

MINUTES

City of Alpena Planning Commission
Special Meeting
April 1, 2016
Alpena, Michigan

CALL TO ORDER:

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Randy Boboltz, Planning Commission Vice-Chair.

ROLL CALL: PLANNING COMMISSION

Present: Sabourin Hunter, Gilmore, VanWagoner, Boboltz, Lewis, Mitchell

Absent: Heraghty, Dort

Staff: Adam Poll (Director of Planning & Development), Don Gilmet (City Building Official)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

The April 1, 2016, agenda was approved as presented.

PUBLIC HEARING AND COMMISSION ACTION:

PC 16-SP-01: Review a site plan submitted for a proposed new building to be constructed at 234 W Chisholm.

Poll gave the staff report to the Planning Commission. Poll noted the site plan called for the construction of a new 4,920 SF office building proposed to be constructed at the currently vacant location of 234 W Chisholm (Former Kentucky Motor Lodge). The site is zoned Central Business District (CBD) and lies within the Downtown Overlay District (DOD). Office buildings are allowed by right in the CBD, but the DOD requires that any newly constructed building requires a site plan review. Poll noted that the Planning Commission reviews the proposed site plan and elevation of the building to ensure that a variety of design standards are met. The Planning Commission does have the ability to approve modifications from the written design standards, including building height, in order to allow creativity and flexibility in design while maintaining the intent of the district regulations.

Poll went over the intent of the DOD as presented in the Zoning Ordinance. Poll noted that the applicants are proposing a 5' front yard setback and a 12' side setback off of Fourth Avenue. The site plan shows 18 parking spaces which are located in the rear of the building and not easily visible from Chisholm Street. Fourteen parking spaces are required. Other features include a shrubbery which would appear to block any view of the dumpster enclosure or parking area from Chisholm Street. The site in question is unique in that it is located on the edge of the CBD and DOD districts and any properties further north on Chisholm Street are not upheld to the same design guidelines.

Poll noted that the building would appear to cover 62% of the front lot line. The design standards call for 70% front lot line coverage. As many of the other buildings in the area do not meet that requirement or are significantly setback from the front of the property it would appear that 62% coverage would not be out of character for the area.

Poll noted that surrounding buildings include the Chamber of Commerce located across Chisholm Street which is a single story office building that is setback from Chisholm Street with a row of parking in the front yard. The opposite corner of the intersection to the north of the proposed building is a vacant lot adjacent to Latitudes Tavern. He noted that directly across Fourth Avenue is the Red Wing Shoe Store, which is a single story commercial building with a 0' setback off Chisholm and Fourth Avenue. Adjacent to the shoe store is Meridian Contracting which is a converted single story residential home with a 10' to 15' front setback from Chisholm. To the south of the proposed building is the Frontier Building and to the south east is a bank parking lot/drive thru. First Merit Bank is located on the corner of Third Avenue and Chisholm Street and has a 0' setback from Chisholm Street. The former Kentucky Motor Lodge was two stories and set back off of Chisholm with parking located in the front of the building. The applicants are proposing a 5' front yard setback off of Chisholm Street which would not appear to be out of character for the area. One of the primary functions of the 0' setback that is required is to eliminate private parking in front of a building and create a pedestrian friendly environment to encourage a walkable community. In this case a 5' setback would still appear to encourage walkability and the parking is hidden in the rear of the building. In addition, a 12' side yard setback would meet the standards of the DOD and visibility would not be obstructed. The building could have a 0' setback off of both Chisholm and Fourth and meet DOD standards.

