

February 6, 2008

The Scandia Planning Commission held their regular monthly meeting on the above date. The following were in attendance: Chairman Chris Ness, Commissioners Christine Maefsky, James Malmquist, Peter Schwarz and City Planner Sherri Buss, TKDA. Commissioner Kevin Nickelson excused himself from the table as he is involved in the CUP application for Willowbrook Church, an item on the agenda. Chairman Ness called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA, MINUTES**

**James Malmquist, seconded by Christine Maefsky, moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed unanimously.**

**Peter Schwarz, seconded by James Malmquist, moved to approve the January 8, 2008 Planning Commission minutes. The motion passed unanimously.**

### **WILLOWBROOK COMMUNITY CHURCH – CUP APPLICATION**

Willowbrook Community Church has requested a Conditional Use Permit for construction of a Place of Worship on a 40.5 acre site located west of 11262 Scandia Trail. The site plan shows two structures, the main church facility of approximately 25,000 square feet and a separate 2,400 square foot youth facility. The main auditorium would seat 500 people. The parking lot proposes 215 spaces. Future expansion areas for the church and parking lot also appear on the plan.

City Planner Sherri Buss presented her report. Planner Buss summarized the process that the City has taken with the applicant thus far, such as discussing goals for the site design. The City has communicated that the structure should be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan by maintaining the rural character of the community and by making the development look like it belongs in the existing landscape. The applicant did include some elements that are consistent with rural architectural forms (gable roofs, red color and paned window design), although the large parking lot in the front of the building is not typical of rural churches and gives the site a suburban appearance. As an example, Planner Buss showed pictures of the Stillwater Public Works building in which the parking lot is located to the rear of the facility and the facade resembles a cluster of rural buildings. Additional pictures were viewed of newly constructed churches that had preferred design elements, and a church along Lake Elmo Avenue and Highway 36 that had an undesirable lighting scheme. Missing from the application is submission of a fully detailed landscaping plan, a lighting plan, a required Watershed permit, and MnDot's review of the driveway entrance. Planner Buss recommended that the application be tabled to allow the applicant to redesign the site layout to better respond to the City's direction, and to complete the other application requirements. The review period can be extended an additional 60 days, to May 17, 2008.

Chris Doehrmann, design architect, and Chad Goehring, representative of Willowbrook Church, presented their submittal. Mr. Goehring stated the vision the church has of connecting with the local community (hosting community events, providing public hiking trails) and sees a positive benefit to both the City and Willowbrook. Although the applicant asked the City for feedback on early design concepts, the church does not see itself as a rural and historical church, but more of a modern, inviting structure; thus the use of glass facade, as a "window to the community". Mr.

Doehrmann felt the design achieves the goal of connecting with the rural landscape and yet stays within the church's goals. The use of berms and landscape islands was an attempt to satisfy the screening of the parking lot and break up the expanse. They also felt the site would have minimal filling and disturbance by the placement of the lot to the front of the building.

Chairman Ness opened the floor to public comments. *Kevin Nickelson, 11262 Scandia Trail*, provided comments from the adjoining property owners Duane and Sally Lawrence, 10860 213<sup>th</sup> Street, in which they requested landscape screening along the northern property line. This is a requirement of the landscape plan.

*Alex Bildeaux, 21473 Manning Trail*, stated his concerns of noise levels, lighting and what type of events will be held on the grounds. Mr. Goehring responded that the church does not plan on outdoor events as part of their activity plan and will be sensitive to the surrounding property owners.

*Trent Nickelson, 11081 Scandia Trail*, stated that he felt the layout and design of the building appeared rural and had no problem with the parking lot in the front. Mr. Nickelson would rather see that the view from the rear of the building towards German Lake is preserved. Mr. Nickelson felt that there are a high number of cars traveling along Highway 97, and that it is difficult to get around the fact that cars are a part of the landscape.

As there were no more public comments, Chairman Ness closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Schwarz questioned if the building height of approximately 45 feet at the peak was allowed. Planner Buss determined that this is consistent with the building code, as it is measured at the midway point of the gable.

Councilmember Peterson stated her disapproval of the design of the Stillwater Public Works building and explained that basing the red color as a rural element is not critical, as the red Gammelgarden building was designed to replicate a Swedish museum. Councilmember Peterson approved of the parking lot placed in the front of the building.

Commissioner Maefsky explained the value the public places on maintaining a rural view along Highway 97 and felt that the applicants should make more of an effort to not obstruct this view by the building's close proximity to the road. Commissioner Maefsky would like to see the parking lot redistributed away from a shopping mall look and to more of a prairie appearance. She would like to find a balance for the neighbors (noise concerns), the landscape/lake and the design.

