

URBANDALE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION MINUTES

December 19, 2011

The Urbandale Planning and Zoning Commission met in regular session on Monday, December 19, 2011, at the Urbandale Administrative Offices Building, 3600 86th Street. Chairperson David Russell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners present were Jeff Hatfield, Bill Kusy, Jeff Payne, Kevin Gass, Bridget Montgomery, Paul Pick, Wayne Van Heuvelen, and David Russell. Staff members present were Steve Franklin, Community Development Manager/Chief Planner, and Cheryl Vander Linden, Department Secretary.

The first item on the agenda was to approve the minutes from the December 5, 2011, meeting. Mr. Gass moved, and it was seconded by Pick, to approve the December 5, 2011 minutes. On roll call; Ayes: Gass, Pick, Hatfield, Kusy, Payne, Montgomery, Van Heuvelen, Russell; Nays: none. Passes: None. Motion carried.

The next item on the agenda was the "Homemaker's Plaza Warehouse & Parking Expansion" Site Plan No. 012-2007-07.01 (10215 Douglas Avenue).

Mr. Franklin said this site plan includes two properties owned by Homemakers Plaza, Inc. The Douglas Avenue parcel where the existing Homemaker's facility is located is triangular in shape, has 994.11 feet of frontage on Douglas Avenue and an area of 16.11 acres. The vacant NW Urbandale parcel, separated from the Douglas Avenue parcel by the railroad right-of-way, has 470.05 feet of frontage on NW Urbandale Drive and a total area of 5.40 acres. Therefore, the two sites together have an area of approximately 22.37 acres. The City Council approved the rezoning of both parcels to "P.U.D." on May 8, 2007 to allow the existing Homemakers building to be expanded and rebuilt/renovated, and to allow future expansion on both parcels. A site plan for the initial additions/renovations was approved on May 22, 2007.

The 2007/08 reconstruction/remodeling/expansion included replacement of the original 1961-vintage building which was mostly used as showroom, and remodeling of showroom space that was retained; single-story showroom/office expansions to the southeast and southwest of the original showroom; warehouse expansions to the northwest and northeast, and new office space on a second floor within part of the warehouse expansion. A new, covered customer pick-up area was also added at the north end of the parcel.

This site plan proposes a 50,000 warehouse addition at the north end of the Douglas Avenue parcel, which was anticipated at the time of the 2007/08 project. This proposed warehouse expansion lies to the northeast of the 2007/2008 warehouse expansion, adjacent to the railroad right-of-way. Construction is expected to take place in the spring of 2012.

Also proposed on the NW Urbandale Drive parcel are approximately 260 parking spaces and a concrete access drive from NW Urbandale Drive. The new access drive connects to an existing access location that is shared with the property adjoining to the south. This new access drive will become the primary truck access for all deliveries to Homemaker's warehouse, with the Douglas Avenue accesses thereby becoming customer-only accesses.

Mr. Franklin explained that the proposed parking spaces will be used, at least initially, for employee parking only. There are 545 existing parking spaces on the Douglas parcel, and this additional parking increases the total to 805 parking spaces on both parcels. This new parking on the NW Urbandale parcel utilizes only a little more than half of the subject property. Sufficient area remains for additional parking spaces or a building at some future date, if desired.

The building materials are proposed to be predominately concrete panels, and are compliant with the "Homemaker Furniture" P.U.D. Master Plan. Sanitary sewer and water services are available to the property with no improvements or modifications to the public systems necessary.

The properties to the south and west are fully developed for various industrial purposes and are zoned "M-2" Medium Industrial District. There are retail properties to the east/northeast that are zoned "C-G" General Commercial District, and a business park development just to the south of the NW Urbandale Parcel that is zoned "M-1" Light Industrial. The property is located in the Urbandale School District.

Mr. Franklin said Staff recommends approval subject to requiring the developer to:

1. Add overstory trees within the new parking area to comply with the Zoning Ordinance landscaping requirements; revise General Note 7 on Sheet C0.1 to reference the current version of SUDAS; reestablish the cut "X" property corner in the driveway if it removed by the construction; show the existing sidewalk along NW Urbandale Drive, including the portion to be removed to widen the entrance; callout the required detectable warning inserts for the reconfigured sidewalk; provide additional information to verify adequate fire department access at the proposed chain link fence and gate.
2. Provide a copy of the NPDES permit prior to approval; provide drainage calculations showing the existing NW Urbandale Drive storm sewer system can handle the additional detention flows; provide at least one foot of freeboard in the detention basin per SUDAS requirements; add a paved trickle channel in the detention basin; and callout the proposed overflow elevation for the detention basin on the grading plan.
3. Provide a storm water facility maintenance agreement for the detention area per the City's post construction ordinance (template to be provided by the

Community Development Department).

