MEETING MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, February 12, 2020
7:00 P.M.
Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, James C. Lytle Council Chambers

Members Present: Peter Isaac (Chair), Jennifer Draper, Carol Goddard, John Hewko, Brian Johnson, Jane Sloss

Members Absent: George Halik, Andrew Pigozzi

Staff Present: Scott Mangum, Planning and Zoning Manager
             Meagan Jones, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
             Brian George, Assistant City Attorney

Presiding Member: Chair Isaac

1. CALL TO ORDER / DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chair Isaac called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. Ms. Jones called the roll and a quorum was established.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: January 8, 2020

Commissioner Goddard suggested a minor edit.

Commissioner Goddard made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 22, 2020 meeting as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Sloss. A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved, 5-0, with one abstention.

3. OLD BUSINESS (Continued from January 8, 2020 meeting)

   A. Text Amendment
       Ground Floor Retail Uses in the Downtown 19PLND-0107
       A Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment pursuant to City Code Title 6, Zoning, to revise regulations related to ground floor retail uses in the D2 Downtown Retail Core Zoning District

       Ms. Jones provided a review of previous conversation on the proposed amendment and presented revisions that followed from that discussion.
Chair Isaac opened the hearing to questions from the Commission and Public. Hearing none he then asked if there was any public comment on the proposed amendment. Hearing none, Chair Isaac closed the hearing and the Commission reviewed the standards.

It was generally agreed that each standard had been met with intentions to follow the Comprehensive Plan, better fit within retail oriented areas and no evidence being shown that negative impacts would occur to adjacent properties. Standard 4 was not applicable.

Commissioner Draper asked for clarification on the language regarding placement of uses at the ground floor or above the ground floor. Ms. Jones responded that above ground floor financial institutions would likely have a greater variety of uses within it (such as investment and corporate banking) while on the ground floor, the intention is to have the retail banking portion of the financial institutions since that would create more pedestrian traffic.

Chair Isaac proposed to rework the language within the proposed text amendment to make it clearer.

Commissioner Goddard inquired if a financial institution could just have an ATM on the ground floor and meet the intent of the amendment. Ms. Jones responded that for this amendment that would not suffice, staff would take a look at what percentage of a financial institution is dedicated to retail banking type uses versus another use such as investment banking. Commissioner Goddard replied that the amendment language should better reflect that.

Some discussion continued regarding the wording of the amendment. It was agreed that reference to ATMs could be removed and wording describing retail banking as the primary use be added.

Commissioner Johnson asked if it would be advisable to use the phrase retail financial services to address uses such as investments brokerage that may have the appearance of the floor of a bank. Chair Isaac stated that previous discussion centered on the goal of the area to have ground floor retail and to not just have any type of financial services on the ground floor but to have uses that would also encourage pedestrian traffic, especially as it relates to the D2 District.

**Commissioner Goddard made a motion to recommend approval of the text amendment as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Hewko. A roll call vote was taken and the motion was approved, 6-0.**

**Ayes:** Draper, Goddard, Johnson, Sloss, Hewko, Isaac

**Nays:**
4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Map Amendment

2044 Wesley Avenue 20PLND-0002

John Cleary, owner, submits for a Zoning Ordinance Map Amendment pursuant to City Code Title 6, Zoning, to remove property, known as 2044 Wesley Ave., from the West Evanston Overlay (oWE) District. This map amendment is in anticipation of a future planned development that would include this and additional properties, and consist of 3-story townhouses and one 4-story apartment building with indoor and outdoor parking.

Mr. Mangum provided an overview of past plans for the area such as the West Evanston Master Plan and the Canal-Green Bay Road- Ridge Avenue-Church Street Study Area Report. He then reviewed some existing regulations for the West Evanston Overlay District and properties within the district that had been developed. He then introduced the proposed map amendment.

Chair Isaac opened the hearing up to questions from the Commission. He then asked why the removal from the overlay was needed. Mr. Mangum replied that it was a request from the applicant due to not owning enough of the needed properties (such as the Public Storage and Parking Lot) to fully comply with the overlay.

