



Plan Commission Minutes
August 2, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
City Hall Council Chambers &
Virtual Online – WebEx Meeting

Commission Members Present: Brandvold, Christopherson, Erickson, Gragert, Granlund, Obaid, Seymour, and Wolfgram

Staff Members Present: Allen, Noel, and Wittwer

1. Call to Order – Chairperson Granlund called the Plan Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. Roll Call – Chairperson Granlund called the roll for the meeting. Commissioners Granlund, Seymour, Erickson, Gragert, Brandvold, Wolfgram, and Christopherson were present in the Council Chambers. Commissioner Obaid was present virtually online.
3. Commissioner Seymour moved to approve the July 19th minutes. Commissioner Gragert seconded and the motion carried.
4. Open public comment period for items that do not appear on this agenda noted as public hearings. None.
5. Conditional Use Permit (CZ-2110) & Site Plan (SP-2129) – Catholic Charities Sojourner House
Mr. Allen presented a request to consider a conditional use permit (CUP) and site plan for the expansion of the Catholic Charities Sojourner House at 618 S. Barstow Street. The property includes capacity for 53 individuals each night in a bunk bed style of temporary housing. The 3,692 sq. ft. building includes nine vehicle parking spaces. The proposal would add a two-story addition with approximately 3,450 sq. ft. of residential use on the first floor and approximately 2,750 sq. ft. of offices and supportive services on the second floor. Approximately 3,150 sq. ft. of the existing space would be renovated. Federal health guidelines recommend adopting six feet social distancing as a standard operating practice; thus the 53 beds will be spread out with the addition. Homeless shelters are not expressly listed in the City’s zoning definitions. In the past it was defined as a motel use with the transient nature of guests and lack of any additional services or use types. This CUP would allow the residential on the ground floor mixed with the office and supportive services above. Operations should be explained more clearly for the CUP. The applicant is asking for zero parking with the addition and states they will use on-street parking, public parking, and lease stalls nearby for employees and volunteers. Rooftop solar and street landscaping is being included. Bicycle parking and exterior lighting is required. The private gap between the business to the north should be redesigned using crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) techniques. Signs will be reviewed separately for compliance. The City has provided over \$330,000 through Community Development Block Grant COVID-19 funding relief for the expansion.

Property owner Kevin Burch with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse, Inc. spoke in support of the project. He stated the shelter’s temporary moves due to safe distancing restrictions during the pandemic forced them to reexamine a long-term solution. Thus, this proposal has been developed with community partners’ input and saves dollars by not needing temporary locations. They are not adding beds but it allows six feet for socially distancing. If they remain as-is, the CDC will require the safe six-foot distancing, and then they would lose approximately 28 beds. They looked at different locations but they own the property and the COVID-19 funding is only for renovating existing shelters and not new construction. With the extra space, enhanced programing can be provided to meet more of guests’ needs with services both day and night. Daytime services will include laundry, secure single-use showers, housing resources, counseling, Lutheran Social Services crisis support, etc., along with overflow accommodations during extreme weather. When 15 degrees or lower they allow more inside use to keep people alive. There are about 30 to 40 guests right now and that will increase as the

temperatures change. Mr. Burch stated the daytime services and 24-hour restrooms will depend on community partners involved and hopes that more resources can be provided but not all funding has been secured. An open day-center model rather than appointment process is the goal but depends on adding this space, staffing levels and community/resources partners. For example, community rooms could double as resource areas providing WiFi and computer access. During the addition construction, the shelter will operate as-is to maintain numbers. They will then shift spaces around and make needed modifications as the existing space gets renovated. Their intake process is safer for guests, staff and volunteers if it is staggered in smaller rooms. They have communicated with downtown businesses and adjacent neighbors to address issues with a lack of a daytime shelter. They developed a plan to keep the area clean and will be key for the future.

Applicant Casey Stadler with Wieser Brothers Contracting stated the current structure will not support a second story or hold snow loads. Solar panels will be flatter from the street view. The north alley would be inaccessible and be a utility easement for the gas meter. He suggested a tall privacy fence or wall to seal off the utility courtyard.

