

MINUTES OF THE CITY OF AMES PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

AMES, IOWA

MAY 1, 2024

In the absence of both the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, Director Kelly Diekmann asked for a nomination of a temporary Chairperson to lead the meeting. Moved by Blickensdorf, seconded by LaPietra, to nominate Mike Clayton. Vote on Motion: 6-0.

The Regular Meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission was called to order by Acting Chairperson Mike Clayton at 7:03 p.m. on May 1, 2024 in the Council Chambers at 515 Clark Avenue. Commission Members present were Julie Winter, Cheryl Moss, Mike Clayton, Mike LaPietra, Matthew Voss and Jim Blickensdorf.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved by LaPietra, seconded by Winter, to approve the Agenda for the meeting of May 1, 2024. Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion passed.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 6, 2024 MEETING

Moved by Voss, seconded by Blickensdorf, to approve the Minutes of the March 6, 2024 meeting. Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion passed.

PUBLIC FORUM

Acting Chairperson Clayton opened the public forum and closed it when no one came forward to speak.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mike LaPietra was elected Chairperson and Jim Blickensdorf as Vice Chairperson by unanimous vote.

REVIEW OF BYLAWS

Chairperson LaPietra asked the Commission if there were any proposed changes to the bylaws; there were none.

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT TO ALLOW FOR ROCK CLIMBING FACILITIES WITHIN GENERAL INDUSTRIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

Planning Director Kelly Diekmann presented the staff report. He stated the requested text amendment was to create a use in the use table for General Industrial for rock climbing training facilities as there is an applicant who would like to operate such a facility. Staff was requesting that the definition be approved for the use and added to General Industrial, and for a requirement of a Special Use Permit to allow the ZBA consideration of an actual site.

Mike Clayton asked about the requirement of a facility with a 14-foot ceiling height. Mr. Diekmann clarified it would not be a zoning requirement, rather, the applicant expressed the ceiling height is a requirement that they need to run their operation.

Matthew Voss asked about the reasoning of adding the definition of rock-climbing facility rather than modifying the sports practice facility definition. Director Diekmann said a rock-climbing operation does not fit within the definition of a sports practice facility; it is not a training facility for teams, and it includes individual recreational uses other than training. Cheryl Moss asked if there is a zoning category that would allow this type of use. Mr. Diekmann said it is allowed in commercial zones, but the applicant was not able to find a site that met their needs in a commercial zone and industrial sites were better suited.

The applicant, Brian Doscher, of 2815 49th Street, Des Moines, addressed the Commission. Mr. Doscher stated they struggled trying to find a commercial space that met the needs for their operation, but found an industrial site that is a good location and meets their needs. Ms. Moss mentioned the site is close to other entertainment areas and downtown and asked if the applicant had concerns about truck traffic from the nearby Resource Recovery plant. Mr. Doscher said the site is on a dead-end street, and he has not encountered any trucks nor do they anticipate any issues.

Jim Blickensdorf asked if any changes would need to be made to parking rules in GI to accommodate the use. Mr. Diekmann said it would be treated as a sports practice facility; when there is an unlisted use, the planning director uses the best available rate for the unlisted use. Ms. Moss asked about maximum capacity. Mr. Doscher said they anticipate 60-80 maximum at any point.

Chairperson LaPietra opened public comments and closed it when no one came forward to speak.

Moved by Winter, seconded by Clayton, to recommend that City Council amend Article 5 and the General Industrial (GI) Zoning District allowable uses in Table 29.901(2) to permit Indoor Rock-Climbing Facilities via a Special Use Permit. Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion passed.

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT TO ALLOW FOR MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT IN THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ZONING DISTRICT (ISU RESEARCH PARK)

Director Diekmann presented the staff report and stated the proposed request would affect the Iowa State University Research Park (ISURP). There is a specific zoning district for the area called Research Park Innovation District (RI) which applies to the southern-most expansion of the research park. The approved Master Plan identifies an area on the west side of the park as a "Hub" area, which has specific standards and allowable uses that are distinguished from the rest of the Research Park and it is the only area where commercial uses are allowed. In the Hub, there are two lots available for development that are both in excess of 4 acres in size. The ISURP would like the ability to add a housing component with commercial development on those two lots.

Mr. Diekmann said staff considered how residential use in the area might effect different potential industrial uses, but ISURP believes, as the manager of the park, that they can find uses that will not be impacted by having residential uses nearby and can mitigate the concern of making industrial land undesirable. Staff recommends approval with a Major Site

Development Plan reviewed by the Commission and approved by the City Council before it can be established.