Mr. Gass asked so that's employee parking then?

Mr. Dave Merschman, 4605 80th Place, Urbandale, said the parking lot would be generally used for employees only. In fact, we're going to be placing a gate on the northwest corner of the current pick-up area, which will block all customer traffic from proceeding through, because we don't want customers, and that's the agreement that we have with the railroad, to use that railroad crossing. It's only to be used for employees and our semi-trailers that deliver the freight to us. So that parking lot will be used for employee parking, mainly on the weekends. But during the week, there will be some warehouse guys that I'm sure will park in this area right here, since it's right across the tracks from where they're going to be working in that new warehouse.

Mr. Russell asked how many employees do you have?

Mr. Merschman said we're just under 300, about 295. And we're still hiring.

Mr. Russell said you said you've worked out an arrangement with the railroad?

Mr. Merschman said yes. That was arranged back in 2007. And they wanted to make clear that it was not a public crossing. So we made it clear to them that our customers are not to use that crossing.

Mr. Russell asked can they cut you off at some time on that, and keep you from going across?

Mr. Merschman said no, we have a long-term agreement with them.

Mr. Russell said so they can't just shut you down.

Mr. Merschman said right. In the future, we also have made arrangements with them, if we decide, because as I've told the Council the last few years, who knows what the future will bring? We may build a building on that lot, in place of the parking lot, and then have an over-the-top conveyor that would go across the tracks to connect the buildings. But that's just an option, something that we did bring up to the railroad that there's a possibility of, and they were open to that, at that time.

Mr. Hatfield asked what kind of safety precautions are there, at the railroad spur? Is it a stop sign only?

Mr. Merschman said actually the railroad provided a normal-sized stop sign, and we asked them if we could put in a larger stop sign. Because we'll have semi-trailer trucks going across there, so we'll have a larger stop sign.

Mr. Russell asked will it have the arms that come down?

Mr. Merschman said no.

Mr. Russell said they won't? So it will not be a lighted crossing.

Mr. Merschman said no, not at all. Because it's considered a private crossing.

Mr. Gass asked what is the volume of train traffic on that? Once a week? Twice a month?

Mr. Merschman said it depends on the time of the year. Once or twice a week maybe.

Mr. Franklin said I think when it's at its busiest, it's maybe a few times a week, and that doesn't happen all the time.

Mr. Merschman said the railroad has been very cooperative, I will say.

Mr. Kusy said so employees need to cross at the depicted gray crossing? Or can they go down a little ways to cross?

Mr. Merschman said no, they'll cross at the one crossing. It will be 26 or 30 feet wide.

Ms. Montgomery asked will there be a sidewalk delineated there?

Mr. Merschman said no. Again, most of the semi-trailer traffic occurs between the hours of 6:30 and 9:30 in the morning, and that's about the time that most of the salespeople which are going to be the people.....Most of the parking is going to be on the weekends. There is no semi-trailer traffic on the weekends, on Saturdays and Sundays. During the week, when the warehouse people park there, they will already have arrived to work by the time the semi-trailers do come. So there should be very few times that there will be a conflict.

Mr. Kusy asked do these semi-trailers typically enter via NW Urbandale Drive, come through and then exit through Douglas? Or do they turn around?

Mr. Merschman said no, they turn around and go back on NW Urbandale Drive. Because that's gate is going to be there so they can't go through.

Mr. Kusy said so it's all going to happen in this gray area?

Mr. Merschman said yes.

Mr. Kusy asked so there are other docks then?

Mr. Merschman said yes. What they'll do is, they'll come across the tracks, they'll drive

forward here and then back, and there are going to be docks on the north side of the building. Then they pull out and either turn here or pull out and make a 270. It just depends on if there are other trucks that are parked right here. We've allowed a lot of space for them to make their turns.

Mr. Franklin said the project also includes making those radiuses bigger out here on NW Urbandale Drive, making those a little bit bigger so that especially southbound trucks can get in here and make that turn without any trouble.

