

The City of Lake Forest
Plan Commission
Proceedings of the February 9, 2022 Meeting

A remote meeting of the Lake Forest Plan Commission was held on Wednesday February 9, 2022, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Commission members present: Chairman Dixon and Commissioners Jamie Moorhead, Barrett Davie, Stephen Douglass, Steve Lamontagne and Mark Pasquesi

Commissioners absent: Louis Pickus

Staff present: Catherine Czerniak, Director of Community Development

1. Introduction of Commissioners and staff and review of meeting procedures.

Chairman Dixon introduced the members of the Commission and reviewed the meeting procedures followed by the Commission.

2. Consideration of the minutes of the November 10, 2021, meeting.

Consideration of the minutes of the minutes was postponed.

3. Public Hearing and Action: Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of a plat of consolidation, site plan and setback variance for Senior Cottages to be located on the northwest corner of Everett and Telegraph Roads. 12 Cottages are proposed.

Property Owner: City of Lake Forest

Development Partners: Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Senior Citizen's Foundation,

Community Partners for Affordable Housing and The City of Lake Forest

Chairman Dixon asked the Commission for any conflicts of interest or Ex Parte contacts. Hearing none, he invited a presentation from the petitioner.

Ms. Czerniak introduced the petition and stated that 12 senior cottages are proposed on a 2.23 acre City owned parcel on the northwest corner of Everett and Telegraph Roads. She stated that the project was initiated under the leadership of the Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Senior Resources Commission and the Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Senior Citizens' Foundation. She commended their efforts to move this development forward to provide additional housing opportunities for the seniors in the community. She noted that Community Partners for Affordable Housing (CPAH), a not for profit group that has worked closely with the City in the past, will ultimately own and manage the cottages adding that CPAH owns and manages the five senior cottages located to the north of the current proposal. She noted that the Commission heard an introduction of the

petition in June 2021 and since that meeting, work has been done to refine the site plan and the ingress/egress points, inventory the trees on the site, prepare preliminary engineering plans, and design the cottages. She stated that the design aspects of the cottages were recently reviewed and approved by the Building Review Board. She noted that with input from the City Engineer and public safety officials, curb cuts are located on both Telegraph and Everett Roads, as far from the intersection as possible. She noted that ingress/egress on Everett Road is designed to support only right in and right out turning movements recognizing the congestion that can occur along Everett Road during peak traffic times, when a train is blocking the road. She stated that the turning radii into and within the development were reviewed by the Fire Department to assure that they are adequate for the emergency vehicles that will need to access the development. She noted that the site plan is configured to preserve some of the large trees in the northwest corner of the site and the public walking path to the west and north of the proposed cottages. She reviewed that the cottages are configured as two attached units, in six duplex buildings. She stated that each cottage has a single car garage, covered front and rear porches, and a small yard. She noted that shared visitor parking is provided near the northeast corner of the development. She stated that the petition is before the Plan Commission for consideration of the plat of consolidation, which incorporates various parcels and portions of parcels into a single parcel that is configured to accommodate the cottage development. She stated that the newly created parcel will be transferred from the City's ownership, to CPAH. She added that Commission consideration of a slight variance from the setback along Telegraph Road is also requested as part of consideration of the overall site plan. She stated that the area of encroachment into the 20 foot setback is reflected on the site plan and ranges from 2'8" at the point of least encroachment, to 4'6" at the point of the greatest encroachment. She acknowledged that the development could be shifted west five feet to eliminate the need for a variance however, she noted that there was a conscious effort to provide space between the pedestrian path and the closest cottage. She reviewed that the property is zoned B-1, for commercial and multi-family use and pointed out that uses that generate more activity and traffic could be located on the site as permitted by the zoning district. She stated that the City has owned the parcels for over 20 years, since the parcels were acquired by the City in the 1980's when the Tax Increment Financing District was established in the Settlers' Square Business District. She stated that the staff report provides findings in support of the petition. She noted that members of Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Senior Citizens' Foundation and Senior Resources Commission are in the audience and may want to offer comments.

Chairman Dixon invited questions from the Commission.

