

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING ZONING VARIANCES AT 105 – 111 W. LOCUST HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, NORMAL CITY HALL, FOURTH FLOOR UPTOWN STATION, 11 UPTOWN CIRCLE, NORMAL, MCLEAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS – MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2020.

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Koos called the Public Hearing Regarding Zoning Variances At 105 – 111 W. Locust to Order at 7:00 p.m., Monday, February 17, 2020.

2. ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Mayor Chris Koos, Councilmembers, Kevin McCarthy, Chamberly Cummings, Stan Nord, Karyn Smith, Kathleen Lorenz, and Scott Preston. Also present were City Manager Pamela Reece, Assistant City Manager Eric Hanson, Corporation Counsel Brian Day, and Town Deputy Clerk Theresa Denham.

ABSENT: Town Clerk Angie Huonker.

3. STAFF COMMENT:

Deputy Corporation Counsel, Jason Querciagrossa summarized the history of the requested variances. He noted that the variances were not approved at a Zoning Board of Appeals Hearing on January 28, 2020. After the meeting, staff was made aware of a Board Member voting in error at that hearing. The applicants appealed the decision of the Zoning Board. He explained that the appeal is “di novo” meaning that Council is not bound by the Zoning Board’s decision.

Mayor Koos clarified that no vote would be taken during the Public Hearing, but the Council would vote in New Business during the Regular Meeting of the Town Council that will immediately follow the Public Hearing.

Town Planner Mercy Davison gave a history of the properties and explained the proposed project: demolition of the existing three structures and rebuild of a single, five-story structure. Parking would be below the building, at grade. The property would also be five feet fewer away from the rear property line to provide a five-foot setback for a circle drive. This setback is the first requested variance, the second is a parking variance. The owners are asking for 11 fewer spaces than required by code. Staff supports the variance, using it as a good opportunity to see how parking trends have changed. Staff also supports the variance on the basis that the parking variance would be readily apparent to anyone who might hope to live in the building. It also affords more landscaping, and greenspace with the setback variance, which the public sees and can enjoy. This project is also subject to newer stormwater requirements, so staff believes this plan will be beneficial to that area.

Councilmember Karyn Smith asked for the difference in occupancy for the current buildings, versus the proposed. Inspections Director, Greg Troemel noted there are currently 20 two-bedroom units, and the proposed structure will have 37 two-bedroom units.

Councilmember Kathleen Lorenz asked for some history on the flooding and stormwater.

Town Planner, Mercy Davison said that the area has experienced flooding for some time after extreme weather events, but it wasn’t brought to the Town’s attention until recently.

She noted that onsite detention and flood routing are both planned for the project and would help with providing a path for surface water.

Inspections Director, Greg Troemel said the flooding problem is not chronic in the area, but given construction trends when the units were originally built, so called “garden units” do run more of a risk of flooding.

4. APPLICANT TESTIMONY:

Attorney for the owners, Russell Arbuckle of Normal, IL and property owner Keith Iden of Woodstock, IL were sworn in by Mayor Chris Koos.

Mr. Arbuckle first mentioned that their plan would account for 20% green space on the property, which is in line with code, assists in storm water detention and is far greater than other properties in the area.

Mr. Arbuckle noted that by nature of the code, this project could include more beds and more parking than they are requesting. Mr. Arbuckle summarized the variances they are requesting. He mentioned that they are complying with newer sections of the code to account for storm water detention and will reduce the hard surfaces with the new construction by roughly 20%.

Mr. Iden gave a summary of his family’s history of the property. He mentioned that there were imminent and needed improvements, and that need inspired the project.

Councilmember Stan Nord thanked the applicants for their investment in the Town and noted the increase in property tax revenue this project will reap for the Town. He mentioned that the circle drive is not just a matter of convenience, but also one of safety and expressed his approval.

Councilmember Karyn Smith asked if any tenants were parking on the street versus the lot. Inspections Director, Greg Troemel clarified that the current 35 spaces account for about 50% of building occupancy. Ms. Smith further asked if the owner was aware of any compromises the tenants were making regarding parking. Mr. Iden said he was not aware of any.

Councilmember Lorenz asked why they decided to add beds when the market is considered saturated for apartment living. Mr. Iden noted that it was most advantageous for the owners to add beds to qualify the investment. He also noted that they made the decision in line with local trends.

Mr. Arbuckle noted that this area is subject to R3B Zoning and adding beds in that area of high density is in line with the Town’s Comprehensive Plan.

Councilmember Karyn Smith drew attention to the fact that without the setback variance they could achieve more beds.

5. OPPOSITION TESTIMONY:

The Mayor swore in speaker Elizabeth Megli, an attorney representing four property owners and a property management company adjacent to the Iden Apartments.

Ms. Megli addressed the Council with her concerns in opposition to the parking variances. Ms. Megli represents four property owners and a property management company adjacent to the properties. Ms. Megli noted that those she represents are not in opposition to the project, or the setback, just the parking variances.

They object to the parking variance because Locust Street already has problematic parking, and they feel adding beds will exacerbate that problem.

Regarding mentions of current trends for bringing fewer cars to campus, Ms. Megli noted that University of Illinois was used in a Zoning Board Hearing as an example of those observed trends. Ms. Megli argued that comparing the two Universities isn't relevant because ISU does not house the same population of International Students.

Ms. Megli noted that according to the management company she represents, 84% of students do bring cars to campus. She said that testing national trends in this area would put a significant burden on Locust Street.

They also remain concerned about stormwater issues despite the efforts made by the owners and staff.

They request the variances not be granted since the project could reasonably be completed without granting the variances.

6. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further requests to speak or questions from Council, Mayor Koos called for a Motion to Adjourn the Public Hearing.

MOTION:

Councilmember McCarthy moved, seconded by Councilmember Preston, the Council Accept a Motion to Adjourn the Public Hearing Regarding Zoning Variances At 105 – 111 W. Locust.

AYES: McCarthy, Cummings, Nord, Smith, Lorenz, Preston, Koos.

NAYS: None.

Motion declared carried.

Mayor Koos adjourned the Public Hearing Regarding Zoning Variances At 105 – 111 W. Locust at 7:28 p.m., Monday, February 17, 2020.