Mr. Hatfield said there are three staff recommendations. Do you agree with them?

Mr. Merschman said I have read through them. He asked if Mr. Bishop had any comments on any of the recommendations?

Mr. Chuck Bishop, Bishop Engineering, 3501 104th Street, Urbandale, said we're fine with making those revisions. We're working on some negotiations with staff on the trees, about relocating some existing overstory trees out from under the building out to the east of the parking lot.

Mr. Gass asked I suppose if somebody's coming from the north on NW Urbandale Drive, and they're going to pull in there, they're going to see that that gate's there, thinking that they can cut through to get to your customer parking, they're going to have to turn around and go back out, right? Or won't be any way to access that?

Mr. Merschman said right. We'll have a monument sign, or some sort of signage, there at the entrance that will be labeled as "Shipping and Receiving Only", or something like that, to let the general public know that this is a truck entrance only.

Mr. Gass said well, somebody will probably try to get in there, I'm sure.

Mr. Merschman said there will be somebody that will drive in there, but they'll see the gate and there will be plenty of room for them to turn around. They may be a little disgusted by this time, because they'll have to pull all the way around and drive clear over here, but that's the purpose of the gate. We don't want customers to cut through there.

Mr. Franklin said they'll only do it once.

Mr. Van Heuvelen said staff is satisfied you'll be able to work out that tree issue?

Mr. Franklin said yes.

Mr. Payne moved, and it was seconded by Van Heuvelen, to approve the Homemaker's Plaza Warehouse & Parking Expansion" site plan, subject to staff recommendations and Staff working out the tree question. On roll call; Ayes: Payne, Van Heuvelen, Hatfield,

Kusy, Gass, Montgomery, Pick, Russell; Nays: none. Passes: none. Motion carried.

Mr. Russell said this item will go before City Council in two weeks, right?

Mr. Franklin said next week, on December 27.

Mr. Russell said thank you for Homemaker's. We really appreciate Homemaker's as a great business and partnership in Urbandale.

Mr. Merschman said it's been a great relationship with the City, and so we really appreciate that, and it's nice that things are working out as planned.

Mr. Russell said we appreciate your business.

The next item on the agenda was the election of 2012 Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

Mr. Gass moved, and it was seconded by Hatfield, to elect Bridget Montgomery as the 2012 Chairperson. It was approved unanimously.

Mr. Hatfield moved to elect Kevin Gass as Vice-Chair, and it was unanimously approved.

Regarding Staff reports, Mr. Franklin said we won't have a meeting on January 3, 2012, due to not having any items. Today was the deadline for the January 16 meeting so if something is submitted in the next couple of days we'll still likely go ahead and put it on that agenda, but I'm not aware of anything coming in. So, we definitely won't meet on the 3rd and probably won't need to meet on the 16th but I will confirm that next week. That's not unusual for this time of year. We get a little bit of a dead period in here around the holidays.

Ms. Montgomery said, just to clarify the reason why Mr. Payne's term on the Commission is not being renewed, is because his appointment term is up and he's not a female?

Mr. Franklin said beginning in 2012 the Code of Iowa now requires that all appointments to boards and commissions be gender-equal if at all possible. An exception is allowed only if a qualified appointee of the necessary gender cannot be found. I have no idea who the mayor has or hasn't talked to. If he can't find a female to serve, then he most likely is going to call Mr. Payne and ask him to serve again.

Mr. Payne said I believe there was a notice published in a magazine or the paper, and there were two qualified candidates that were female who applied, so he's thinking that there will be someone to fill the vacancy.

Mr. Gass said I'd just like to say congratulations to Mr. Payne and thank him for his years of service. He said I can honestly say, being here as long as we have together, wisdom is a wonderful thing and experience is a wonderful thing. A lot of time these people can diffuse a situation, so that's been for me a real comfort to know that we have people who are willing to stand up and say those things. And I mean it in all sincerity that it certainly saved a lot of anguish at some of these meetings because people were getting agitated, so comments like Mr. Payne's certainly diffused a lot of that.

Mr. Franklin said sometimes putting a little perspective on the issue can go a long ways.

Mr. Hatfield said I did enjoy working with you. Sometimes we were on the same side and sometimes we were on the opposite side. But we always agreed at the end of the day what was best for the city and you had good opinions. I miss you already!!

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.