

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
February 26, 2024

The Fergus Falls Planning Commission held a regular meeting on February 26, 2024, in the Council Chambers of City Hall. Chair Kilde called the meeting to order at 5:15 PM. Present were Laurel Kilde, Sarah Duffy, Wayne Schuett, and Paul Vukonich. Absent were Mike Walls, Nate Kunde, and Ryan Fullerton. Staff present were Klara Beck and Jill Hanson.

Applicants present: Stanley Carignan

Public present: Carla Bentzin, Bernie Schuetze, Jeff Arntson, Hunter Arntson, Bert Clark, Andrew Kowalski

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the agenda by Commissioner Duffy and seconded by Commissioner Schuett with a change to the order of the hearings to accommodate those in attendance for public hearings. Passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Vukonich made a motion to approve the minutes from January 26, 2024. It was seconded by Commissioner Duffy. Passed unanimously.

ELECTION OF HPC EX-OFFICIO

Motion and second were made by Commissioner Duffy and Commissioner Vukonich to nominate Wayne Schuett to serve as the ex-officio representative to the Heritage Preservation Commission. Passed unanimously.

ACTION ITEM

5a. LICENSED TOBACCO SALES IN § 154.037 B-2, SERVICE BUSINESS DISTRICTS & § 154.038 B-3, GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS

Community Development Manager Klara Beck recommended that Planning Commission update City Code § 154.037 to explicitly include “licensed tobacco sales” among the permitted uses within the B-2 Service Business District. While the city code specifically mentions “Pipe and tobacco shops” as a permitted use in the B-3 zone, there is an absence of explicit language addressing tobacco sales in the B-2 zone. Klara suggested simultaneously updating § 154.038 B-3, GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT to read “licensed tobacco sales” rather than “Pipe and tobacco shops” as a permitted use in the B-3 zone. By updating, the city may bring its regulations in line with existing practices and ensure clarity for businesses and regulators. Commissioner Schuett made a motion to recommend approval of the code changes to the City Council. It was seconded by Commissioner Duffy. Passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

6c. REQUEST BY CITY OF FERGUS FALLS (APPLICANT) ON BEHALF OF MARK & BRENDA CHRISTOPHERSON (PROPERTY OWNERS): REZONING OF 801 WEST STANTON AVENUE FROM I-2, GENERAL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT TO R-4, MULTIPLE FAMILY RESIDENCE DISTRICT

Klara Beck outlined the city's initiative to rezone 801 West Stanton Avenue to align with the Downtown Riverfront Master Plan, aiming to revitalize the blighted I-2 General Industrial District into a site for workforce housing. The City secured a grant to acquire the property after it is prepared for redevelopment.

There was discussion regarding nearby railroad tracks and crossings. Klara emphasized that the rezoning is dependent on the property's sale to the City of Fergus Falls. She noted that no public comments were received before the meeting.

Chair Kilde opened the public hearing at **5:35 PM**.

Carla Bentzin, 919 West Stanton Avenue, asked how long it would take for the property to be cleaned up. Klara replied that 2025 would be the soonest that new construction would take place. Cleanup would occur this building season.

Bernie Schuetz, 1008 West Stanton Avenue, raised concerns about infrastructure costs and the presence of an old foundry on the site. Klara assured him that the city is aware of the foundry's history and noted an ongoing environmental study by the property owner. She mentioned an upcoming Stanton Avenue infrastructure project, with affected residents already informed via mail and information also available on the city website. Klara clarified that the discussed property's infrastructure is privately owned, with the owner responsible for upgrades, emphasizing that the current focus is solely on the rezoning request.

Chair Kilde closed the public hearing at **5:42 PM**.

Commissioner Vukonich motioned to recommend approval of the rezoning request to the City Council, seconded by Commissioner Schuett. Passed unanimously.

6a. REQUEST BY FERGUS FALLS HABITAT FOR HUMANITY TO OBTAIN A VARIANCE TO ALLOW FOR SPLITTING OF A LOT WITHIN AN R-1, ONE-FAMILY RESIDENCE DISTRICT LOCATED ON EAST ST. CHARLES AVENUE INTO TWO NONCONFORMING LOTS

Klara Beck presented the staff report for the request of a Variance in an R-1 zone located on East St. Charles Avenue. The applicants stated their intention is to split the lot into two 50' x 150' lots with the intent of building two Habitat for Humanity homes. The two newly created lots may then both access utilities directly from St. Charles Avenue rather than the unimproved Arlington Avenue, where utilities are not readily available.

