

City of Kalamazoo  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
Minutes  
May 7, 2020  
*FINAL*

Electronic meeting  
under the authority of Executive Order 2020-48  
issued by Governor Gretchen Whitmer

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; Emily Greenman Wright, Vice Chair; Shardae Chambers; Derek Wissner; Coreen Ellis; Brian Pittelko; Alfonso Espinosa; James Pitts

Members Excused: Sakhi Vyas

City Staff: Pete Eldridge, Assistant City Planner; Clyde Robinson, City Attorney; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Joseph Ulery, Deputy Chief Information Officer; Neal Conway, Communications Coordinator; Katie Reilly, Neighborhood Activator

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

**B. ROLL CALL**

Planner Eldridge proceeded with roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present.

**C. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA**

Planner Eldridge announced that P.C. #2020.08: 2203 Paddington Road would be postponed to the June 4<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission meeting.

Planner Eldridge explained the process for the public to comment on agenda and non-agenda items during the meeting.

**Commissioner Ellis, supported by Commissioner Chambers, moved approval of the May 7, 2020 Planning Commission agenda as amended. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.**

**D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Pitts, moved approval of the April 15, 2020 Planning Commission minutes. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.**

**E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

## **F. NEW BUSINESS**

None.

## **G. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Commissioner Milliken reviewed the process for the public to comment on the public hearings.

1. P.C. #2020.07: 1009 E. Stockbridge Avenue. The Urban Alliance is requesting a special use permit to allow the building to be used as a community service center at this location.  
**[Recommendation: approve special use permit for community service center]**

Planner Eldridge presented the staff report. He shared that Urban Alliance had been leasing the building for five years and currently in the process of purchasing it from the United Methodist Church. They desire a special use permit to allow the conversion of the former church into a community service center. The property is 1.4 acres and the building is 9,000 square feet with a large gymnasium. The parking lot accommodates 42 off-street parking spaces and there is a gravel area along the north property line that is sitting idle. Planner Eldridge reviewed zoning maps and pictures of the area. The property and surrounding areas are residential for current and future land use. It is identified as tax exempt as was the church and non-profits occupying it. The community service center aligns with the Shared Prosperity, Youth Development, and Complete Neighborhood goals of the Strategic Vision. Urban Alliance has a range of programs with ideas to further their outreach now that they are taking over the building. Urban Alliance has been in the Edison neighborhood for 15 years.

Planner Eldridge stated that the mission of Urban Alliance is to understand and meet the needs of the community through outreach. Urban Alliance participates with several programs: Group Violence Initiative; the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Kalamazoo program; Momentum programs; and they partner with KNHS. Urban Alliance has 20 full-time staff and the building currently houses two nonprofits - the offices for Building Blocks and the Group Violence Intervention Coordinator. Urban Alliance plans to make the building accessible to outside groups. They plan some upgrades to the interior and some exterior improvements, but no footprint changes.

Urban Alliance reached out to the community regarding this request. They held an open house the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of March and shared information with the Edison Neighborhood Association. City staff mailed the required notices. Staff received one correspondence regarding the condition of the dumpsters there - which was forwarded to Planning Commissioners. Planner Eldridge let Commissioners know that Urban Alliance's plan will go through the site plan process and the dumpsters will need to be screened.

Planner Eldridge listed out the review criteria. This includes: 1) Functionality of the site and how it fits with surrounding land uses. This site has frontage on multiple streets that have a fair amount of traffic already. There are main entrances off Mills and Stockbridge and another incidental entrance on Race Street. 2) Community service centers are allowed under special use permit in a residential zone district. 3) Location and design. There are no adjustments to the footprint of the building. They have operated at this site for five years with no issues raised. The site has ample parking for the proposed programs. There is no environmental impact and the road capacity is acceptable. No new driveways are planned. Emergency access is more than sufficient.

Planner Eldridge explained the rationale for staff recommendation: community service centers are allowed as special uses in zone RD-19 with approval from the Planning Commission. The proposed use

will be able to comply with zoning ordinance requirements. Urban Alliance has been a tenant in this building for the last five years while providing programs and services to the neighborhood. The proposed facility will continue to house Urban Alliance staff and provide meeting space for outside groups. Urban Alliance administers programs that service youth, adults and other nonprofits. Staff recommends approval for the special use permit for this community service center.

Applicant, Mr. Joe Brown, said they are excited for this opportunity. The church didn't have the money to maintain the building, so Urban Alliance decided it was time to step in to purchase it. They desire to create a welcoming environment to facilitate multiple neighborhood events. Mr. Brown said they are looking forward to updating and upgrading the security of the building and adding ADA compliance. They want to get the auditorium into a usable state as a resource for the neighborhood. He said they are looking forward to providing a lot of opportunities for the neighborhood - potentially even a free clinic. Mr. Brown said that they partner with a lot of non-profits, and they hope to expand those offerings to other organizations who fit the mission and provide beneficial services for the community. Mr. Brown shared that they are currently working on a survey of the neighborhood to ask what is needed. He said that will drive their direction as far as building use.

