

CITY OF BIG RAPIDS
Planning Commission
Minutes November 16, 2022
Approved

Acting Chair Jane called the November 16, 2022 regular meeting of the Planning Commission, to order at 6:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PRESENT Chris Jane, Rory Ruddick, Kate McLeod, Kasey Thompson, Jacob Buse, and Sarah Montgomery

EXCUSED Megan Eppley

ABSENT None

ALSO PRESENT Paula Priebe, Community Development Director
Emily Szymanski, Planning & Zoning Technician

There were 9 people in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Sarah Montgomery seconded by Rory Ruddick, to approve the minutes of the October 19, 2022 meeting of the Planning Commission as presented.

Motion was passed with all in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT NOT RELATED TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Roberta Cline of 602 Escott Street noted that while tonight's study session on manufactured homes will be presented by staff with no public hearing, she asked if the Planning Commission could allow questions from the public after City staff and the Commission discussed the topic.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Study Session: Economic Development Strategy

Jessie Black, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM) Fellow, summarized the Staff Report, stating that tonight's discussion is to simply update the Commission on the progress made thus far and ask for any feedback on the Economic Development Strategy Draft. Black had then opened up the discussion and

asked Commissioners if they had any questions or thoughts after reviewing the Strategy. Those comments are as follows:

- Jane asked if any of the data stood out to Black while drafting the Strategy. Black stated that the labor force numbers in the recent battery plant announcement and that they will be bringing in over 2,300 jobs. The local economy currently employees a little over 5,000 people. Putting that into consideration, another 50% will be added to the local workforce.
- Ruddick asked if Black were to remove the University from the data used, what would the impact be? Black stated that Ferris State University staff and students make up a lot of the local economy. If the University wasn't in the City of Big Rapids, the economy would immensely struggle (i.e. students working at local restaurants, retail, and services).
- Jane had asked about what the public input looked like for this Strategy. Black had stated that City staff held two input sessions (one at City Hall and the other at Toppings/The Backroom Coffee. To increase public participation, Black and Szymanski attended the Annual Chili Cookoff to meet people where they are at. The intent of the input sessions was to create a S.W.O.T. (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) Analysis to better understand public perceptions.
- Thompson had recommended to one of the City Commissioners that the Economic Development Strategy should also include a process to follow up with businesses that have left the City in order to understand why they left.

Commissioners thanked Black for all of the hard work on the Economic Development Strategy and throughout their time at the City of Big Rapids. The Commission had no further comments or questions regarding the Strategy.

Study Session: Manufactured Homes in Single-Family Neighborhoods

Szymanski summarized the Staff Report, stating that this discussion stems from concerns of a few community members as well as from the interest indicated by the Planning Commission. Szymanski first presented information from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regarding the differences between manufactured (previously known as 'mobile') and modular homes. Next, Michigan's Mobile Home Commission Act, Act 96 of 1987 was introduced as this Act outlines what local municipalities can regulate. This Act, along with Michigan Supreme Court Cases, state that local municipalities cannot exclude manufactured homes from a particular residential Districts, nor can Ordinance regulations only apply to manufactured housing. Szymanski stated that the City's current Ordinance language already includes standards that apply to all dwellings in the City of Big Rapids. For example, minimum width of dwellings, permanent foundation, does not have exposed wheels or chassis, is aethically compatible with other dwellings, etc). Lastly, Szymanski introduced the term

“exclusionary zoning” to the Commission, as any proposed amendments cannot exclude or have the intent to exclude.

The conversation ensued over the following:

- Buse asked that while it appears that the City cannot exclude manufactured housing from particular residential districts, the perception is that manufactured homes do not last as long as stick-built homes. If manufactured homes start to deteriorate, what would the process be for the City? Szymanski stated that the City currently has Ordinance language pertaining to blight and the Code Enforcement Officer, Andrew Hartung, oversees the enforcement process for blight cases. Buse stated that he can only imagine that Hartung is overwhelmed being the only staff member to handle these cases. Could the City hire an additional Code Enforcement Officer to assist Hartung? Szymanski stated that additional staffing is approved by the City Commission, but she will bring this suggestion up to the City Manager, Mark Gifford.

The Planning Commission opened up the discussion for any questions from the public in attendance.