In response to questions from Commissioner Douglass, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that consideration was given to relocating the pedestrian path but for several reasons, a decision was made to request a variance from the setback along Telegraph Road instead. She noted that there are wetlands around the path which could complicate relocation, neighbors to the west have in the past voiced concern about the path encroaching further toward their private backyards and relocating the path, would add cost to the project which is challenging for a project that is intended to offer affordable

and modest rents to local seniors. She confirmed that a greater number of units was considered however, the desired product is cottages, similar to the existing cottages, to help meet the demand for that product. She added that there is also interest in a low impact development for the site given its location away from the business district and in an area of transition from commercial and institutional uses to the adjacent single family homes.

In response to questions from Commissioner LaMontagne, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the streets are the minimum width necessary, in the opinion of the City Engineer and public safety personnel. She noted that the proposed encroachment of the cottages is toward Telegraph Road and not toward a residential neighborhood. She stated that the goal is to retain healthy streetscape vegetation and add plantings as necessary to buffer the development from the adjacent streets.

Chairman Dixon invited public testimony.

Paul DiPiero, a resident in the area, stated that between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. and again around 4 p.m. there is heavy traffic on Everett Road and school busses and children walking. He expressed concern about adding traffic to the area. He noted that the public pedestrian path is well used and expressed concern about removal of vegetation and the loss of the wooded character and privacy for those using the path.

Hearing no additional requests to speak, Chairman Dixon asked staff to address the two points raised in the testimony

Ms. Czerniak explained that the senior housing is a low traffic generator in comparison to the commercial and multi-family uses that are permitted on the site by the current zoning. She added that seniors often can arrange their travel times to avoid peak commuter hours. She stated that the cottages are sited to maximize the distance between the nearest cottages and the walking path and as a result, a variance along the east side of the site is requested. She confirmed that existing vegetation will be retained to the extent possible and enhanced to retain a buffer along the path. She added that if determined to be necessary, a fence could be installed behind the westernmost cottages.

Chairman Dixon invited final questions and comments from the Commissioners, hearing none, he invited a motion.

Commissioner Davie made a motion to recommend approval of the plat of consolidation, site plan and a variance to allow one of the cottage buildings to encroach into the setback along Telegraph Road as reflected on the plan presented to the Commission.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pasquesi and was approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

- 4. Public and Action: Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of tentative and final approval of the plat of resubdivision for 1361, 1371 and 1373 Edgewood Road. Reconfiguration of three lots into two lots is proposed.
Property Owner: Lillian H. Shepard Trust (Joseph Duff, Rochelle Davis, Rudolph Duff Jr., Rahasaan Duff-Tatum, Gingi Wingard and Laura Stephenson)
Representative: Joseph Duff**

Chairman Dixon asked the Commission for any conflicts of interest or Ex Parte contacts. Hearing none, he invited a presentation from the petitioner.

Mike Bleck, Bleck Engineering, introduced the petition. He reviewed the property and the surrounding area. He noted that the property is currently configured as three lots of about in 9,000 to 10,000 square feet and presented photos of the three existing buildings on the property. He presented the proposed plat of subdivision noting that two lots, fully conforming to current zoning requirements, are proposed. He stated that the petitioners are requesting that the plat be identified as the James Shepard Resubdivision to recognize the history of the ownership.

Ms. Czerniak noted that the property has been the subject of some complaints from neighbors over the past several years and stated that the proposed plan presents a good solution. She stated that since no public infrastructure, roads or utilities, are required to support the proposed resubdivision, concurrent approval of the tentative and final plan is appropriate.

Chairman Dixon invited questions from the Commission.

In response to a question from Commissioner Pasquesi, Mr. Shepard stated that one of the structures was occupied by Ms. Shepard until her death in April 2021. He stated that prior to that time, the family has stopped leasing the two other homes to tenants.

Hearing no further questions from the Commission, Chairman Dixon invited public testimony.

Mark Knipfer, 1359 Edgewood Road, stated that he lives in the house to the south of the property. He asked about the timing for removing the houses and noted that there are several dead and poor quality trees on the site. He added that there is a utility pole on the property that is leaning and in deteriorating condition.