**Commissioner Milliken opened up the public comment portion of the hearing.**

None.

**Commissioner Milliken closed the public hearing.**

Planner Eldridge stated that the dumpster issues referred to earlier have been cleaned up. The dumpsters were emptied, and all the miscellaneous furniture was removed.

Commissioner Milliken asked for clarification as to what triggered the special use permit request. He wondered if the key difference was that with ownership of the building, Urban Alliance will be able to do larger events, and more ongoing interior events that bring larger gatherings. Planner Eldridge agreed that Urban Alliance will more readily be able to use the whole building and expand program offerings. He believed there would be more activity on the property than if it was just utilized as a church.

Commissioner Milliken thought it was an important point that Urban Alliance is going from being a tenant occupant of a church that had a special use permit to now being the sole occupant and user. They will have the flexibility under this new special use permit to utilize the full opportunity the space presents with the large auditorium and gymnasium. Commissioner Milliken believed that is the key difference in bringing this forward.

Commissioner Espinosa asked if the special use permit for the community service center would change the tax status of the property. Planner Eldridge explained that it would only change the tax status on the property if the community service organization was a for-profit entity. He confirmed that Urban Alliance is a nonprofit entity, so the property's tax status would not change.

**Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Chambers, made the motion to approve the special use permit for PC 2020.07 for a community service center at 1009 E. Stockbridge Avenue.**

Commissioner Greenman Wright shared that she is excited they are using and maintaining the existing building. She said they have seen other churches in the downtown area where neglect has led to them being beyond repair. Commissioner Greenman Wright was happy to see them investing money and programming in the neighborhood, and she was glad they can have a permanent location. She shared she would be voting yes.

Commissioner Ellis was excited about the idea of utilizing this space for something good. She seemed impressed by the applicant's passion for the work they are doing in serving the community. She said she would be voting yes.

Commissioner Milliken added that the historic reuse of such a key building in the fabric of the neighborhood was very impressive. He also added that this is consistent with the criteria in the zoning ordinance. Commissioner Milliken stated his agreement with the findings of staff in the staff report.

**Roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

Commissioner Milliken reviewed the process for the public to comment on the public hearings.

2. P.C. #2020.09: Presentation of Oakland Winchell Neighborhood Plan for incorporation into the 2025 Master Plan. This is a joint request of the Oakland Drive Winchell Neighborhood Association (ODWNA) and the City's Community Planning and Economic Development Department. The neighborhood plan draft document is available for review at <http://www.imaginekalamazoo.com/plans/#neighborhood-plans> [Recommendation: approve recommendation for neighborhood plan adoption by the City Commission]

Ms. Katie Reilly, Neighborhood Activator, gave a presentation of the neighborhood plan. She said the planning process started in 2018, and they used a variety of techniques for engagement: community meetings, online surveys, and focus groups. Unique to their process, they broke up into committees based on the major themes their plan ended up addressing. Those committees were led by resident leaders. In their plan, they include topics of Future Land Use vision, especially for the corner of Stadium Drive and Howard (currently the Kalamazoo Christian property); Connectivity, Environmental Responsibilities, Safety and Good Governance. Ms. Reilly then introduced Mr. Pete Kushner, President of the Oakland Drive Winchell Neighborhood Association, which led the planning process.

Mr. Kushner thanked the Planning Commission for moving government forward during this time. He said that as a neighborhood, they were excited when the City kicked off the initiative to give neighborhoods a voice in the Master Plan through neighborhood plans. He shared that they were the first neighborhood to put together a plan which was not a core neighborhood. Mr. Kushner said they had volunteers led by their board. At their peak, they had five committees with over 40 neighborhood members combined working in the areas Ms. Reilly had mentioned. He expressed pride in the neighborhood residents for pulling together. They had multiple open houses through neighborhood association meetings, surveys, regular website and email newsletter postings of progress, and countless committee meetings to digest all the comments and feedback. Mr. Kushner believes the plan greatly represents the hopes, dreams and desires of where the

neighborhood wants to go. He said the residents are eager to begin implementing the neighborhood plan. They have started working on a Safe Routes to School program with Ms. Reilly. He believes the plan is comprehensive and reflects the hard work and initiatives of the Neighborhood Association and the neighborhood at large.

Commissioner Espinosa expressed appreciation that the plan is very comprehensive. He wondered as he was looking at the neighborhood future land use vision, how the natural features were selected for inclusion. Mr. Kushner explained that they worked with Planner Anderson and Ms. Reilly to come up with a bubble plan. This plan shows their preference for how that specific area is developed. He felt the NFP areas designated on the maps were a collaborative effort with the board, neighborhood and City.

