

**CITY OF PARK RAPIDS  
REGULAR MEETING  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
AUGUST 25, 2014, 6:00 p.m.  
Park Rapids Library, 210 First Street West – Lower Level  
Park Rapids, Minnesota**

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** The August 25, 2014, Regular Meeting of the Park Rapids Planning Commission was called to order at 6:01 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL:** Present: Commissioners Dick Bradow, Joel Vorhes, Janice Tidrick, Diane Smith and City Councilmember Paul Utke. Absent: Nels Peterson. Staff Present: City Planner Dan Walker and Planning Secretary Carmen L. Lockhart. Others Present: None.

**3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** A motion was made by Smith, seconded by Vorhes, and unanimously carried to approve the agenda as presented.

**4. APPROVAL OF REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES OF JUNE 23, 2014:** A motion was made by Smith, seconded by Tidrick, and unanimously carried to approve the June 23, 2014 Regular Meeting Minutes as presented.

**5. GENERAL BUSINESS:** None.

**6. INFORMATIONAL/DISCUSSION:**

**6A. LOT SIZE ADJUSTMENT MEMO AND INFORMATION:**

Bradow said this is something that Smith and I are familiar with as this is our third look at it.

Walker said Strodman had brought this up at one point and we talked about it again in 2011 and then back in April when we brought the issue up again and decided to wait until later in the year to have more time to go through it. Walker said he just wanted to meet tonight and go through the information in the memo and present some of the issues for discussion and get some guidance from the commission as to how we want to proceed. Walker suggested checking properties while the weather is still decent.

Walker said the basic thing is going to come down to what the map will look like and getting the specifics of the district and one of the biggest challenges of an overlay is you don't want to create other issues. Walker asked what are we trying to accomplish with an overlay district is it just allowing for existing subdivisions or existing things to be split to do some infill or are we looking at actually allowing new subdivisions to plat at a smaller lot size? Walker said with that, there could be other issues as generally when you do a small lot subdivision you want to make sure you've got an alley so people are

able to put a garage on it or access it that way because if you have a 50 ft. lot the chance of getting a house and trying to access from the front yard is going to create an issue.

Smith asked if the overlay district would encompass the whole of Park Rapids or just parts of the city? Walker said that is the question we want to look at and at certain times we talked about the really early plats in the city were platted mostly at 50 ft. and then as people's tastes and as society changed over time, the lots have gotten bigger so we have areas in the core of the city that were originally platted as 50 ft. and we have areas farther out that are 100 ft. lots.

Smith asked how much of the city have alleys already in place? Walker said most of the old plats that's pretty typical as well so I mean it's in the main area of the heart of the city and then as you go out there are no longer any alleys in the newer subdivisions. Utke said there are no alleys but are there easements for alleys or is there just nothing in those developments? Walker said most of them don't have any easements or anything for alleys. Bradow said so when we are looking at overlay districts we may not want to include those unless we can gain easements. Walker said right and it just goes back to the style of housing and the way the neighborhoods were formed over time because originally the house was there and then the garage was in the back and there was access through an alley and over time the garage has actually orientated towards the street. Vorhes said and we went to attached garages rather than detached. Walker said so when you have a 100 ft. lot you need to have that to accommodate that sort of width.

Smith asked if there are any contractors that want to make smaller lot sizes in any developments that don't have alleys? Walker said there really hasn't been an inquiry to do that and haven't had anybody that wants to do a small lot subdivision like that.

Utke said it might be an interesting proposal if we had an area of town that we wanted to try it there and change the lot size and go back to the alleys because with the cost of infrastructure and everything we look at today, it is getting so expensive for a lot of people to get into a house even if it was in a newer development but if we went back to a 50, 60 or 70 ft. wherever that number is, that reduces some of the basic overhead that is just in the ground, now you could build a house and maybe they could afford to do that. That might be another piece to this puzzle.

Vorhes said there would be smaller yards to maintain also.

There was discussion about McGrane's addition have some lots with alleys and some without. Utke stated to the west of Pleasant there are alleys and the east side doesn't but isn't fully developed either.