*Kevin Nickelson* stated that the great number of cars traveling along Highway 97 makes for an inherently noisy environment for those that live nearby, and that the noise issue from the church should not be significant.

Commissioner Malmquist felt this to be both a land use and a visual issue. By way of a text amendment, a house of worship is allowed on this property. There is no getting around the fact that a big building will be placed in a beautiful field; this isn't necessarily bad, but different. The decision cannot be based on meshing philosophical intent within the Comp Plan.

Councilmember Crum asked if an access can be granted off of Manning Trail or 213<sup>th</sup> Street. Administrator Hurlburt explained that the ordinance's intent is to have access off of an arterial so that traffic is not routed through neighborhood streets.

Councilmember Harnetty stated that as the land is going to be used and that development is not an illegal activity, the statement that "ruining the view shed by allowing a church" is not valid. It may be the responsibility of the council to strongly influence the look of the community, but taking on the role of dictating the architectural design is a slippery slope.

Commissioner Maefsky explained that while growth is good, preserving community character is one of the roles of the Planning Commission. She felt that new construction should enhance the character of the community.

Mr. Doerhmann interjected that he feels the design criteria is met and the subjective preferences stated can change with the members of the council.

Mayor Seefeldt commented that while the church's vision is admirable, this seems to be a combination of the rights of the landowners and developers versus the public's input on having this structure fit into the property and making it the least obtrusive through design, lighting, landscape, etc. There should be a thorough analysis of future expansion and the site must be prepared in the correct way early on to prepare for this. Whereas he is not highly critical of the plan, Mayor Seefeldt would like to see the structure moved further back onto the property and a reconfiguration of the parking lot. These would be welcome changes.

Councilmember Yehle felt that the design does blend into the surrounding properties, but perhaps the obtrusiveness may be minimized by layout and landscaping. The developer has provided a style that fits in, but the councilmembers are not architects.

Chairman Ness asked for a survey of all members as to their stand on the parking lot issue. Commissioner Schwarz: The lot cannot be hidden entirely but can be improved upon by splitting it up. Commissioner Malmquist: Would like to see it broken up. Chairman Ness: Moved towards the back of the structure. Commissioner Maefsky: Moved to the back of the structure. Councilmember Yehle: Swing towards the back, analyze the grade. Councilmember Harnetty: Church needs to create the space somewhere on the lot. Mayor Seefeldt: Reconfigure. Councilmember Peterson: Towards the side would be preferable. Councilmember Crum: The church need to do the best with what the site allows; changing the parking lot will change the scheme of the building's design. Can berms be the solution?

Mr. Doehrmann stated that the layout is done in a way that also works to serve the congregation. By changing the placement of the parking lot, architectural issues become a problem. The church's entrance is now designed to be a welcoming environment and prefers not to have people entering through a back door. The 10 foot separations in the parking lot, the berms and landscape buffers were added in an effort to mitigate concerns.

City Planner Buss commented that final acceptance of this plan will set a precedence. What fits into the community is a very important decision. Every site has challenges and finding the correct balance is crucial.

Councilmember Harnetty wanted it understood that the church is welcome in the community and their patience is appreciated. The council is trying to look forward and visualize the future in what seems like a clumsy process.

The consensus of the group was to meet in a workshop setting with the architect and church to review alternative sketches and landscaping ideas. Knowing what can and cannot work within the constraints of the lot will be valuable when bringing this back for discussion. A Notice of a Special Meeting for February 12, 2008 at 1:00 pm will be posted.

**Commissioner Malmquist, seconded by Commissioner Maefsky, made a motion to table the CUP request for Willowbrook Church and extend the review period to May 17, 2008. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **RESCHEDULE MARCH PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**

It is necessary to reschedule the regular meeting date of the March Planning Commission meeting as March 4<sup>th</sup> is still the scheduled date set aside by the state for meetings of major party caucuses. The City Council has already rescheduled their meeting to March 5<sup>th</sup>. **Commissioner Malmquist, seconded by Commissioner Ness, moved to reschedule the March 4<sup>th</sup> meeting to Wednesday, March 5, 2008. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **COMMISSIONER SCHWARZ – HIGHWAY 97 TASK FORCE**

Commissioner Schwarz requested that the City Council officially relieve him of his position on the Highway 97 Task Force. The council approved this request along with commending Commissioner Schwarz for his years of service on this committee.

**Commissioner Schwarz, seconded by Commissioner Malmquist, moved to adjourn.**  
The meeting adjourned at 10:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Eklund, Deputy Clerk