Dave Larson, Board President of the Eau Claire Temple of Free Masonry, spoke in opposition or to delay the project until operations are better understood. They are not against helping the homeless but a better location should be found. Expansion will force long lines waiting on sidewalks instead of using the current parking lot. There are about 80 times per year that police and emergency services need to access the site using the lot. They see homeless individuals causing problems at the Masonic Center with drug use and criminal activity that is driving down property values. Local businesses and public are bearing these external impacts and costs and it is unfair.

Lauren Pomush, 821 S. Barstow Apt. 4, has volunteered at the shelter and stated the addition will provide more access to resources to gain employment. She is concerned that people will die like the person recently downtown if the expansion is not approved.

Sheri Baemmert, business owner at 705 S. Barstow St., stated they were not included in project engagement. She sees drug deals, people being high around the site and homeless using Wilson Park where they wait until they can access the shelter. Losing the parking lot will increase using public and private spaces. She was concerned about the impact on children and the YMCA. She was concerned about a possible sex offender occupying the shelter. She and her staff are concerned about the crime and how it will impact her business. She does not want the project approved unless by delaying a better option can be found.

Jerome Gebert, 2116 Cleveland St., had his daughter's wedding at the Masonic Center and a homeless person trespassed causing problems.

Libby Richter, 28 Maple St., spoke in support of the expansion. She was once homeless and it can cause stress, trauma, and illness. She stated neighbors are using a not-in-my-backyard approach and not believing in the potential for improvements reducing emergencies. The expansion will hopefully help people grow and 24-7 services are needed. There is a lack of bathroom issues for guests to use during the day, but the city could also help provide one.

Paul Lenz, 600 Graham Ave., stated a CUP protects adjacent properties from nuisances and negative impacts like diminished property values and enjoyment of property. This is a zoning matter not a homeless one and understands as a past judge the importance of treatment instead of prison. The River Edge Apartments have seen negative impacts with property damage

and loitering, defecating and doing drugs. No damage was occurring before the shelter. There was a 59% reduction in homeless related issues when the shelter was elsewhere. At the recent Idea Lounge event, police reports showed 30% to 40% of homeless have no connection to the city. He stated the Beacon House operates a business model that works well. Sojourner House is a business model that creates a public nuisance kicking people out during the day.

Mike Milewski, 618 S. Farwell St., stated he has had retail problems as some clients will not get out of the car to do business. The Seaver Street parking lot includes drug use and prostitution. Catholic Charities needs to address the surrounding nuisances. He urged a no-vote because of the unsafe and unhealthy environment. He never received project notice from the owner.

Steve Harmon, 705 S. Barstow St., spoke against granting the CUP. He has had to reduce rent of his property due to the nuisances. The second-floor sounds like a maybe as funding is not secure. Onsite parking is needed for extreme weather. The project is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and he asked for a three-month delay to come up with a better location and plan.

Kari Jo, 714 S. Barstow St., stated she was not contacted by the shelter on the project and is concerned about their wishful plans and lack of clarity around 24-7 services.

Carrie Poser, 3035 Eddy Lane, is the Director of Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care for the homeless population. She stated where there is a city you see more services for homeless. The migration data does not show more homeless leave the local Dairyland area. Chippewa County lacks a shelter, data shows people are coming from there. The Catholic Charities business model is not failing compared to others nearby. The difference is the population that it serves, like addicted and mentally ill. She said it was amazing during COVID that the shelter survived with its bunk situation. Other shelters had to close or reduce capacity. Homelessness existed before Catholic Charities. They will not fix mental health but will connect people to the services. Not all criminal activity is done by the homeless and they are not the responsibility of the shelter. The City and County should contribute funds if the situation shall improve. The project should be approved.

Jake Gondik, 1215 Belknap, Superior, WI stated he is an attorney representing the Masonic Center. There are a lot of unknowns with the second story, alley, 24-7 services, no previous CUP and variances being needed. There are however known nuisances that stem with the shelter and he stated to table or vote no on behalf of his client.

Commissioner Wolfgram expressed concern about the Catholic Charities not mitigating concerns with the local adjacent businesses and wanted the 24-7 model clarified versus the appointment model. She advocated for a project delay so partners could work out the issues.

