

Rock Island Planning & Zoning Commission Minutes

Council Chambers (3rd Floor), City Hall

1528 3rd Avenue

March 4, 2024

5:30 PM



Voting Members

Present

Mike Creger
Norm Moline
Maureen Riggs
Sarah Wright
Bill Sowards
Samuel Odeyemi
Don Mewes

Voting Members

Absent

Tanja Whitten
Reshanda Johnson

Staff Present

Tanner Osing
Eunice Amissah-Mensah

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Riggs called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM and read the roll call.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public present for a comment so the meeting continued.

Approval of the Previous Meeting Minutes

Creger moved to approve the minutes for February 5, 2024. Mewes seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 7 to 0.

Other Business/New Business

2024-01 Public Hearing: Community Home Partners – Consider a request regarding an application plan and rezoning from B-3 (community business) district to Planned Unit Development (PUD) district at 950 31st Avenue.

Osing presented the staff report. He noted that the subject property is vacant land located on the north side of 31st Avenue between 9th Street and 11th Street and approximately four (4) acres in size. Historically, it was used as farm land as part of the Dingeldein Gardens. The property is now owned by the City and has been held for development since 2013. In 2023, Community Home Partners (CHP), an affiliate of the Rock Island Housing Authority, approached the City with a concept to develop housing on the site. A letter of intent to sell and an option to purchase was subsequently approved by the City Council. CHP proposes to develop the site with permanent supportive housing for veterans. According to local housing experts, there is a need for this type of housing in the region and similar developments nearby have been successful. The proposed

development as shown in the concept plan includes 25 small houses, of which twenty (20) are one (1) bedroom units and five (5) are two (2) bedroom units. The houses are planned to be around 600 square feet in floor area. A community center is also included in the proposed development (labeled “services” on the site plan).

He added that the twenty-five (25) houses radiate from the access road and cul-de-sac in a cluster type development. The two (2) bedroom housing type is spread intermittently among the one (1) bedroom housing type. The primary building façades face inward, typically towards a sidewalk connected with the parking area. The community center is located near the center of the site and is connected to the parking area and houses. The houses are separated between 11 feet and 17 feet from each other. This setback is consistent with the City’s Zoning Ordinance. The nearest house to a property line is proposed to be 13 feet.

He noted that the Zoning Code generally requires two (2) parking spaces for a single-family residence. This would mean that fifty (50) spaces would normally be required for the twenty-five (25) units. The site plan shows a total of thirty-four (34) parking stalls including four (4) accessible spaces. Staff is comfortable with this amount of parking given the nature of development and the likely occupants. The development is also well-served by public transit, which may reduce the need for residents to use a private vehicle. Additionally, a twenty-seven (27) foot wide private access road is proposed to connect with 31st Avenue. The road terminates with a ninety-six (96) foot cul-de-sac which meets the Fire Code standard for emergency access. A sidewalk is also proposed connecting 31st Avenue to the development. Cul-de-sac-like sidewalks are shown on the site plan connecting the houses to the parking area, as well as a pedestrian path around the perimeter of the site. Staff recommend that a more direct sidewalk connection be provided between the homes and 31st Avenue to promote a logical pedestrian flow.

He noted that staff believes CHP’s proposed development is compatible with the surrounding mix of residential and commercial properties. Lastly, staff believe the site is capable of handling the proposed use. The development has an attractive layout for small houses and retains adequate areas for site access, open space, and stormwater detention. As the preliminary PUD plan develops, more technical details will be provided regarding utilities, grading, and easements. Staff has no concern at present about these details

Moline asked if the plan will be accepted as recommended by staff as the applicant submitted it. Osing responded that the motion will be to approve the request with staff’s recommendation and that it serves as a guide. Moline asked if there was a reason for the gap in the plan on the north east side. Osing responded the sidewalks are going around the perimeter of the plan.

Riggs asked where a more direct access will be located. Osing deferred that to the applicant, Mr. Chow.

Wright asked how the retention ponds were located. Osing responded it is due to the existing sanitary sewer. Wright also asked if there are plans for the area as it has been identified as a food desert. Osing stated the city will be retaining a section along 31st Avenue for commercial purposes.

Chair Riggs called for the applicant or representative. Mr. John Chow, Executive Director of Rock Island Housing Authority stood in for the request.

John Chow added that the project costs approximately \$8.7 million and it is leveraging private-public funding. He wanted to provide clarification on the funding. He stated they are in partnership with the Veterans Affairs and Community Health Care Services. The development will be a 2000 to 3,000 square feet with office space, community center and services. He added that with the food desert a one-mile radius is looked at in determining the plans. He added that the plans are preliminary and will probably go through a few changes and

Wright asked why the small home style was chosen. Mr. Chow stated from studies and other projects veterans often come as individuals for a household that is why it was chosen.

