

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**SOUTH ST. PAUL PLANNING COMMISISON**  
**January 5, 2022**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY CHAIR ROSS AT 7:00 P.M.

Present:     Angela DesMarais  
              Tim Felton  
              Jason Frankot  
              Ruth Krueger  
              Matthew Thompson  
              John Ross  
              Michael Healy, City Planner

Absent:     Geoff Fournier

- 1)     APPROVAL OF AGENDA – Motion to approve as presented– Thompson/Frankot (6-0).
- 2)     APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 1, 2021 – Motion to approve the minutes as presented – Thompson/Frankot (6-0).

3)     NEW BUSINESS

None.

4)     PUBLIC HEARINGS

- A.     Ordinance Amendment Amending the Zoning Code’s Parking and Loading Regulations for Nonresidential Uses

Mr. Healy presented the staff report. The Applicant is the City of South St. Paul. The proposed ordinance would update the parking and loading regulations for nonresidential uses. The public hearing was called by the City Council following the review of a draft ordinance at their November 22<sup>nd</sup> work session. The current parking standards were put in place in 1992. The code requires very large off-street parking lots for most uses. These lots are sized to meet “peak demand” such as Black Friday for retail stores or a Christmas worship service for a church. Few existing commercial properties meet the parking requirements and new uses moving into existing buildings very frequently need a variance. Staff is proposing updates to the ordinance that reflect the way that businesses and residents actually function in the community.

The current zoning code allows the City Council to establish a modified parking requirement for any Conditional Use or Planned Unit Development in any district. Parking is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The MMM District, the district that replaced the NCMU district, offers additional parking flexibility from the parking ordinance. In the MMM district, small commercial buildings up to 7,500 square feet in size do not have a set parking requirement when they contain permitted nonresidential uses. Existing commercial buildings up to 15,000 square feet in size can be reused without needing a parking variance so long as the use of the building is a permitted use. Additionally, the City Council can approve “parking and circulation plans” for larger permitted uses and allow modified parking requirements “case by case,” just as they already do with CUPs and PUDs.

The proposed ordinance would do three main things relating to parking: reduce the minimum parking requirements for libraries to require 1 stall per 400 sq. ft. and update the parking requirements for some other uses to better align with industry standards; remove set parking requirements for permitted nonresidential uses in the C-1, CGMU, and GB zoning districts for uses that have a gross floor area of 7,500 square feet or less and allow existing vacant buildings that are up to 15,000 square feet in size to be reused by a permitted use without a parking variance; and make all non-residential uses in the C-1, CGMU, GB, I, and I-1 district and institutional uses in the R districts eligible to submit parking and circulation plans for review by the Planning Commission and the City Council. The ordinance would also update the Code's off-street loading requirements to implement changes recommended by the Zoning Administrator, City Engineer, and City Attorney.

Chair Ross asked Mr. Healy to clarify if handicap parking requirements would be changed as a part of this ordinance given, they are regulated by a separate body. Mr. Healy stated that the handicap parking requirements would remain the same. Mr. Healy added that one of the amendments to the existing ordinance would reference the ADA requirements for handicap parking spaces.

Chair Ross asked Commissioner Frankot to share his experience with having a shared parking lot. Commissioner Frankot shared that Black Sheep Coffee has a shared parking agreement with his property to allow their customers or employees to park in his lot. Commissioner Frankot stated that the situation has worked out well and prevents the space from being wasted.

Chair Ross opened the public hearing.

No correspondence had been received and no one was present to comment on the item.

Chair Ross closed the public hearing.

Motion to recommend approval ordinance amendment as presented - Thompson/DesMarais (6-0).

