice vote 5-0.
The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Meagan Jones
Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Community Development Department