

MINUTES OF A PUBLIC HEARING HELD BEFORE THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF INDEPENDENCE, OHIO TO DISCUSS THE REQUEST FOR A U-3 CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT TO ALLOW THE CONVERSION OF THE EXISTING RESIDENTIAL DWELLING AT 7064 BRECKSVILLE ROAD, INDEPENDENCE, OHIO INTO ARRANGEMENT OFFICES FOR FORTUNA FUNERAL HOME

**HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM
5:00 P.M., TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2020**

Chairman Lytkowski opened the Public Hearing at 5:09 p.m. and the following responded to Roll Call:

PRESENT: Dale Lytkowski, Chairman
Gregory P. Kurtz, Mayor
David Grendel, Vice Mayor
William Gutermuth
Don Ramm, City Engineer
Jeff Markley, City Planner

OTHERS

PRESENT: Gregory O'Brien, Law Director

Chairman Lytkowski asked that before they begin, were all residents been notified of the particular project. The Secretary stated that the residents had been notified. He asked if there were any residents in attendance. There were none.

Mr. John Fortuna of Fortuna Funeral Home was in attendance. Chairman Lytkowski asked Mr. Fortuna to give the Planning Commission an update and explain to the Commission what they were trying to accomplish. The Chairman stated that he knows they discussed in detail at last month's Planning Commission meeting, but he wanted Mr. Fortuna to reiterate it for the record.

Mr. Fortuna stated that as he had mentioned in the last meeting, they have run out of office space upstairs here at the funeral home; so they would like to convert the home into 2 or 3 offices and a casket selection room. They also hope to put in a designated area for cremation as everyone knows that more cremations have been taking place. He stated it would not be to do cremations, but it would be mainly arrangement offices. He stated that if it was not a selection room for caskets, it would be selection for anything that would take place with a cremation like urns, any type of arrangements for cremation as well as regular burials.

Mr. Fortuna stated that what they were trying to do was have more working room to be able to meet families.

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Chairman Lytkowski asked Mr. Fortuna if they had purchased the home already.

Mr. Fortuna stated that they had purchased it.

The Chairman asked if there was going to be extensive remodeling done to that home? He asked if they were going to tie the façade into the funeral home?

Mr. Fortuna stated that they did talk about that at the last meeting. They were going to try to incorporate it to blend in with the funeral home. He stated that he did put a call into Mr. Casini after the last meeting. He stated that he hadn't heard from him yet. He figured he would wait until after this meeting to pursue talking to him. He stated that they haven't done any plans for the interior, but they have looked at the structure; and they believe they will be able to pretty much gut the entire interior and start from scratch to set up the house to best serve their purpose.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that the house now has a driveway going onto 21.

Mr. Fortuna agreed.

The Chairman asked if the driveway would be eliminated. He was just curious.

Mr. Fortuna stated that they were not certain at this point. He stated that they were hoping, as they had talked at the last meeting, to have the proposed driveway connect their parking lot.

The Chairman stated that was north/south.

Mr. Fortuna agreed.

The Chairman stated that he was talking about going east out of the home, the driveway.

Mr. Fortuna stated that they hadn't given any thought to totally eliminate the drive, but he would think that most of the traffic coming and going would be through the connected driveway; and that was their main intention to eliminate having to come on to 21 any more than they have to through that driveway.

Chairman Lytkowski asked City Engineer Ramm if he had looked at that driveway.

City Engineer Ramm stated that he hadn't looked at it extensively.

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The Chairman asked if it would make sense to close that off, or would it make more sense to keep it open. He stated from a safety standpoint as well.

Mayor Kurtz stated that from a safety standpoint, if they would put the connector like the Chairman mentioned north and south, you could drive straight out onto the road. It would be safer than ever trying to back out.

The Chairman agreed.

Vice Mayor Grendel said you could possibly have like one way, use the driveway to get into the facility and then go out using the existing parking lot. It would eliminate cars coming in that way, but they could go out that way.

Mayor Kurtz stated that he thought the Engineer could work that out. He asked if the Planning Commission was granting a right-of-way across the City's right-of-way as part of the approval?

Law Director O'Brien stated that Council would have to authorize some sort of access agreement. He stated that his recommendation would be an easement, but they would probably as a City, and he would have to speak to the Mayor on this. The Law Director stated that they would have to talk about duration if the City would ever utilized Florian; they would probably want to put some duration in there. The City could provide notice.

Mayor Kurtz stated that would be fair.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that he recalled last time when they talked, it had to be 5 or 7 years ago when they built the funeral home.

Mr. Fortuna stated that believe it or not, they have been there 14 years.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that he recalled they were going to put up some sort of a dining area for after services. He asked Mr. Fortuna if he ever came back to that idea.