Stan Carignan, Habitat for Humanity Executive Director, explained the side setbacks for the lots would remain the same as the other lots in the neighborhood and the lot depths would allow for adequate construction of the homes. Having access to utilities on St. Charles Avenue would help to keep the building cost down.

Chair Kilde opened the public hearing at **5:49 PM**. Hearing none, Chair Kilde closed the public hearing at **5:50 PM**.

Commissioner Schuett motioned to recommend approval of the variance request, seconded by Commissioner Duffy. Motion passed.

6b. REQUEST BY ALEX & MEGAN BLONDEAU FOR A REZONING TO ALLOW FOR 2008 COUNTY HIGHWAY 111 OUTLET A TO BE REZONED FROM R-1, ONE-FAMILY RESIDENCE DISTRICT TO R-A, AGRICULTURAL RESIDENCE DISTRICT

Klara Beck presented the staff report for the rezoning request for parcel number 71002991378024. The parcel in question is approximately 1.5 acres and is referenced as "Outlot A". Alex & Megan Blondeau own Outlot A as well as parcel number 71002500004063 to the south, which is zoned R-A. The Blondeaus use both parcels as one property. Parcel 71002991378024 was at one time intended to be a storm water outlet for a proposed subdivision, but plans for that subdivision fell through. The Blondeaus now grow nursery stock on the land and would like to build a greenhouse. Property in an R-1 zone cannot contain a stand-alone accessory structure like a greenhouse. Rezoning the parcel to R-A matches it to the zoning of their larger parcel containing their home and allows for the use of "Nurseries, landscape gardening and tree farms and greenhouses all for the growing of plants, but not to include retail sales" as specified in § 154.030(B)(3) of Fergus Falls City Code.

Chair Kilde opened the public hearing at **5:54 PM**. Hearing none, Chair Kilde closed the public hearing at **5:55 PM**.

Commissioner Vukonich motioned to recommend approval of the rezoning request, seconded by Commissioner Duffy. Passed unanimously.

6d. REQUEST BY CITY OF FERGUS FALLS TO ALLOW FOR 205 HAMPDEN AVENUE TO BE REZONED FROM I-2, GENERAL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT AND R-2, ONE AND TWO-FAMILY RESIDENCE DISTRICT TO B-3, GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The rezoning request for 205 Hampden Avenue is to clean up zoning anomalies on the city’s zoning map and allow the library to be regulated under zoning guidelines that are more fitting for their location and intended purpose. Parcels 71001990154005, 71001990154004, 71001990283000, and 71001990282001 make up the footprint of the Fergus Falls Public Library and its parking lots. Parcels 71001990154005 and 71001990282001 are zoned I-2. Parcels 71001990154004 and 71001990283000 are zoned R-2. The footprint of the building itself spreads across parcels 71001990154005 and 71001990154004, meaning the building spans two zones. Situating a property within a single designated zone provides clarity for both the building operators and regulatory authorities regarding the permitted uses, regulations, and standards applicable to the property. B-3 zoning will accommodate the library’s need for signage indicating the presence of a native planting butterfly garden in its parking lot.

Chair Kilde opened the public hearing at **5:57 PM**.

Bert Clark, 1303 South Sheridan Street, wanted to verify that the houses next to the library will not be rezoned. Klara explained a map showing that the rezoning is only the library property. None of the surrounding homes will be rezoned. Chair Kilde closed the public hearing at **6:01 PM**.

Commissioner Duffy motioned to recommend approval of the rezoning request, seconded by Commissioner Schuett. Passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

7a. SIGN ORDINANCE POTENTIAL UPDATES

Discussion on sign ordinance updates postponed to the March meeting.

STAFF UPDATES

Klara Beck provided updates on the expiration of the interim ordinance (moratorium) in Otter Tail County regarding the sale of hemp-derived cannabinoid products. The County Board of Commissioners has halted further local actions as they await the outcomes of the 2024 legislative session.

The meeting adjourned at **6:08 PM**.



Community Development Manager