

City of Decorah  
Planning and Zoning Commission  
June 26, 2017 – 7:00pm  
Meeting Minutes

Members present included: Nathan Thompson, Barbara Massman, Tony Clarke, Joel Zook and Stan Moellers

Members absent: Brian Cook and Llew Jenkins

Others present: Zoning Administrator / City Manager Chad Bird.

Consider approval of minutes from the May 8, 2017 regular meeting

**Motion by Thompson and seconded by Massman to approve the minutes from the May 8, 2017 regular meeting.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

*The hour being not quite 7:10pm, acting chair Moellers moved the following items up on the agenda, ahead of the scheduled public hearing.*

Consider setting a public hearing on rezoning of property; David & Julie Olson, 1006 Woodside Court property parcel to R-2 Single – Four-family residential district, July 10, 2017 at 7:10pm

*Bird reviewed the application with the commission and noted Mr. and Mrs. Olson have applied to rezone a lot next to their residence to R-2 in the hopes that it may be sold for residential development. It was also noted that a portion of the lot in question would be subdivide and preserved with the Olson's current residential lot.*

*Bird noted the lot is zoned commercial and stated that the Olsons believe the commercial nature of the area has diminished.*

*Bird asked the commission to set a public hearing, for Monday, July 10, 2017 at 7:10pm.*

**Motion by Zook and seconded by Massman to approve setting July 10, 2017 at 7:10pm as the date and time for the public hearing on the Olson rezoning request.  
Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Consider Site Plan Review re: 2300 Millennium Road, *Norwegian Mutual Insurance*

*Bird reviewed the submitted site plan from Norwegian Mutual for a proposed commercial facility in the Decorah Business Park. He noted that it is a fairly simple commercial structure on a vacant undeveloped lot.*

*Bird noted a few comments from the city engineer regarding the proposed site plan. Bird stated these comments are technical and not necessary related to the site layout.*

- 1. The storm sewer should be gasketed pipe. SDR 26 PVC or better.*
- 2. Sanitary Sewer service and water service are not shown. The Sewer should come from the preinstalled tee noted on the plans. The pipe may be reduced from 6" to 4" if desired. It should be routed outside the 200' circle to simplify.*
- 3. The drives appear narrow. The engineer suggests at least two lanes wide (24') so that ingress and egress are not hindered by the width. This is especially true if future traffic adds more activity and congestion in the general street areas here.*

*The city's engineer further added that there should be a condition as well that they are aware of the DNR regulation of the 200' and that they comply with those conditions. This may limit the ability to fertilize the lawn (or types of fertilizer) within the 200'.*

*Bird noted from previous conversations with the DNR and others, it appears the project may move forward subject to their standard conditions. Bird also reviewed the city wellhead protection factors and stated that that compliance with the DNR regulations of the 200' circle that will be satisfactory in this case to satisfy the intent of the Ordinance.*

*The commission raised questions about the parking lot, lighting and storm water management. Bird noted there is a detention pond planned for the site.*

**Motion by Clarke and seconded by Zook to approve the site plan for Norwegian Mutual Insurance and recommend approval to the city council.  
Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

**7:10pm** - Public hearing on rezoning of property; Aase Haugen H-M Hospital Medical District property parcel to R-3 Multi-family residential, June 12, 2017 at 7:10pm

*Moellers opened the public hearing portion of the meeting and asked for comments from the public.*

*Mark Faldet, 407 West Broadway spoke regarding his concerns with the storm water run-off and the cul-de-sacs. Faldet noted that increased run-off is affecting his farm ground to the east, along Locust Road and he noted that increased development is only going to make that worse. He also asked the commission why so many cul-de-sacs and is the entire area just going to be cul-de-sacs? He noted he is concerned about the master planning of the area and for public safety and traffic control. He also wondered about the type of development being proposed for the rezoned area.*

*Jeffrey Schmidt, director at Aase Haugen spoke about the project and noted that they are proposing an eight-lot subdivision with two-family "patio" homes constructed as duplexes on the lots. He noted each would be approximately 1,700 – 2,200 square feet.*

*Molly McNicoll, 203 Hollihan Street spoke about the storm water run-off and expressed concerns about a couple of sink holes in the area. She noted concerns about run-off down through the Luther prairie area and has noted erosion because of existing development and she expressed concern for future development. She inquired as to why the developer was noted being required to implement rain gardens and similar structures. Bird noted there is provision for a storm water management area in the preliminary plans for the parcel.*

*Bird also read two letters submitted by residents who were unable to attend the public hearing.*

*Steve Belay, 1003 Nordic Drive, submitted a letter and asked that the commission consider a "contract" rezoning to restrict expansion of other permitted uses in the proposed R-3.*