Hearing no further requests to speak Chairman Dixon asked staff to respond to the questions raised during the public testimony.

Ms. Czerniak stated that a condition of approval requires the existing structures to be removed prior to the recording of the plat to avoid creating a nonconforming situation on the property. She stated that as with any redevelopment proposal, all the trees on

the site will need to be evaluated and a tree removal and landscape plan submitted for review. She stated that neighbors will have an opportunity to provide input on the new homes, site plan and landscaping proposed for the two newly configured properties at the Building Review Board. She stated that the City will alert the utility companies to the concerns about the utility pole.

Chairman Dixon invited final comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Moorhead stated support for the petition noting that the plat of resubdivision appears to satisfy the zoning criteria adding that the lots meet the minimum lot size and minimum width.

Chairman Dixon stated that in his opinion, the proposed redevelopment of the property with new homes on two lots will add value to the neighborhood. Hearing no further comments, he invited a motion.

Commissioner Douglass made a motion to recommend tentative and final of the resubdivision to the City Council subject to the following conditions of approval.

1. The existing structures must be removed, and the site graded and stabilized prior to the recording of the plat of subdivision to avoid creating non-conforming conditions on the two newly configured lots.
2. Prior to the recording of the plat of subdivision, all applicable fees shall be paid.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pasquesi and was approved by a roll call vote of 6 to 0.

- 5. Initial Presentation: Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of a Special Use Permit for a Central Business District Planned Development. Modifications are proposed to the office building at 1401 N. Western Avenue to support adaptive reuse of the building for multi-family residential. A 1.0 floor area ratio and a variance from parking standards are requested. Property Owner: 1401 N. Western, LLC (Carmen Speranza) Contract Purchaser and Representative: Tom Swarthout, The Highview Group**

Chairman Dixon asked the Commission for any conflicts of interest or Ex Parte contacts. Hearing none, he invited a presentation from the petitioner.

Mr. Swarthout introduced the petition noting that the project will be a milestone change for the north Western Avenue area. He noted that the Central Business District has changed in recent years with retail suffering and the proposed change from office use to residential use for this building will be welcome. He introduced his design team.

Amy Erb, project designer, reviewed the location of the building on north Western Avenue and described the surrounding area. She stated that the building covers about one-third of the site and pointed out the surface parking lot at the rear of the building, adjacent to the railroad tracks. She stated that the existing internal courtyard will remain. She noted that there are a mix of uses in the area, along with a mix of single story, two story and three story buildings. She noted that the Crystal Point buildings across the street are approximately 37 feet in height and are set at a higher elevation than the subject property. She stated that the building was built between the 1970's and 1980's and has been partially vacant for four years. She stated that the building is run down and does not have accessible access. She added that the property has been on the market for a while. She noted that there is a lack of rental residential units available in Lake Forest and stated that the proposed plan will offer two and three bedroom apartments. She stated that the style of the front elevation will be changed to better align with other buildings along Western Avenue. She stated that the building will have a masonry base and brick, limestone and iron detailing. She stated that a third floor is proposed and is setback from the front façade and has a mansard roof to mitigate the increase in the height of the building. She stated that the landscape will be improved within the limited area along the front of the building. She stated that the intent is to coordinate the work on the building with the City storm sewer project planned in the area. She stated that the hope is that this project will be a catalyst for other property owners in the area to make improvements and that the project will meet a need for rental units in the community. She noted that the Building Review Board recently reviewed the project and recommended approval of a height variance as well as the design aspects of the building. She noted that the proposed height of the building is lower than the Kelmscott Park buildings and similar to the Crystal Point buildings across the street. She stated that the project will add vitality to the area with minimal traffic in comparison to the traffic that would be generated by a fully occupied office building. She stated that the proposed scale of the building works well with the street adding that the building complies with the required five foot setback from the front property line. She stated that the building, with the enhanced landscaping, will offer an improved pedestrian experience. She presented renderings of the proposed building and graphics illustrating the proposed building height in comparison to the heights of other buildings in the area. She reviewed the layout of the parking lot noting that additional parking spaces can be added by clearing the vegetation along the railroad tracks. She reviewed the floor plans and pointed out the balconies on the second and third floor units. She reviewed the roof plan and noted the location of the roof top residential scale air conditioner units. She presented an image of the courtyard and images of the sightlines from the upper floors of the surrounding buildings. She stated that the intent is to make the units available during the summer of 2023.