Mr. Fortuna stated that they wanted to originally put a structure up there for his mother. He stated that it would be converted over to offices or another building that they would have access. He stated that they thought that getting the utilities back there would be tough to get to. He stated that not saying they would never do anything with that back parcel, but it was sort of on the back shelf right now since they were focusing on the house.

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Chairman Lytkowski stated that another question he had in his mind. He asked if there was a trend in cremation as opposed to burial with caskets. The Chairman stated that he was just curious.

Mr. Fortuna stated that they were fortunate in their area here, still the majority of the families that they take care of, even if they would be ultimately cremated; they still choose to have a visitation prior. He stated that in some areas of the country, it is the majority cremations; but they were still fortunate to be having folks coming in. He stated that the home will not be specifically just for casket selections and sales. It would encompass all types of arrangements that people would be asking for.

Chairman Lytkowski asked if Batesville Caskets still in business. Mr. Fortuna stated that they were. That was who they use.

The Chairman stated that the hinges on the caskets, he asked if Mr. Fortuna knew where they were made.

Mr. Fortuna stated he didn't know.

The Chairman stated that they were made right in Cleveland on Madison Avenue. They did all that work for years.

Mr. Fortuna stated that they learned that today.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that he had no other questions. He asked if anyone else had any questions.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked if there was going to be signage regarding the property. Would there be any signage on the building or on Brecksville Road?

Mr. Fortuna stated that they have talked about signage possibly to direct people once they pull into their parking lot as to what that drive would access to. He stated that they thought about what they might name the home. He stated that his dad who started the business, they were toying around with some ideas as to what they might call the building other than just an office.

Mayor Kurtz stated it could be the Fortuna Center or something.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that was a nice name.

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Mayor Kurtz stated that he had a couple of things. He stated that he thinks that the Law Director outlined the need to go to Council to get permission to use the right-of-way; and he also believes that the Architect or somebody should weigh in on the exterior upgrade to have it complement or match the funeral home or at least upgrade the entire façade so that the neighborhood would be enhanced as a result. He stated that if they have to have some type of portico or something like that which would match what they have on their existing facility. It may blend in well, and the Architectural Review Board could measure that.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that maybe the City Planner could tie in the landscaping as well. He stated that the landscaping was very nice on that corner.

Mayor Kurtz stated that there was a tremendous opportunity to blend this in and complement the rest of the residential neighborhood, similar to what the rezoning on that accountant's building did next to the Cleveland Clinic building in the center of town years ago. He stated that there was an opportunity here to really further accent and clean up and really make this appearance something that would be even more similar to the way they have done their corner. He stated that it was well manicured, it was well maintained, and if he would be willing to continue that theme and that strategy and the discipline of their maintenance, it will enhance the entire neighborhood.

Mr. Fortuna stated that it was definitely their plan because they would have families that they would be serving as they were now. He stated that they want to give that first impression to the people, just like they would if they were coming into the funeral home itself.

Mayor Kurtz stated that they could do some nice amenities to tie those together from the appearance on Brecksville Road, and also to navigate back and forth. He stated that there was a lot of opportunity there he thought.

Mr. Fortuna stated that it was such in the beginning stages, they would be open to discussion as to what they would be able to do. He stated that they didn't want to move forward on anything as they mentioned at the last meeting until they knew that they received the approval to do so.

Chairman Lytkowski asked Mr. Fortuna if he had a timing issue there.

Mr. Fortuna stated 6 months ago. He stated that they were going to move forward as things go as they would hope today; they were going to move forward. He would be

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talking to the City as to what the next steps would be that they would need to do. He stated that they haven't had any plans drawn up; so they were in the very beginning stages. He stated that they didn't want to waste their time.

Chairman Lytkowski stated to the Law Director that the Planning Commission would not really take action on the matter. They will put it on next month's agenda for action by the Planning Commission. He asked the Law Director if that would be correct.

Law Director O'Brien stated that would be the Planning Commission's prerogative. He stated that they have made exceptions to that in the past; he didn't know if the Chairman wanted to do that one here. He stated that he thought it was always dependent on if there were any neighbor input. That has been the practice to wait.

Chairman Lytkowski asked Mayor Kurtz if he had any thoughts about that. The Chairman stated that he felt that Fortuna has been a very good citizen for Independence. That was the only reason he raised the question.

Mayor Kurtz stated that he didn't have any objection as long as it would be clear what the goal would be in terms of the City. He stated that he looks at what they have done at the corner when he drives by there. He stated that he wished that every property in the City was as well manicured and maintained. He stated that if they could use the right-of-way to get it further manicured, and that property to set the template for all the rest of the properties in line. He stated that it was an opportunity to do some really neat things. He stated that he could see adding a portico on the side of it that would mirror what they have on their funeral home. He stated that they could upgrade that entire façade to complement, and then landscaping it. He stated that he thought the City Planner could work wonders to complement and really tie it all together to the next residential house.

