

MINUTES OF THE CITY OF AMES PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

AMES, IOWA

AUGUST 7, 2024

The Regular Meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission was called to order by Chairperson Mike LaPietra at 7:00 p.m. on August 7, 2024 in the Council Chambers at 515 Clark Avenue. Commission Members present were Cheryl Moss, Mike Sullivan, Mike LaPietra, Mike Clayton, Matthew Voss, Julie Winter and Jim Blickensdorf.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved by Sullivan, seconded by Voss, to approve the Agenda for the meeting of August 7, 2024. Vote on Motion: 7-0. Motion passed.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 19, 2024 MEETING

Moved by Clayton, seconded by Sullivan, to approve the Minutes of the June 19, 2024 meeting. Vote on Motion: 7-0. Motion passed.

PUBLIC FORUM

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

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT TO THE DOWNTOWN SERVICE CENTER (DSC) ZONING DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR) AND HEIGHT EXCEPTIONS

Planner Benjamin Campbell presented the staff report. He stated the applicant, Ames Silversmithing, would like to demolish the building at 218 Main Street and add on to their existing single-story building at 220 Main Street, which is located in the Downtown Service Center (DSC) Zoning District. The DSC contains regulations that would prevent Ames Silversmithing from expanding as intended. In a letter to Council, the applicant's architect stated it was not feasible to expand into the existing building and demolition is the only feasible alternative. The DSC regulations include a minimum floor-area-ratio (FAR) of 1.0 and a minimum floor count of two to mimic the historic nature of most of the buildings along Main Street. The DSC has a process to allow for exceptions to the FAR and floor count, however, it does not include buildings on Main Street. The proposed text amendment would allow for any building in the DSC Zoning District to apply for the exception.

Julie Winter asked if staff has received other requests similar to the one at hand. Mr. Campbell said staff has received inquiries from building owners interested in expanding an existing non-conforming structure, but the code currently does not allow for partial expansion; one would have to meet both the FAR and the floor count. Mr. Campbell added an exception request is heard by the Zoning Board of Adjustment and there are criteria that must be met in addition to evaluation by staff.

Director Diekmann clarified that there are two categories: new construction and additions. Additions would apply everywhere, but new construction on a vacant lot would not be

exempt. The intent is to accommodate non-conforming properties looking for incremental expansion, not to encourage demolition of two-story buildings to replace them with single-story buildings. Mr. Diekmann explained the proposed text change would only strike existing language, not add any, and the section is focused on the structure itself to make sure it would meet the character along Main Street. Ms. Winter stressed that she is concerned about potential future changes and losing density on Main Street with the proposed changes.

Mr. Diekmann asked if Ms. Winter was concerned that a two-story building would not have a two-story addition. Ms. Winter replied there are several areas on Main Street that have one-story buildings and the city might lose two-story buildings in the future with this proposal which could result in less density and the loss of housing spaces on the upper floors.

Mike Sullivan said he had similar concerns and suggested instead of eliminating item (ii), having a clause for existing one-story buildings on Main Street to be allowed to add on a one story rather than opening it up to the entire DSC. He added that the character on Main Street is very different than that on 6th Street.

Discussion was held about changing the proposed language of the text amendment.

Cheryl Moss asked if the second story units on Main Street are being kept up and renovated and actually used for housing. Mr. Campbell said there are over 100 units downtown and the majority of the second stories are utilized in some way: as office space, studio space, or housing. Mr. Diekmann added the downtown second story units are a premium product that have been renovated and are getting high priced rent.

Jim Blickensdorf stated he shares the same concerns about maintaining the character of downtown, and like for like replacement makes sense. He asked if the Zone Development Standards table applies to all construction or only new construction. Mr. Diekmann said it applies to everything. Mr. Blickensdorf said it seems that the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) already has authority for Minimum FAR and Minimum Height through Special Use Permits to grant exceptions on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Diekmann clarified that a building must already be a Special Use to take advantage of the ZBA granting relief.