Poll noted that the proposed building is a single story with a parapet wall on the Chisholm Street façade to give the appearance of a second story. The block in questions does have a minimum two story height requirement for new buildings. This location would appear to be on the edge of the minimum two story height requirement. The block across Chisholm Street does not require a second story for development. Other buildings on the same block (including First Merit Bank and Frontier Communications Building) are two story buildings, but are not located adjacent to the proposed building. Nearby buildings such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Red Wings Shoe Store are single story structures. The façade of the proposed building would appear to meet most of the other design criteria of the DOD. The building scale would appear to be similar to surrounding buildings, even though the buildings on the same block are located over 200' away. The proposed roof appears flat, with a three dimensional cornice treatment. The materials used are principally masonry with some EIFS trim on the upper level which create a distinct and separated ground floor area. Poll noted that the amount of windows on the front façade would appear to be adequate, and as previously the parking/loading area would appear to be sufficient.

Poll noted that the primary façade meets most of the requirements with the exception of the lack of a principal pedestrian access accessible from the public sidewalk. The submitted elevation does not indicate that a door is present on the front façade. There would appear to be a logical location that is currently shown as a window. Staff inquired with the applicant who stated that they would prefer to keep the large window on the front and when a future tenant moves into the space, the building is designed so the window could be removed and a door could be added later. Due to the focus on pedestrian access in the downtown and the emphasis that has been placed on walkability both locally and elsewhere, staff would recommend that a door is installed along the public sidewalk on Chisholm Street even if it is not initially utilized.

Poll noted that the site plan and a preliminary elevation to the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Design Committee where it was reviewed. The DDA Design Committee liked the design and thought it should be approved, but noted that they would prefer if there was pedestrian access off of Chisholm Street.

FAVOR:

Bruce Dietz, noted that he was the applicant. He noted that the office would be utilizing the building was a professional office with essentially no public access, and that the only people utilizing the office would be the staff that works at the building. Dietz noted that he had designed the building so that a door could easily be installed where a large window is shown on the Chisholm Street façade, but felt that as there would be no walk in foot traffic, the presence of a door would not be needed. Dietz noted that commercial doors are not as energy efficient as a window, and said that installing a door that is not used would just create an un-needed cold spot in the building. Dietz noted that he understood why the Zoning Ordinance called for a door, and noted that he would add a door to the Chisholm Street façade if the Planning Commission required him too. Dietz emphasized that the design allows for a door to be easily installed in the future for any change of use for the building.

OPPOSITION:

None.

COMMISSIONER'S DISCUSSION AND ACTION:

Hunter questioned if the building would meet fire code with only one means of egress. Gilmet noted that the site plan meets fire code requirements and a second door is not required.

Boboltz indicated that he did not think requiring an additional door on the Chisholm Street Façade is necessary. He indicated he did not like the idea of a parapet wall.

Dietz noted that the building would not have a parapet wall as Poll indicated, and that the building would be 23' tall, tall enough for a second story. He noted that the office did not need a second level, but if someone wanted to add a second story on later they could without changing the roof of the building.

Poll noted that in a conversation Dietz indicated that there would be windows on the side of the building. Dietz indicated that there would be windows on all sides of the building and there would not be any blank walls.

Motion made by Lewis, seconded by Mitchell to approve the Site Plan for the building a 234 W Chisholm Street as proposed, as it appeared to meet the intent of the Downtown Overlay District requirements.

Yays: VanWagoner, Boboltz, Lewis, Mitchell, Hunter, Gilmore, Sabourin

Nays: None.

Absent: Heraghty, Dort

Motion passed by a vote of 7-0.

BUSINESS:

None.

COMMUNICATIONS:

None.

REPORTS:

Development Updates

Poll indicated that the former Alpena Power Office building demolition project was out to bid, with the bids due back on April 26. Poll noted that he hoped to have the approval of City Council for their May 2nd meeting and issue the notice to proceed to the contractor that week.

Poll noted that other grant projects were moving forward, with The Owl looking to open by Memorial Day, and Alpena Furniture was be soon going out for bids. Poll noted that good progress was being made on the Holiday Inn Express, and that they were taking reservations for November 15, 2016.

CALL TO PUBLIC:

None.

MEMBERS' COMMENTS:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:13 p.m. by Chair Sabourin.

Wayne Lewis, Secretary