Chairman Lytkowski stated that if no one on the Planning Commission had any objections, once they would close the Public Hearing, they will have Mr. Fortuna be on the regular Planning Commission meeting. He asked the Law Director if he was correct that the Planning Commission could take action, subject to approval by the City Council on the easement.

Law Director O'Brien stated that it would be the Chairman's prerogative.

Vice Mayor Grendel stated that the other thing was would they be able to get that on this month's agenda for Council to approve it also here next week.

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The Chairman stated that would be perfect. He stated that the only reason he was saying it was because they have been at it for 6 months or whatever; and they have been a good citizen. The Chairman stated that he just thought that the Planning Commission should try to accommodate them.

Vice Mayor Grendel stated that he agreed.

Chairman Lytkowski asked Mr. Gutermuth if he had any questions.

Mr. Guternuth stated that he just wanted to get on the record, set the expectation of service; he asked if it would be a 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. operation. He asked if they would meet with families in the evening. He would like to get a sense of that, but that would be all that he would have.

Mr. Fortuna stated that it would vary. He stated that usually they will meet when it would be convenient for the families. He stated that it would happen where they would meet in the evening. He stated that they prefer not to because they would like to go home in the evenings; but it does happen.

Mr. Gutermuth stated that was it for him.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked if the lighting would be an issue as far as for the neighbors. He stated that he noticed the neighbor's house to the north was quite close to the house.

Mr. Fortuna stated that when they redo the interior, they plan to completely gut it; so if they have to eliminate the windows that would be on the north side of the house so that the office would not really need to have an exterior window. That could eliminate the issue of any lighting problems.

Vice Mayor Grendel stated that he didn't think there would be any need for a fence because it looked like it was very close. He didn't think they would want to do something like that to distinguish between the residential area and their commercial area.

Mr. Fortuna stated that the only place they might consider a fence would be from the rear of the house toward the garage.

Mayor Kurtz stated that would make sense.

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Mr. Fortuna stated that it would be for the neighbor's privacy. They might consider that also.

Vice Mayor Grendel asked would the garage be used to house any of their vehicles.

Mr. Fortuna stated that it was being used already for one of their vehicles.

Vice Mayor Grendel stated that he agrees with the Mayor, it could be a wonderful potential. He stated that he knows that they always do things first-class; so it will extend the beautification that they have done to that corner even farther to the north.

Mr. Fortuna thanked them.

Chairman Lytkowski asked if there were any other questions or comments.

Mayor Kurtz stated that he had a couple of things just to reiterate what some of his colleagues have indicated. The Mayor stated that he thought a fence to the west of the house to buffer, both from the sight line and also soften if there were headlights or anything. He stated that he thinks the orientation of the house, the orientation for access would have to be on the south side of the existing structure or the south and/or west if they have a nice board-on-board fence or something.

He stated that then the façade, and then the landscaping to accent and complement what they have done with their existing property. It will do nothing but enhance that area. He stated that he will depend on the Architectural Board to further comment on what the Planning Commission has put into the record.

The Mayor stated that the last thing was, he thinks they need for their access road, whether it be some type of ornamental pavers or something like that with some accent lighting so it would not complicate the neighborhood. He stated that he thinks that will go a long way to make it really nice for everyone.

Chairman Lytkowski stated to Mr. Fortuna that he thought he heard all of that. Before they would adjourn the Public Hearing, he wanted Mr. Fortuna to stick around because the Planning Commission was going to put them on immediately on the regular Planning Commission meeting and take a vote. He stated that hopefully the Planning Commission could approve it, subject to City Council with the easement. He asked the Mayor if that was correct.

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Mayor Kurtz stated that as long as the Vice Mayor, he would be okay with Council.

The Chairman asked the Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Grendel stated that he thought it would not be rushing things too much. They have known, at least he has known, that they were planning on and purchasing the home. He stated that they have known the plans; so it was not a big surprise or a big upheaval. He stated that he sees no problem, once the Planning Commission would approve it this evening, that they put the easement legislation on next week's agenda.

Chairman Lytkowski asked if there were any other comments. There were none.

A motion was made by Vice Mayor Grendel, seconded by William Gutermuth, to close the Public Hearing.

ROLL CALL: Yeas: Grendel, Gutermuth, Kurtz, Lytkowski
Nays: None
MOTION CARRIED

There being no further business, the Public Hearing was closed at 5:29 p.m.

Dale Lytkowski, Chairman

Debi Beal, Planning Commission Clerk
Minutes Unapproved at Time of Release 08/05/20