*Karl Knudson, 1004 Ridge Road, submitted a letter and argued that the proposed addition expands or enhances a non-conforming cul-de-sac situation. Knudson's position is that the city codes prohibit cul-de-sacs at more than 600' and he sees this area as longer than that and thus, not permitted. He submitted language from a 2000 Iowa supreme court briefing.*

*The commission asked some general questions in regard to the issues raised. Moellers then closed the public hearing portion of the meeting.*

Consider a request for rezoning of properties from H-M Hospital Medical District to R-3 Multi-Family Residential; Aase Haugen, Nordic Drive

*Bird noted the type of housing that Aase is proposing for the area, R-3 provides the best fit for smaller patio style duplex construction.*

**Motion by Moellers and seconded by Zook to approve the rezoning request as presented.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Consider C-3 Commercial Design Review re: 116 & 118 West Water Street, Water Street Professional Group, LLC - sign

*Bird noted this C-3 design application is for signage at this location as the owner is redeveloping the property into a financial services office building. Bird noted the application shows the sign(s) proposed at 3 feet by 8 feet and may be back lit, if approved by the commission. The sign is proposed at 24 square feet and appears to be less than 20% of the front surface area.*

*There was no additional discussion.*

**Motion by Zook and seconded by Thompson to approve the C-3 design application for signs at 116 and 118 West Water Street.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Consider C-3 Commercial Design Review re: 219 West Water Street, Alliant Energy – sign

*Bird noted the application is for a new sign permit for the Alliant building in the downtown. Alliant is changing their brand and these signs will simply replace the current image panels. The sign(s) is proposed at 3 feet by 6 feet. The main sign is proposed at 19.5 square feet and appears to be less than 20% of the front surface area.*

*The commission discussed the back lighting proposed for the main sign. There was some discussion about too much lighting in the downtown area but there were also comments about how this sign was previously lit and just not operational. It appeared that the applicant proposed to relamp the sign with LEDs and make it functional again.*

**Motion by Massman and seconded by Zook to approve the C-3 design application for signs at 219 West Water Street.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Consider C-3 Commercial Design Review re: 217 West Water Street, #2, Winneshiek Energy District - sign

*Bird noted this a new sign permit for The Winneshiek Energy District. The sign is proposed at 3 feet by 2.5 feet. The main sign is proposed at 7.5 square feet and appears to be less than 20% of the front surface area.*

**Motion by Massman and seconded by Clarke to approve the C-3 design application for signs at 217 West Water Street.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Discussion and possible action on residential tax abatement program

*Bird updated the commission on the city council discussions regarding the abatement program and affordable housing. The commission discussed several points of affordable housing and the abatement program specifically. Moellers noted that he is generally not in favor of these types of programs as he sees it as too much involvement or support and too little impact on the true goal or outcome.*

*Zook asked about other types of housing or down payment related programs. Bird noted Upper Explorerland had several housing programs directed at low income housing.*

*After additional general discussion, the commission made the following recommendations to the city council regarding the abatement program.*

**Motion by Zook and seconded by Thompson to recommend to the council that the current abatement program does not seem to be impacting affordable housing the way it was intended to. The commission recommends the council reduce the valuation cap for abatement from \$400,000 to \$200,000 for new residential construction and also to shorten the abatement period from five years to three years.**

**Roll call vote: Unanimous, motion passed.**

Discussion and possible action on Air BnBs and transient lodging

*The commission engaged in a discussion regarding AirBnBs in the community. Bird noted he has an intern working on an overview of the Airbnb situation. Bird shared a spreadsheet of information and noted there are 26 residences on the Airbnb official site and 18 in the area, outside the city limits. Of the 26 in the city, four appear to be in zoning districts that do not allow for rooming houses or boarding houses.*

*There are 15 Vacation Rental By Owner (VRBO) rooms in the area. Three outside the city limits and none appear to be in violation of the zoning codes.*

*Zook and Bird noted reference to city code that seems to allow for this type of rental and that unless the commission was willing to recommend a change in zoning ordinance, it appeared they were going to be allowed.*

*There was general discussion regarding inspections and the commission questioned whether there was staffing available to inspect the properties or whether they even wanted to recommend another layer of government oversight.*

*There was no action or further discussion.*

Discussion, review and update of city's 2012 comprehensive plan

a. Chapter 8 – Intergovernmental and Chapter 10 – implementation

*Due to the lateness of the hour, the commission tabled this item until its July meeting.*

Other business

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:53pm

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chad A. Bird".

Chad A. Bird  
City Manager  
Zoning Administrator