

MINUTES
City of Alpena Planning Commission
Regular Meeting
June 13, 2017
Alpena, Michigan

CALL TO ORDER:

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Wayne Lewis, Planning Commission Secretary.

ROLL CALL: PLANNING COMMISSION

PRESENT: Mitchell, Lewis, Wojda, Gilmore, VanWagoner

ABSENT: Austin, Boboltz, Sabourin

STAFF: Adam Poll (Director of Planning & Development), Don Gilmet (Building Official), and Cassie Stone (Office Clerk).

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Agenda approved as printed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

May 16, 2017, minutes were approved as amended with two corrections. Correct abbreviation of Planned Unit Development (PUD) not (PUB). Edit that Wojda suggested to Sabourin that he with stand from the vote with abstain.

PUBLIC HEARING AND COMMISSION ACTION:

P.C. Case #17-SU-03

Alpena Public Schools, has requested a special permit be granted to move their business offices to the former Sunset Elementary School building located at 1421 Hobbs Drive in an R-2 One Family Residential District. Article 5.7B

Background: Sunset Elementary School was constructed as an elementary school and used as such until about 2010, when declining enrollment numbers in Alpena Public Schools (APS) caused the school system to shut down the school and the building has been utilized primarily for storage since then. APS would now like to move their administrative offices to this location and potentially some pre-kindergarten classes as well. As the primary use is shifting from school to administrative office, a special permit is required.

Surrounding uses include residences to the north and west, forest and wetlands areas to the south and east. The school sits on almost 40 acres, with a majority of the property being vacant and wooded. A majority of the wooded area is a wetland that would be unbuildable.

Zoning and Planning Issues: The property in question is zoned R-2 One-Family Residence District which would not traditionally allow business offices. The building was constructed and utilized as a school for a number of years and the building itself remains in useable condition. Enrollment numbers have not increased to the point of needing the structure for an elementary school so if the current request is not allowed, the building will continue to sit vacant.

APS currently has their administrative offices at 2373 Gordon Road in Alpena Township. They have another agency (NEMSCA) interested in leasing part of their building on Gordon Road and an empty building that could be utilized in Sunset School. APS has indicated that if they are allowed to move their administrative offices that they may also utilize the site for pre-K classes as well. They have stated that they do not intend to make any exterior changes to the site, and the existing play area and ball field would remain.

There is existing hard surface parking located at the site that would appear to be more than adequate in size, although exact parking numbers are unknown as the lines have worn off.

The senior center had discussed utilizing part of the building in addition to the administrative offices as there would appear to be sufficient room for both uses. The senior center use is not included in the application and would require a separate special permit as that use would be significantly different than the use as administrative offices. As of right now, the senior center has no immediate plans to move from their current location on River Street.

The problem with vacant school buildings is wide spread and affects many communities. School buildings are generally constructed for a very specific use and are sometimes difficult to utilize for other uses. Usually these buildings are functionally obsolete and many vacant school buildings sit vacant for years before eventually being demolished. In this case, Sunset School is not functionally obsolete and has been maintained. APS would like to utilize the site for a use that is related to the school system.

Recommendation: The proposed use would not appear to have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood. Allowing the vacant school to be utilized for administrative office would allow another agency to expand (on Gordon Rd) and ensure Sunset School continues to be maintained.

If the Planning Commission chooses to deny the special permit request, the applicant could still utilize the building as a school, but as it is not needed at the moment, it would more than likely remain vacant.

Therefore, staff recommends **approval** of the Special Land Use Permit to allow Sunset School to be utilized for administrative offices for Alpena Public Schools and have pre-k classes on site as well.

Poll stated for the record that he is the most affected neighbor for this request and if anyone feels Don Gilmet should give a separate report he can if anyone is objective. Wojda questioned if there was any special recommendations that are being made? Poll answered no, claiming no dramatic changes were planned for the exterior. Wojda also questioned if granting this special use permit would foreclose an

eventual reversion back to a full time school if that became necessary. Poll replied no and added that a motion can be made that would make it be utilized as a school.