Mr. Kushner stated that their bubble plan doesn't change zoning. It is not a legal overlay; it is the neighborhood's preference. As landowners and developers come and go in the future, this plan will guide them to know what the neighborhood wants. He shared that anything north of Arcadia Creek is ready for commercial development in a responsible manner. Anything south of Arcadia Creek would be a mixed-use and less intense development. It is important to the neighborhood to protect their look and feel while being realistic about development.

**Commissioner Milliken opened up the public comment portion of the hearing.**

None.

**Commissioner Milliken closed the public comment portion of the hearing.**

Commissioner Milliken said that some categories in the City Master Plan are intended to push the boundaries of current zoning, encouraging zoning to innovate. He liked that this neighborhood plan presents the neighborhood vision of that. They presented what they think that will mean since those areas haven't been zoned. Commissioner Milliken believes that the plan is very proactive and useful. He did let them know that a couple times where the future land use map is shown, the hatching for natural features is not defined in the legend. He asked them to add the hatching to the legend since it is such an important part of the plan and key part of goals and vision. They will want to make sure that is captured and that people who read the plan knows what it means.

Mr. Kushner agreed that was a good point and thought that Ms. Reilly would add that. He also shared that their neighborhood board is working to narrow down some projects for the quick win funding. Mr. Kushner estimated that they will spend the next spring and summer to come up with a consensus of how to spend those funds.

Commissioner Ellis asked Mr. Kushner how the neighborhood plan and vision fits into the Master Plan. Mr. Kushner shared that he got involved on a local level to give more of a voice to their neighborhoods. He is hoping their plan will be an impetus and example for other neighborhoods. He believes neighborhoods must put their plans forward and show the City what they want. Mr. Kushner would like the Master Plans

and neighborhood plans to get updated every five years. He also hopes the City will help neighborhoods who don't have an association to get them started.

Commissioner Espinosa commented that Western Michigan has a large chunk of their land in this neighborhood. He asked how they contributed to the plan. Mr. Kushner reported that he made multiple efforts to reach out to Western and got positive, but broad, responses. He says he keeps in touch and gives them information. It could be a stronger relationship, but it's got to be a two-way relationship. Mr. Kushner stated that Western is a big part of the City. He thought it could be a big positive or big negative to the neighborhood. He's gotten feedback that the biggest thing that scares most people on the future land use map is if Western bought the property and built 13-story student housing. Mr. Kushner said they welcome development that will fit into the character of the neighborhood.

**Commissioner Espinosa, supported by Commissioner Pitts, made the motion the Planning Commission recommend the Oakland Drive Winchell neighborhood plan for adoption by the City Commission.**

Commissioner Espinosa thought it was nice that the plan is so comprehensive. He stated that he really wants to see it developing at a constant pace. Commissioner Espinosa assured Mr. Kushner that it was a good effort and worth the time.

Commissioner Milliken stated that he thinks this is a good addition and enhancement of the Master Plan as it applies to this neighborhood. He expressed appreciation to the neighborhood and staff for leading and guiding these efforts.

**Roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**H. OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

**I. CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Regarding non-agenda items)**

Ms. Jessica Gardner McKinley, resident, called in with a comment on PC #2020.08: 2203 Paddington Road. She said they received a letter indicating a location on Stockbridge Avenue whereas this is a group daycare a street over from her. She was concerned that people were not quite aware of what was going on. Ms. Gardner McKinley shared that they have small lots and occupancies in the Millwood neighborhood and there is a 24-hour daycare that resides there currently. She said it is very populated, with a lot of cars and activity throughout the night. Ms. Gardner McKinley requested information about the proposal, how large the expansion would be and what this would include. She is hoping to receive more information with an honest, straight-forward letter with regards to the actual address.

Planner Eldridge informed Planning Commissioners that there was a correction needed in the notice. He said they revised the notices and they were resent to the 33 addresses related to the Paddington request.

Planner Eldridge said he would reach out to this individual and answer their questions about the group daycare.

#### **J. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS**

None.

#### **K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT**

Planner Eldridge referenced the updated site plan spreadsheet that was sent to the Planning Commissioners. He informed them that even though the office is closed, they have been accepting, reviewing, and distributing site plans to the appropriate departments. Meetings have been held via Zoom with the applicants. The City has only taken in four site plans since the closure of the office but has managed to keep the process going with those already in the queue. Planner Eldridge assured Planning Commissioners that any project deemed essential would continue to move forward and be provided with necessary permits, inspections, and plan review.

Planner Eldridge also stated that the marijuana ordinances will go before the City Commission on May 18<sup>th</sup> for a public hearing. The City Commission asked the Planning Department to look more closely at separations for certain land uses. They requested the Planning Department to add things like playgrounds, public pools, and youth centers to the 500' separation that before had applied just to day cares. Once the land area maps are revised, they will be back up on the website to be viewed.

#### **L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioners Ellis, Pitts, and Milliken thanked staff for their work and wished everyone to stay safe and healthy.

#### **M. ADJOURNMENT**

**Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 8:13 pm.**

Respectfully submitted,



Christina Anderson,  
City Planner  
Community Planning & Economic Development