Commissioner Sloss then asked how the development would follow the West Evanston Master Plan versus the overlay district and does that relate the form-based code. Mr. Mangum replied that the form based code of the West Evanston Overlay District implements the West Evanston Plan.

Mr. John Cleary, the applicant, stated he moved to Evanston in 2013 and lives near the site with children in the local schools. He then expressed that the overlay is very restrictive. He then explained that part of the overlay requirements include connecting the streets; on a lot that is 100 ft. deep this would be restrictive for building once the streets are in place. Mr. Cleary then stated that he is looking to build 2.5 to 3 –story townhouses; the proposed apartment building is not within the overlay district. If the properties are not in the overlay he would seek to build within the underlay zoning code regulations.

Chair Isaac inquired why the applicant was not applying for the map amendment and planned development at the same time. Mr. Cleary responded that due to cost, approximately $100,000 in plans, civil engineering and environmental work, it makes more sense to do the map amendment first then apply for the development. If the City wants only townhouses, he would agree to sign an agreement or undertaking to proceed and appear before City Council. He went on to state that there is very little new affordable housing construction and townhomes are a form of housing that is missing.
Commissioner Draper asked Mr. Cleary what his plans would be if the proposed text amendment does not pass. Mr. Cleary responded that building a road between Wesley Ave. and Jackson St. would be impossible, however, if the overlay is removed then the site would be developed and generate taxes.

Commissioner Hewko stated that the materials indicate a need for the Public Storage lot along Simpson St. to be a part of development and inquired if the development is contingent on obtaining that property. Mr. Cleary responded that the proposal has nothing to do with the Public Storage facility and the parking owned by Walgreens.

Chair Isaac then opened up the hearing to questions from the public.

Mr. Marcus Lechleidner asked if all of the parcels are needed for the project to make financial sense. Mr. Cleary responded that the way the plan is laid out, development would require the purchase of the public storage facility, Walgreen’s parking lot, and property along Green Bay Road as well as putting in a road, which would be very expensive. He added that the plan was created in an era when a lot of development was occurring.

Mr. Lechleidner then asked what the expected cost of the townhomes would be. Mr. Cleary replied that townhomes costs are proposed to be $500,000 - $550,000 once complete, approximately $2,000 per month mortgage. Expected to be 2,000 square feet with 2-car garages.

Mr. Lechleidner then stated that a lot of people walk through the property and asked if it would still be possible with the development? Mr. Cleary responded that it could be possible to have access. He has an option on the properties but the City may have to foot the bill to clean the property. It would still be possible to walk through from Jackson St.

Jeff Masters inquired if the public storage facility does not go away if there would still be a road between the two properties. Mr. Cleary responded that there would be a private drive linking Jackson Ave. and Wesley Ave. between the facility and the townhome buildings, owned by the townhome owners.

Chair Isaac stated that it appears that the front of the townhomes would be south facing and to access the homes, one would need to go from the public street to the private sidewalk to access the townhomes and there would be a private alley to access public streets to get to the garages in the back.

Jeff Masters asked for clarification on the zoning change. Mr. Cleary stated that the Plan calls out the layout of roads and development. The underlying zoning would remain R4 and building could occur. Mr. Mangum stated that the overlay calls out the
area for the public roads and then calls for development regulations. If it is removed, the underlying zoning district regulations would have to be followed. The R4 District provides for a wider variety of housing than the overlay. Mr. Cleary added that the R4 District has lower height restrictions as well as density.

Ms. Carolyn Dellutri asked what the maximum height is for the R4 District. Mr. Mangum responded that the maximum height is 35 ft. or 2.5 stories. R5 is 50 ft. or five stories.

Ms. Amy Masters voiced concern over the amount of greenspace and asked if removing the property from the overlay would remove those requirements? Mr. Mangum responded that the overlay requirements would be removed. One way to ensure keeping the greenspace could be to tie the two together, the map amendment and planned development. Chair Isaac stated the other option would be to amend the plan.