Mewes asked if it will serve only disabled veterans. Mr. Chow stated all veterans will be served including disabled veterans. Riggs asked if it was income restrictive Mr. Chow responded that it will be subsidized and they will be provided with housing vouchers. He added that they should receive notification of funding approval and changes by June of this year and then the project should not take more than 12 months for the development.

Creger asked if local companies will be used for the project. Mr. Chow stated they will try to use local resources and put out bids as well. Creger asked about the units and if only single veterans will be accommodated and if there was a timeline to view the changes that will be made to the plan. Mr. Chow responded that there are five (5) 2-bedroom units properties that can cater to some families.

Moline asked if an outdoor area have been provided for the project. Mr. Chow responded that they currently do not have a plan for that in the budget but it will be heavily considered in the next cycle and vision of development.

As there were no other questions or members of the public wishing to speak, Chair Riggs called for a motion.

Recommendation for Case 2024-01

Creger made a motion to recommend approval of the Rezoning to include the discussion on the sidewalks. Mewes seconded the motion. Chair Riggs called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 7 to 0 (Creger, Mewes, Moline, Odeyemi, Sowards, Wright, and Riggs)

2024-02 Public Hearing: City of Rock Island regarding amendments to Sign Ordinance.

Osing presented the staff report. He noted that the City undertook a comprehensive update to the Sign Ordinance in 2019. The updates included expanding the introductory section with a clearer justification for the code, providing a stronger distinction between permanent and temporary signs, and adding language regarding window visibility requested by the Police Department. Enforcement of this ordinance was fairly limited after its enactment due to the COVID-19 pandemic and understaffing. Over the past year, enforcement efforts have ramped up largely due to adequate staffing levels.

Through the enforcement process, staff has learned that some ordinance language, primarily regarding window and temporary signs, needs to be fine-tuned. The proposed amendments are aimed at providing clearer requirements that can be easily explained while placing reasonable limits on commercial signage.

The following list includes a summary of the amendments – It requires that window signs cover no more than twenty-five percent (25%) of window panes and remove the language that creates a two-foot-wide “visibility strip” along first story windows and language that requires window decals and adhesive films to be sufficiently transparent. Staff believe the 25% coverage requirement accomplishes the intent to provide visibility into businesses for first responders and is a straightforward requirement to explain. Businesses serving alcohol also already have additional requirements for window visibility covered under the Liquor Ordinance.

It also adds a maximum time for temporary signs to be up during a year, provide a limit to their size, and include a list for different types of temporary signs. The current language only allows temporary signs to be up for thirty (30) consecutive days, but provides no downtime requirement. This makes it challenging to explain to business owners who wish to know how long a temporary sign needs to be taken down for. This update resolves that issue while placing a best practice limit of temporary sign size. There is an increase the total attached sign area to two (2) square feet rather than one (1). Attached sign area includes both window signs and wall signs. This was the requirement prior to 2004 and is more consistent with neighboring communities.

It provides language regarding LED storefront lights and string lights that defines the lighting type and prohibits its use. The Sign Ordinance currently contains language that prohibits string lights. However, that language is broad based and could be interpreted in different ways. This update clarifies the original intent of that provision.

Overall, staff believe that these updates better capture the intent of the previous provisions and make the ordinance easier to explain and enforce. Code cleanups like this one are often necessary every few years as conditions change and new challenges emerge.

Creger asked if businesses that already have their lights up will be grandfathered in. Osing responded that they will not be grandfathered in but they will be completely

prohibited. Osing stated that City Staff wanted to fine tune the Ordinance before proceeding with enforcement.

Mewes asked if this amendment can be attributed to the enforcement process by staff. Osing responded that in part that is true.

Chair Riggs asked that the “no downtime” requirements be explained. Osing stated that this affects temporary signs and this means that temporary signs can be up for 30 consecutive days or have it spread out for 30 days within one calendar year.

Creger asked if is okay to keep signs up longer if no complaints are received. Osing responded that there are proactive enforcement measures and address complaints received as well. Osing stated some signs are exempt such as real estate signs.

As there were no other questions or members of the public wishing to speak, Chair Riggs closed the public hearing and called for a motion.

Recommendation for Case 2024-02

Moline made a motion to approve the changes made to the Sign Ordinance. Sowards seconded the motion. Chair Riggs called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 7 to 0 (Creger, Mewes, Moline, Odeyemi, Sowards, Wright, and Riggs)

Other Business

Osing stated the onboarding reference guide will be provided to the Commissioners hopefully before the April meeting.

Adjournment

Chair Riggs asked for a motion to adjourn. Mewes made a motion to adjourn. Wright seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a vote of 7 to 0, and the meeting adjourned.

Minutes submitted by Eunice Amissah-Mensah