- Roberta Cline of 602 Escott Street asked the following questions:
 - Clarification on the current Ordinance regulation that states, “it has a minimum width across any section of twenty-four (24) feet...” Cline asked where the Ordinance prohibits singlewide manufactured homes. Szymanski stated that singlewide homes are usually 14-18 feet in width and the Ordinance requires at least 24 feet, prohibiting singlewide homes due to width.
 - If singlewides are prohibited, why are there a few around the city? Szymanski stated that the Ordinance may have been different at the time. However, all singlewides that exist within the city limits today, except for those allowed in mobile home parks, are considered nonconforming and can continue unless damaged/destroyed.
 - Can the City require an age of singlewide homes? This would help mitigate blight. Szymanski is concerned that this might be exclusionary. City staff will discuss this item with the City Attorney.
- Dan Spedowske of 830 Lilac Avenue asked Szymanski if she has “ever gone and looked at a manufactured home?” Szymanski has. Spedowske also stated that “they say manufactured homes but they shot out in a heartbeat. The carpet is not the same, the soffit is not the same, the paneling is not the same, the cabinets are not the same. After fifteen years, they can’t get the same materials because everything changes. Where are you going to get the parts? Where are you going to get them? Who is going to get them? Who is going to fix them?” In order to better understand the question, Szymanski asked Spedowske if there was a specific question that could be answered. Spedowske said, “My question

for the city is why do “you people” want to bring manufactured housing into the City for it to deteriorate?” Jane stated, “Why would you assume that “us people” want that?” Spedoske replied with “Whoever started this whole thing – which I heard was Mark Gifford – who can never show up to a meeting, which is sad. Where is all of this coming from, changing our R-1 District? What’s next, a teepee? What I’m hearing is “you guys” want to bring in all of this low-income “stuff?”

- Pam Borstler of 819 Marion Avenue asked two questions:
 - “If manufactured homes have to be newer than five years of age, why are the Lattimore manufactured homes allowed in the city? There is blight laying around all of them. I’m sorry, but Andrew gives them 30 days for blight and then he gives them another warning with additional time. The city is not following through with this”. Priebe clarified that the City does not currently have an age provision within the Zoning Ordinance. That was brought up as an example from another municipality.
 - Is it mandated that the city have a certain percentage of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) housing? Is that the way you’re going? Szymanski stated that there is not a mandate for the City of Big Rapids. However, it is the job of planners to help improve communities so that they welcome everyone. Going forward, the lives of younger generations will look very different from those of older generations (i.e. getting out of college then getting a job then buying a house). Younger generations cannot afford to purchase traditional homes. The median income for this area is \$28,000.
- Jana Lee Farrier of 729 N State Street stated that a modular home on Finley Avenue was required to have a garage and a basement. However, the new manufactured home on Marion/Bellevue was given a waiver and did not have to have a garage or a basement because “it was too expensive” there should be set rules that are followed because “what is good for the goose should be good for the gander”. Priebe stated that the Finley Avenue home was constructed by the Housing Commission when the previous home burned down. They were directed to put a new home on that lot and used grant funds from the State of Michigan hoping to add more modular homes at a certain price point. It was the Housing Commission’s choice to add both a garage and a basement. That is not a requirement of the local regulations”.
- Greg Denny of 323 W Pere Marquette Street asked how many manufactured homes are currently in the city? Of those, how many are rentals? How many look blighted because they don’t have a basement, garage, or attic?”
- Rosemary Jennings asked if there are currently singlewide homes outside of mobile home parks in the city? Szymanski stated that yes, there are a few but they are nonconforming and could not be replaced with a singlewide if destroyed.

Thompson stated while she can sympathize and empathize with comments made, she also speaks with so many young people on a daily basis and has to be transparent.

Thompson stated that there is a push where millennials and generation-z are being encouraged not to buy houses. As much as the community is having this discussion of rentals versus home ownership, these are the types of issues that City Officials and staff will have to address. There is a housing crisis across the Country and major corporations are buying up entire neighborhoods as we speak. As much as there is resistant, the ship is already coming. It is time to figure out what the community, City Officials, and City staff, would like in our community. How the issue is addressed is up to us. Change is inevitable because the socio-economic shift is already happening.

The Planning Commission requested that City Staff discuss this matter with the City Attorney.

Staff will discuss the topic of manufactured housing with the City Attorney and bring back more information during a future Planning Commission meeting,

UNSCHEDULED BUSINESS

The resignation of Community Development Director, Paula Priebe

Priebe informed Commissioners that tonight's meeting has been Priebe's last meeting of the Big Rapids Planning Commission. Priebe thanked the Commission for their dedication to public service and stated that it has been a joy to work with Commissioners.

There being no further business, Acting Chair Jane adjourned the meeting at 7:37 PM with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Szymanski
Planning & Zoning Technician and Planning Commission Secretary