## 5) OTHER BUSINESS

### A. Discussion on Sign Code Update Relating to Institutional Uses in Residential Districts and Projecting Signs

Mr. Healy discussed the staff report. A few months ago, Staff made the decision to start slowly updating the sign code to make it more business-friendly and to reduce the amount of staff time spent on variances for signage. The City has very strict sign regulations "on the books" but regularly grants variances from the regulations. Institutional uses, such as schools and churches, are allowed uses in residential zoning districts. In order for these institutional uses to have any signage, a Conditional Use Permit, and often times a Variance, are required. The current code limits the maximum size of a sign in the R-1, R-2, or R-3 district to 6 square feet. The only exception is that institutional uses are allowed to have a 32 square foot monument sign. The previous allowance for monument signs was 12 square feet. The code was amended in 2021 to allow institutional uses to have a 32 square foot monument sign.

Institutional uses have similar needs for signage as commercial business, even when in residentially zoned areas. Many institutional uses are located on corner lots and have multiple frontages but the code only allow one sign

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per property. This generally makes it impossible to install adequate signage without a variance. Staff is also taking this opportunity to clean up the rules for awning and projecting signs.

The proposed ordinance would allow institutional uses to have one monument sign per property and up to 24 square feet of wall signage on each street frontage. The Conditional Use Permit requirement would be removed for wall signs, monument signs and non-electronic changeable monument signs. Electronic changeable copy signs would still require a Conditional Use Permit. Additionally, multi-family dwellings on lots larger than 25,000 square feet would be allowed one area identification sign that does not exceed 24 square feet. Standards would also be added to clarify the rules for awning signs.

Chair Ross asked Staff if there were any nuisance signs that the city was aware of. Mr. Healy stated that the only signs he has received complaints about are changing electronic signs. Mr. Healy affirmed that the existing standards for these signs would not be changed as part of the ordinance. Chair Ross asked the commissioners if they felt any changes should be made to the sign code relating to changeable electronic signs.

Commissioner Felton shared that any language that would make it easier to add additional illuminated signage in a residential area would likely not be well received by the community and cautioned that any new signs should not be able to be illuminated. Mr. Healy affirmed that it is reasonable to require that apartments do not light their signs; however, not allowing churches or schools to light their signs may create the need for variances. Mr. Healy suggested that a Conditional Use Permit could be required for illuminated signs.

Commissioner Krueger shared that during the presentation for the Holiday Superstore along Southview Boulevard, the developer shared that there was new lighting technology that would allow the lights to be dimmed at night. Commissioner Krueger echoed Commissioner Felton's comment that residents do not want light from signs coming into their windows at night.

Commissioner Thompson suggested requiring a Conditional Use Permit for illuminated signage for institutional uses, and not allowing other signage in residential districts to be illuminated. Mr. Healy stated that if the Planning Commission wanted to require all illuminated signs to be reviewed case-by-case, the Planning Commission could add a Conditional Use Permit requirement for illuminated signs.

Commissioner DesMarais suggested adding a maximum lumen requirement for signs to the code. Mr. Healy stated that if the Commissioners felt it was appropriate for all signs throughout the city to have a standard amount of illumination, Staff could certainly add language about this.

Mr. Healy summarized that the Planning Commission seemed to be generally in support of the proposed ordinance but apartment buildings in low-density neighborhoods should not be allowed to have illuminated signage and institutional uses in low-density neighborhoods should have their illuminated signage regulated to ensure that there are not nuisance effects on nearby residential properties. Staff will implement the requested changes prior to bringing the ordinance back to the Planning Commission for additional review.

### B. Invitation to a Joint Worksession Meeting to Review Danner Inc's PUD Concept Plan

Mr. Healy shared that the city's Planned Unit Development ordinance includes a concept plan review component. In cases where a Planned Unit Development is complicated, it can be useful for the Planning Commission and City Council to both be present when the concept plan is reviewed. The Danner Inc project is poised to be very complicated, so a joint work session is being held to review the concept plan. The work session will be held in the training room on January 24<sup>th</sup>. The item will be reviewed at 7:45 PM.

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6) ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn- DesMarais/Felton (6-0).