Matthew Voss expressed that he also shares the concerns of the other Commission members and supports like for like replacement. He asked if anyone on 6th Street has taken advantage of this. Mr. Diekmann said Friedrich Realty on the corner of 6th Street and Duff Avenue is the only one.

Matt Palan with Creative Concepts Architecture addressed the Commission. He said he believes the reason Ames Silversmithing would like to build a one-story building is they are concerned that someone in an apartment on the second floor could potentially break in through the floor and get into their building from above.

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

Moved by Sullivan, seconded by Winter, to recommend that City Council amend the Zoning Ordinance differently from what staff recommended in Attachment C. Keep the elimination of (ii) and add (vi) the proposed expansion maintains or exceeds FAR and the number of stories of the most recent existing structure.

Vote on Motion: 7-0. Motion Passed.

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT TO THE PUD OVERLAY SECTION 29.1114 OF THE AMES MUNICIPAL CODE FOR INFILL AND DESIGN STANDARDS

Director Kelly Diekmann presented the staff report. He stated there have been ongoing discussions about housing design and standards to promote diversity of housing in the City. One consideration is how to apply the PUD Overlay in more situations. A suggested amendment is to remove the two acre minimum size for a PUD and to allow for maximum density of the base zoning district plus one. Another amendment is for Pocket Neighborhoods (close-knit, small clusters of 5-12 dwelling units oriented around a common shared space). Pocket Neighborhoods would receive extra relief from the design standards within the PUD Overlay. The third is a design detail that the garage cannot define the character of a development or the garage cannot protrude in front of a house. Staff received negative feedback from developers about this design standard. Staff propose to take the language from the recently adopted two-family home standard and allow a maximum 12-foot setback from the front door.

Mr. Blickensdorf asked if a PUD in an RN1 or RN2 neighborhood would allow people to build tiny homes or manufactured or mobile homes; homes without a fixed foundation. Mr. Diekmann said a manufactured home on a foundation can go anywhere, but the foundation must be at least 400 square feet. The City does not allow living in any mobile trailer except for in RLP zoning (Mobile Home Park Zoning District). A single-family home must be on a foundation, be permanently connected to utilities and be at least 20 x 20 in dimension.

Chairperson LaPietra opened public comments.

Justin Dodge with Hunziker Companies thanked staff for working through the PUD amendments and said the PUD tool helps give a lot more flexibility to projects. He explained that having the garage in front of the house is the most economical and efficient use of lot frontage, which is why the design is desirable. In existing neighborhoods that were built decades ago, Mr. Dodge said it is reasonable for infill opportunities to match the design of the neighborhood where the face of the house meets up with the face of the garage, but for new construction, he would like to have more flexibility to have the garage in the front of the house.

Ms. Winter asked if there are other communities that have the same garage standard as Ames. Mr. Diekmann said possibly Des Moines where every building type has a definition for character rather than zoning for density.

Matt Palan stated he does a lot of work on single-family homes in Des Moines and Des Moines changed their zoning code, so a garage on the front of a house can only be 30% of

the front façade, plus it has a setback.

Chairperson LaPietra closed public comments.

Moved by Clayton, seconded by Voss, to recommend that City Council approve changes to the PUD Overlay that allow for:

- a. Infill developments less than 2 acres with a 1.0 unit density bonus,
- b. Pocket Neighborhood standards, and
- c. Garages to protrude in front of the front façade.

Vote on Motion: 7-0. Motion passed.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

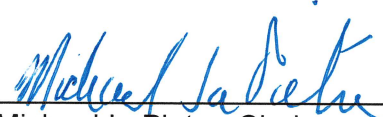
Mike Clayton asked if there is anything on the agenda for the next meeting. Mr. Diekmann said there will most likely be two items.

STAFF COMMENTS

None

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Voss to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.



Michael LaPietra, Chairperson



Eileen Carter, Recording Secretary