John VanWagoner, (superintendent of APS), spoke briefly about NEMSCA having interest in utilizing more of the Gordon Road location where the APS school administrative staff of 15-20 employees resides currently. He explained that the Sunset Facility has been kept up very well. The former Sunset School would consist of the superintendent's office, board of education office as well as a human resource office. Possibility of adding some preschool programs after a year. He also explained that Ella White and Besser School is at absolute capacity and allowing this would be beneficial at adding some early childhood programs at the former Sunset School if the need comes in the future. This would include going through the process of childcare license and facility upgrades before that would even become possible. Wojda questioned the timeline for the APS to make the move into the former Sunset School. VanWagoner replied that they were working with NEMSCA right now to decide how much space they would need. NEMSCA is currently in the process of renovating their current building so when they would need APS to push out of the Gordon Road facility. VanWagoner is anticipating as early as next fall but then again depending on the needs of NEMSCA. There is a possibility that a few offices could move to the Sunset Building by the end of August. Gilmore asked about the 3-4 classrooms for the pre K and what schedule they would be on. VanWagoner explained that currently children attend Monday – Thursday, depending on the program, consisting of both half and full day schedules that include approximately 100 children at the most. VanWagoner (Clay) asked if the building was being used for other programs. VanWagoner (John) replied yes that The Feeding Kids Ministries currently is held at the Sunset School which provides food for children on the weekends and if the special use permit is granted VanWagoner (John) said they would continue to allow space to make that possible or relocate them. Gilmore questioned the hours of operation which VanWagoner (John) replied that normal hours are 7-4:30 Monday through Friday and summer 7-4:00 with an occasional school board meeting once a month in the evening. Lewis questioned the bus schedule. VanWagoner (John) assured that they would ensure one easy central exit and entrance but also explained that their main focus is moving the offices to the Sunset location at this time.

VanWagoner (Clay) feels he should abstain from the vote stating that if APS leaves the Gordon Road location, he will most likely be doing the renovation work and could gain personal profit.

Wojda motioned, Gilmore seconded that VanWagoner abstain from the vote.

Yays: Mitchell, Lewis, Gilmore, Wojda,

Nays: None

Motion passed by a vote of 4-0.

Motion made by Mitchell to allow for the special use permit for Sunset School for administrative purposes. (Poll added for the record that allowing this special use permit would also allow Sunset school to be utilized for school purposes later if need be). Seconded by Wojda with the understanding that the school would be utilized back to school purposes if become necessary.

Yays: Wojda, Mitchell, Gilmore, Lewis

Nays: None (VanWagoner abstained from vote)

Motion passed by a vote of 4-0

BUSINESS: Review Sample Sign Ordinance

Poll briefly explained that the Supreme Court ruled a little over a year ago that we can't regulate signage by content anymore. Some of the issues that are being looked at are not being able to regulate political signage. Poll explained that it be classified as temporary signage so a permit would not be required for temporary signage. Location, size and zoning district can be regulated. Poll added that Greg Sundin (City Manager) said signs should be four square feet. Lewis stated four square feet is too small, with Mitchell agreeing. Gilmet added that it would be way too costly to increase the sign size with examples of real estate signs and speed limits signs would all change. Right now all that is regulated with signs is size, not number of them, and if they are damaged or not and in the right district to allow for the sign size. Lewis commented that whatever gets done with the sign ordinance is eventually going to be problems. Gilmet also added that as of right now sign ordinance enforcements are not a big problem and resulting in going to court over. Wodja stated that there are three options:

- Can regulate the area per sign with no number limit
- Can regulate the area per sign with a number limit
- Can regulate area per property

Poll explained that he has been in contact with Denise at NEMCOG and has attended a few training sessions regarding the signs and what he has seen is everyone is struggling. The direction on what way to go doesn't have to be decided today, Poll just wanted to get some input on the matter. Poll added that he can look around at other communities to get more ideas. Poll feels that total square footage restriction should be looked into and size of the sign. No timeline has not been set as of right now. We have been instructed to keep our regulation as content neutral as possible. Poll added that he would like to get together a document with the changes that the Planning Commission is comfortable with and prefers and then have the City Attorney look it over.

COMMUNICATIONS: Gretchen Kirschner has submitted her application for joining the Planning Commission and introduced herself.

REPORTS: Redevelopment Updates

Northland Area Credit Union made it through their first reading at council. It is anticipated by the next Planning Commission meeting they will have had their second reading at council and PUD rezone will be in place, once it is published. Street conversions and reverse angle parking downtown has begun and overall, people have been adjusted pretty well. It is anticipated that the two way street conversion will begin after Labor Day for the blocks of Second Avenue. MDOT is still looking into the M32 part of Washington Avenue on whether or not it can be done. Bridge work is almost complete and Holiday Inn Express is now open. The hospital was granted a zoning variance and were allowed an advance of 120 square feet on the size of their sign. This was based off of the size of their building, amount of frontage and the lack of development on the property across the street.

Redevelopment Ready Communities Program is eighty percent complete and Poll explained that the Planning Commission has to go through the action items and assign a party (group) that is responsible for

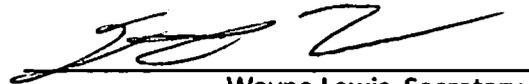
the primary accomplishment of the listed goal and add a timeline. Poll feels that there are way too many action items that need to be eliminated and/or shorten up. Poll asked that the Planning Commission review his comment's that he had made and give him input on the matter.

CALL TO PUBLIC: None

MEMBER'S COMMENTS: None

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m. by Lewis, Planning Commission Secretary.



Wayne Lewis, Secretary