Ms. Czerniak stated that the petitioner is seeking approval of a Central Business Planned Development through a Special Use Permit. He stated that this opportunity was added to the Code specifically to provide incentives to encourage residential development in the Central Business District. She explained that the developer is seeking approval for a floor area ratio of up to 1.0 as provided for in the Code, and the ability to landbank, rather than buildout an additional six parking spaces on the site. She pointed out that if

the petitioner was not requesting the relief noted above, the project could move forward without Plan Commission review adding that multi-family residential is permitted in the B-2 zoning district. She confirmed that the Building Review Board recently recommended approval of a height variance for the building and approval of the design aspects and exterior materials subject to final refinements of the roof top stairway access and some details relating to the exterior materials. She noted that relevant portions of the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code are addressed in the staff report. She stated that the petition is presented to the Commission for initial comment and direction and will be returned to the Commission at the March 9, 2022, meeting for final action to allow the legal notice to be published in a timely manner. She apologized to the petitioner for the delay.

Mr. Swarthout noted that he neglected to mention that the building will be upgraded with the addition of an elevator and life safety improvements.

In response to questions from Chairman Dixon, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the City will be undertaking the "Burr Oak Storm Sewer Project" in this area beginning this spring. She stated that the project is intended to address stormwater issues in the area and will be disruptive. She stated that the petitioner's point was that consolidating construction activity in the area, rather than stretching it out over a period of years, will benefit the area.

In response to questions from Chairman Dixon, Mr. Swarthout stated that a trash and recycling enclosure will be constructed and tucked into the berm. He confirmed that the enclosure will not impact parking. He stated that the nine residential units will be restricted to two parking spaces each. He noted that visitor parking is also available on Western Avenue.

In response to questions from Commissioner Moorhead, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the height variance, landscaping, exterior materials and building design are all under the purview of the Building Review Board. She stated that there is no requirement for first floor retail in this area adding that the City encourages retail uses to be generally focused in the core area, around Market Square, to maximize the vitality of the shopping area.

In response to questions from Commissioner Moorhead, Mr. Swarthout stated that the property has been on the market for six years or so and is currently occupied only by the law offices of Mr. Speranza, the building owner. He confirmed that no roof top access for tenants of the building is proposed.

In response to questions from Commissioner LaMontagne, Mr. Swarthout stated that they have had discussions with the owner of the building to the north and he acknowledged that there could be some future potential to align improvements to that building with the project now being contemplated. He stated that the building in the present request is a structural steel building, and the structure will be reused. He stated that the existing staircases will be extended to the third floor. He stated that he plans to

use a replica of common brick on the exterior and potentially on the interior creating loft type spaces. He stated that the interior will be cutting edge. He stated that he is confident that the roof top access hatch can be reconfigured to minimize its appearance.

Chairman Dixon invited public comment.

Tim Henry, 345 E. Sheridan Road, stated that as a resident and commercial real estate broker, he supports the proposed project and commended the petitioner for bringing the project forward. He noted that the developer has been involved in many successful projects in the community. He stated that the Commission and the City need to encourage people to invest in the community especially those who have successfully completed projects in the past. He stated that the review process should be improved to encourage investors to make Lake Forest a better place. He stated that approval of this petition will be a step in the right direction.

Hearing no further requests to speak, Chairman Dixon, invited final questions, hearing none, he invited final comments from the petitioner.

Mr. Swarthout thanked the Commission and stated that he has a clear sense of the Commission's direction on this petition. He stated that they will proceed with further development of the construction plans for the project.

Chairman Dixon invited a motion to continue the petition.

Commissioner Davie made a motion to continue the petition to the March 9, 2022, meeting.

The motion was approved by a roll call vote, 6 to 0.

6. Additional public comment on non-agenda items

There were no public comments on non-agenda items.

7. Additional information from staff.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Czerniak
Director of Community Development