Ms. Dellutri asked if the property is removed and a planned development follows, could variances be granted regarding height. Mr. Mangum confirmed that could be done.

Chair Isaac then opened the hearing up to public comment.

Mr. Masters voiced concern of the proposal coming in two parts. There was a long process to implement the plan. If the proposed change occurs but the property is sold, there are no guarantees that “good faith” would be followed.

Ms. Dellutri asked for the Commission to consider the character of the area which should be kept. In the discussion about the R5a zoning Commissioners stated that the study should be looked at again. The Study called for downzoning. If the parking lot and storage facility are sold then they are stuck so the entire area should be considered.

Ms. Masters stated that there is a lot of resentment in the 5th Ward towards developers and residents are angry. The whole area should be restudied and the people in the area should be considered, not add too many people and density to the area.

Mr. Chris Gotschall stated that there are decisions being made based on old plans and data. There is a lot of tension. He added that townhomes are not necessarily bad but items addressed in the plan spoke to density.

Mr. Cleary stated that part of the parcel does not restrict but extends Jackson St. at his cost. He has no problem committing to just townhomes. There is density further south with very dense zoning, this area is less dense.

Chair Isaac closed the public hearing and the Commission began deliberations.

Commissioner Goddard asked what has been developed within the overlay. Mr. Mangum reviewed three properties, Emerson Square, Y.O.U. building and a ComEd
station. He added that some properties have become available but not enough TIF increment has been created for public aggregation of properties.

Commissioner Draper asked if there was a public-private partnership possible for the street. Mr. Mangum stated that there would have to be a discussion with the City Council.

Commissioner Johnson stated in looking at the 5 principles, how would principles one and three affect connectivity. Mr. Mangum responded that the project would create a connection with the private drive. There would be some extension of the road, but it would compromise the quality of the connections contemplated including the orientation of development towards public streets as a traditional neighborhood design would.

Commissioner Isaac asked the Commissioners how they feel about a partial removal and not having a continuous block.

Commissioner Goddard stated that they need to consider if the overlay has accomplished its goals. If it has, it should be kept; if not, it should be removed. Chair Isaac inquired why one parcel should be removed that is the central area of this portion of the overlay district. It could be compromising that portion of the overlay.

Commissioner Draper stated that it would be difficult to develop the site and has not been done in 15 years. Rather than leave the property vacant, attempts could be made at figuring out a compromise.

Chair Isaac stated that the proposal is a smart use of space but that he has an issue of doing so piecemeal without knowing what is being done with it. Only one step could be compromising the overlay, so there is the need to see the next step.

Commissioner Johnson agreed with Chair Isaac. He explained that while it is less expensive this way, there is a great amount of uncertainty. If it were done with a developed plan it would ensure greater certainty.

Commissioner Draper stated that the applicant should work more with the City on the drives and roads. Cannot guarantee the proposal will be built so she agreed with previous comments.

The Commission then reviewed the standards. There was some disagreement on the 1st standard. The property would be removed from the overlay but still meet the intent of the Comprehensive Plan; however, there is no guarantee that the proposal would be built. Standard 2 was met as the underlying zoning is not changing. Standard 3 could possibly not be met. There is the possibility that the change could adversely affect other properties but no testimony was provided proving this. Standard 4 does not apply to the proposed amendment.
Commissioner Goddard stated that she is not sure that the plan has been successful and the TIF has not been at this point. If the amendment is not approved the property may sit vacant.

Commissioner Hewko made a motion to recommend approval of the proposed map amendment to remove 2044 Wesley from the West Evanston Overlay District. Seconded by Commissioner Goddard.

A roll call vote was then taken and the motion failed, 2-4.

Ayes: Goddard, Hewko  
Nays: Draper, Johnson, Sloss, Isaac

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment provided.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Johnson 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 6-0.  
The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 pm.

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