Jim Blickensdorf asked what the transit connections are in the area. Mr. Diekmann said Cy-Ride runs a route to the plaza loop area. Julie Winter stated she does not see a strong argument to allow residential in the area as the intent of the area was to be commercial or industrial. Mr. Voss said it could be a positive thing to have mixed use development in the area. Ms. Winter countered that given most of the area is supposed to be industrial, it seems that residential is not compatible with the use that had been planned or the Comprehensive Plan, as well as the need to have industrial space available to attract potential industrial uses. Mr. Blickensdorf stated he agreed with Ms. Winter, and it makes sense for the area to be industrial and not residential. Mr. LaPietra questioned the proximity to support services, restaurants, and stores concerned there may not be a lot of support for residential units.

Director Diekmann said staff does not see support services being an issue as residential is planned for the west side of University Blvd and the Hub area provides some of those services with medical care, childcare and a fitness center. There are no plans to have a grocery store in the area nor a large commercial node.

Ms. Winter asked what the future considerations for setbacks, etc. would be to ensure compatibility. Mr. Diekmann said the guidelines would have the traditional compatibility issues of loading areas in the considerations. Businesses will have to manage their own hazardous materials and acknowledge where sensitive receptors are and plan how to mitigate that.

Kyle Martin of the ISURP addressed the Commission and stated he is the operations manager of the Research Park and is responsible for its development. Mr. Martin gave an overview of the park stating they have 300 acres developed out of 500, there are 120 tenants with 2500 employees, and the number one feedback they receive from current and potential tenants is asking where their employees are going to live. The research park encompasses approximately one million square feet, of which 800,000 square feet are office users.

Mr. Martin said Biova is the only hazmat tenant currently in the research park. The Research Park has plenty of land still available to develop and their industrial looks different than heavy manufacturing or large industrial. The land covenants of the Research Park do not allow heavy trucking or heavy manufacturing as they do not have the road infrastructure for it. The goal is to have housing opportunities for the employees of the research park who want to live in Ames.

Ms. Winter stated the area is prime land for industrial and commercial uses. Mr. Martin said the two lots in question fall within the Hub Activity Area and they would only target that area for amenities because they have plenty of land available to develop for industrial. They believe having mixed use will help them build out the park and attract tenants.

Ms. Moss asked if the apartments would be upper end. Mr. Martin confirmed they would be since their target market is young professionals who would expect that level.

Chuck Winkleblack with Hunziker Companies addressed the Commission and stated he has been working with the Research Park on developing the southern two lots and said it is a bit of a misnomer that they are industrial lots as they were always intended to have more commercial uses rather than industrial uses. He added there are no restaurants close by and they envision the first floor of the building to have a restaurant and bar for the people that live and work there, as well as other service type of amenities that will be enhancements to the research park. Mr. Winkleblack pointed out there is a day care in the Hub which will prohibit industrial uses with hazardous materials from being in the area. He added, that as a community, we need to grow the amenities at the research park to provide for the people who work there and live around there and keep young professionals in Ames after they graduate from ISU.

Mr. Voss said as he is a person in the young professional demographic, it would be a very attractive place to live, especially if he worked in the research park.

Discussion was held about mixed use buildings.

Ms. Moss stated she is not opposed to the project but does not see it making a substantial dent in the lack of this type of housing.

Moved by Voss, seconded by Clayton, to recommend that the City Council amend the Research Park (RI) Zoning District to permit Mixed-Use Development in the Hub Activity Area as presented in Attachment B. Vote on Motion: 4-2. Motion passed.

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT TO ALLOW FOR STAFF APPROVAL OF ZONING EXCEPTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS OF UP TO 20%

Director Diekmann said City Council has had some goals over the last year of improving processes and looking at being more flexible to encourage projects to succeed. Zoning is very restrictive by nature, so there are limits to how flexible one can be and actually apply zoning to property. Zoning is used to regulate use as well as the features that are built on to a site. This proposal does not include variability of use; it only addresses 20% design alternative to standards that have a numeric value.

Planner Justin Moore gave a summary of the amendment with a power point presentation.

Ms. Winter expressed the 20% is good to give staff some flexibility to make the decisions to keep projects moving instead of having to go to the Commission.

Discussion was held about scenarios with the 20% flexibility.

Chairperson LaPietra opened public comments.

Chuck Winkleblack of Hunziker Companies stated the amendment is a great step forward as he has been personally involved with many text amendments over the years and the process can cause months of delay on a project; this flexibility will save everyone time.

Director Diekmann said staff cataloged seven years of text amendments and found that only about 30% of them would have been helped by this rule as many of them are use based, so this will not be the end of text amendments, but it will reduce the small or trivial ones from coming up.

Moved by Blickensdorf, seconded by Voss, to recommend that City Council approve Option #1 draft ordinance language (Attachment A) which establishes criteria for considering 20% alternative design for specified base zone development standards and numeric development standards of Article 4. Vote on Motion: 6-1. Motion passed.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Mr. LaPietra asked if there are any items for the next meeting. Mr. Diekmann said there will likely be a text amendment.

STAFF COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Winter to adjourn at 8:32 p.m.



Mike LaPietra, Chairperson



Eileen Carter, Recording Secretary