Kevin Burch stated federal relief funds have an expiry date and a delay could jeopardize plans.

Casey Stadler stated winter construction increases the costs. If they cannot expand, 28 more people will be out with the new CDC safe distancing rules and more will face extreme weather. What has been proposed meets the gaps in the community and day programming will only get better from what they described.

Commissioner Christopherson moved to approve the request with staff conditions. Commissioner Brandvold seconded the motion. Commissioner Wolfgram moved to postpone to the first September meeting and seconded by Gragert. The motion carried with Commissioners Christopherson and Brandvold voting nay.

6. Annexation (21-5A) – Folsom Court, west of I-94

Mr. Allen presented a request to annex 24.70 acres in the Town of Union. Proposed zoning would be TR-1A. The property is located in the Sewer Service Area and is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for future residential use.

Applicant, Nick Brenner with Menard Inc. stated the future subdivision would be zoned with a R-1 and R-2 mixture. They will preserve woodland buffers and are determining road connections.

No one spoke from the public.

Commissioner Seymour moved to recommend approval of the annexation. Commissioner Erickson seconded and the motion carried.

7. Final Plat (P-6-21) – Northern Lights

Mr. Allen presented a R-2 zoned final plat with 44 lots for 40 twin homes off of Hagman Street. A 20-foot wide sanitary sewer easement needs to be shown on a revised final plat.

Applicant Jeremy Skaw with Real Land Surveying spoke in support of the project and they are still waiting to figure out where the sewer will cross over Hwy. 312.

Commissioner Gragert moved to recommend approval of the final plat with staff conditions. Commissioner Christopherson seconded and the motion carried.

8. Certified Survey Map (CSM-10-21)

Mr. Allen presented a certified survey map (CSM) two-lot split of 3.45 acres at Craig Road and Atrium Court. The split is consistent with the C-3 general development plan. Dedication of an 8-foot wide sidewalk easement is shown on the CSM on private property.

Commissioner Seymour moved to recommend approval of the CSM with staff conditions. Commissioner Gragert seconded and the motion carried.

9. Site Plan (SP-2121) – Transit Transfer Center

Mr. Allen presented a site plan for the City's proposed transit transfer center at 402 S. Farwell Street. The six-story project with 31,675 sq. ft. foundation would include transit operations and retail on the ground floor. There are two levels of parking and three levels of workforce residential apartments which will be approved at a later date. The full building volume is approximately 155,000 s.f. and is 85 feet tall. Driveway widths exceed the 30-foot maximum for improved bus turning. Permanent encroachments for the building corners need to go before City Council. Trash storage is dedicated inside.

Aaron Kelly with LHB spoke about the bus turning movements needing wider driveway widths. He stated the U.S. DOT TIGER grant requires electric vehicle charging. Bicycling parking can be revised to allow at-grade horizontal parking and vertical racks. There is additional bike parking for residential on the third floor. There will be real-time bus information signage. Windows will not be provided in the rear for retail spaces facing the bus terminal area. Utilities will be underground and under the transit center for the service and transformers.

Martin Thompson with LHB spoke about how the residential tenants will have their own dedicated lobby access and resources. The building has two open pass-through corridors as a long-term City goal is to make Farwell Street more of a pedestrian-oriented street.

Commissioner Seymour moved to recommend approval of the site plan with staff conditions. Commissioner Erickson seconded. Commissioner Gragert recommended to add e-bike charging, bench(es) and more horizontal bike racks compared to all vertical bicycle racks on the ground floor, spread out between the two open pass-through corridors and providing approximately eight (8) spaces each. Seconded by Wolfgram and the motion carried. Commissioner Gragert recommended to add ten (10) electric vehicle-ready stalls with conduit and proper electrical service for the public portion of the ramp. Seconded by Commissioner Brandvold and the motion carried. The original motion, as amended, was carried.

10. Future Agenda Items and Announcements - The next meeting is scheduled for August 16th.
11. The meeting adjourned at 11:06 p.m.



Zina Obaid, Secretary