There was discussion concerning Grover's PUD development in the shoreland zoning based on units rather than traditionally platted. Walker said the Kaywood

Addition and Hocking Acres have typical 100 ft. lots. Walker said it could be difficult to sell those lots as the assessments are large on bare lots. Lockhart commented some of those went back to the county as tax forfeiture.

Walker said it offers another opportunity for developers and if there is a market for that the developer will know and it gives them an option.

Bradow commented on page 19, #2, as to identifying areas of the community where an overlay district may be appropriate. Bradow asked if we can identify areas? Walker said we can and one of the questions is, do we just include R-1 zoning or do we include some of the other zoning districts because you know if you're offering that in other zoning districts you're going to have other issues with the uses in the area of the land so I think we need to be specific on whether or not we are dealing with just specific residential zoning or if we want to extend that into some of the other zoning. Smith asked do you mean commercial zoning? Walker said yes like commercial zoning, it complicates it and even with an R-2 District, do we say we are looking specifically at R-1 Districts? Smith said like downtown, a lot of lots are 25 ft. or 50 ft. anyway so if someone wanted to tear it down and rebuild. Walker said in those districts we allow them to build back up as downtown there is a zero setback on the lots. Smith said so it's not so important there. Walker said it comes down to some of the R-2 Districts and different residential districts more than anything. Bradow asked R-1 and R-2? Walker said yes and R-3. Bradow said R-3 has more density so they are going to be a little more forgiving maybe in an R-3? Walker said we allow a single family home to be built in an R-3 District just the same as an apartment building as they are both considered permitted uses. Smith said but if we change the lot size in an R-3 what else is that going to affect then? Walker said right, the question is do we allow that in the overlay or do we say we are going to look specifically at a platted R-1 and allow them to do that and I think we can get there, you can write an ordinance to do that. Bradow asked if it is a little tougher in an R-2 or R-3? Walker said it is difficult but it is going to expand the scope on it a lot farther than maybe we are intending to go on that.

Lockhart commented on there being a lot of lot splits where people want to change an 80 ft. lot to a 50 or 60 ft. lot then what do they do with the left over footage? Bradow said it would have to be a 100 ft. lot. There was discussion concerning lot splits, assessments, left over footage and language stating they can't create a nonconforming lot. Walker said the typical lot size in old areas is 50 ft., new areas it is 100 ft. and some R-2 areas where there are 80 ft. lots. Vorhes said the ordinance would have to say both parcels of a split would have to be conforming lots with a 50 ft. minimum. Smith said on the new developments with 100 ft. lots, would those developers want to split in half? Walker said that is one of the questions, do we allow something or say we only allow it when we have an alley, you can structure the language so you get the desired result.

There was further discussion concerning what areas of the city to overlay. Vorhes said if we do it all over the city, if I purchased a 100 ft. lot, would I want a bunch of people infilling around me increasing the density? Utke said that is where we want

to keep the separation of those newer lot developments would stay at 100 ft. and we're pretty much talking the older part of the community and then we would have the option if we expanded to a new development area, it could go to 50 if that was the desire, but to mix it with the current 100 ft. area like over in Hocking Acres, that would mess that up. Vorhes said if I bought a 100 ft. lot, I wouldn't be happy.

Bradow said that brings us to question #2 on page 19. Identify the areas of the community where an overlay district may be appropriate. Bradow said we may not want to do it community wide, we may want to just select certain areas where it might fit. Walker said you can do that with overlay zoning. Walker said you don't have to make a block, you can pick different areas. Bradow said there are some parts of the community that are 50 ft. lots and we may look at that area and say well that is working here right now and then we bring that out of nonconformity. We don't have to do it city wide in my opinion. Vorhes said I don't think we should do it city wide. Utke agreed and said neighborhood by neighborhood or we could even pick out certain areas and we have a lot of area to do it.

Bradow said to keep in mind that when we make a recommendation we are going to be asking the City Council to change the Comprehensive Plan and that is not inexpensive to do so we have to be careful what we recommend because it is going to cost money to do it. Vorhes added we don't want to come back and revisit it next year or the year after that if we can avoid it. There was discussion concerning the cost.

Smith asked if all the 50 ft. lots are nonconforming? Walker said correct. There was discussion concerning lot sizes in different zoning districts and the minimum standard and the way the ordinance has changed over time so we do have quite a few nonconforming lots. Bradow asked if Walker has been able to identify those, I know Strodman did some of that work and wonder if some of that information might be still available and would help give us some guidance there as to what the 50 ft. lots are that are available or out there right now. Walker said he can come up with some information. Lockhart asked if you want the ordinance to say the 50 ft. lots are conforming? Bradow said yes, I don't know how everybody feels here but I think it makes sense to have 50 ft. lots in certain overlay districts because we don't need to blanket the whole city and I would agree with that in those areas, and then maybe some new areas that we are looking at might make sense to help people with smaller lot sizes and help them afford them the cost of the assessments. There was some discussion on the cost of assessments on corner lots and infrastructure and trying to minimize that by reducing lot sizes in the city to help development within the city considerably. Utke said it's a changing time, 25 years ago, infrastructure went in for around \$10,000 and now we are talking \$30,000 so we have to look at how we can keep people building and still keep a nice community. Bradow said some of the 50 ft. lots look pretty nice. Vorhes said if they go with the character of the neighborhood which is really what it amounts to. Vorhes added people know it going in if they say I want my 100 ft. lot, that's fine but you knew it going in that you bought two 50 ft. lots and then they can't complain that people are building on 50 ft. lots around you. Smith said right, if you do it up front.

Bradow said what he would like to see is recommended areas if you are looking for ideas, can we take a look at some areas where this may work for the City of Park Rapids? Utke said a big part of that is, where do we have the areas with alleys or easements for alleys and it's got to be there or they really aren't going to work. Bradow stated item #4 on page 20 relates to that and we need to take a look at what's appropriate and then identify and decide specific overlay boundaries and from there I think we can make a recommendation to the City Council after we get a look at those items. Bradow stated he is willing to drive around and look at the properties that are a possibility for the overlay with alleys which is a key indicator and see what the neighborhood characteristics are. Utke and Bradow suggested Google Earth as a tool to look at areas in the city.

Utke said he is thinking as we are discussing all these things when we do get to the point where we come up with a change and we've got all this, we turn around then and we target how many builders we have and we don't just put an announcement in the paper, we send out this information to developers and contractors and try to encourage additional development, showing inventory, changes to lot size, setbacks, and I think it could be a win-win for the city. Others suggested informing HRA, realtors and banks and making a big positive promotion type thing of it.

Bradow said some homes are fairly old so if they get redeveloped, and are not nonconforming, it would be good thing and people may be more willing to invest some money into their property. Bradow stated it is no secret that he doesn't like nonconforming lots.

Bradow directed the commissioners to page 21 – "Things to consider before using an overlay tool" and commented on the statement which reads "It is possible to impose multiple overlapping overlay districts on the same parcel" and Walker already indicated that is possible, so we could get fine-tuned with this thing if we really wanted to. Walker said there is kind of a balance with what you're trying to do and then the educational piece for the realtors and developers and so you don't want it to be so overly complex.

Bradow said one of the things he read in the memo was to keep it simple. Walker said he wants to keep it simple enough so it's not overly complicated to administer from our perspective and it's not overly complicated for a normal person to open up the ordinance and read and understand it. Vorhes said a map to show the areas would make it easier to understand. Bradow said what we recommend to the City Council should be simple so that the normal person can understand it.

Smith said we have to come up with a map. Bradow suggested having a workshop to look at maps and to drive around and look at parcels. Walker will start mapping some scenarios and we can take a look at some areas and expand or contract from that point. Walker said if you really look at a map of the city, there are some areas that are going to be easy but then there are going to be areas that we are going to have

to take a closer look to see how they will play out. Bradow said using Google Map will help and let's identify the easy one first in a workshop meeting.

There were comments about obtaining utility services to split lots and the cost of doing so, the cost of changing the Comprehensive Plan, changing setbacks, alleys and snowplowing, obtaining demographics from the census and neighborhood characteristics.

**7. ADJOURNMENT: A motion was made by Vorhes, seconded by Smith, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 p.m.**

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Chair Dick Bradow

ATTEST:

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Carmen L. Lockhart  
Planning Secretary