

## **Special City Council Meeting February 12, 2008**

A special meeting of the Scandia City Council was held on the above date. Mayor Dennis Seefeldt called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. The following were present: Council Members Pete Crum, Michael Harnetty, Dolores Peterson, Donnette Yehle, and Mayor Dennis Seefeldt. Planning Commissioners present: Moose Malmquist, Peter Schwarz. Staff: City Planner Sherri Buss; Administrator Anne Hurlburt, Code Enforcement Official Steve Thorp. Citizen: Thomas Krinke.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the application of Willowbrook Community Church for a Conditional Use Permit to construct a place of worship on 40.5 acres west of 11262 Scandia Trail.

Chris Doehrmann, architect for the church, stated that at the end of the last meeting, the majority of the Commission and Council seemed to indicate that the proposed church building is aesthetically acceptable, and that does not need to be revisited. The Church wants to connect with the community on the road side, and have the front facing the road. They want parking close and convenient to the entrances, and a clear path to the entrances.

Pastor Brad Reis said the church board has been working with the architect and they have approved building as presented to city. They want more insight regarding the city's regulations and to understand the more subjective requirements.

Mayor Seefeldt said that the main issue is the proximity of the building to Highway 97 and the impact on the viewscape. The majority of the Commission and Council have said they would like to see the parking to the side and rear of the church. This is consistent with early discussions when the church initially appeared to seek the shoreland ordinance amendment that allowed consideration of this site.

Pastor Ries asked where is the specific regulation that requires this? Administrator Hurlburt said that some of the criteria for issuing a Conditional Use Permit are subjective. There have been many discussions that the church plan needed to be consistent with rural character and fit into the landscape.

Doehrmann said that was mentioned, but there was also discussion about keeping the church away from the lake. The layout presented was the best solution to the church's needs. They do not want to move the building closer to the road or to place the parking on the back, away from the entrance. The front needs to face south. Pastor Ries said that church members preferred parking convenient to the door.

Planner Buss said that the city requested options to consider, but that had been dismissed by Mr. Doehrmann. The City is using its comprehensive planning process to define its rural character, what is special about the community and the design standards needed to fulfill that. Suburban-style parking lots are not part of that character.

Pastor Ries asked if the parking could not be seen, would that be okay? Harnetty said yes, but this is a “strip mall” model, that is the visual image that is the problem.

Doehrmann stated that the Community Center has parking in the front, but because of snow piles passers by can't see the pavement, but they can see cars. Doehrmann sketched a layout with the parking north of the existing building location, stating that this would not work with the function of the interior of the building.

Mayor Seefeldt said that this was a vacant site with many options for design, but the church had chosen to justify their layout and ignore many of the community's concerns.

Doehrmann said that if all the parking must be behind the building, farther from entrance, that may not be negotiable. Reis stated that he had been contacted by an attorney who had watched the cablecast of the February 6 meeting, raising the possibility that the church was being unfairly discriminated against.

Hurlburt asked if the entire layout could be moved further the north, to allow more space for landscaping between the parking lot and road?

Harnetty asked if the amount of paving could be reduced near the entrance/ drop-off area, and more planting islands added to break the parking lot up into more sections?

Doehrmann sketched how more planting islands could be added to the parking lot. There was discussion of how the entire building and parking lot could be moved to the north. Some change in the layout would probably be necessary in order to meet the wetland setback on the west side.

Mayor Seefeldt stated that if the building and parking lot could be moved north by at least 50 feet, he would probably support it.

There was some discussion about the possible approaches to landscaping the site. Planner Buss said there were several possible approaches that would fit the rural setting, including prairie/ grasses or shelter belts.

Doehrmann said the community should have specific design standards, such as in Pella, Iowa. If the standards are met, the proposal is approved even if they do not like the design. He objected to spending money to redesign if there is uncertainty if it will meet approval.

Yehle said that she wants to see architecture that fits the area, and to break up the sea of parking in front of the building. They could bring in more sketches for feedback before preparing final drawings.

Doehrmann asked if the City could approve the Conditional Use Permit with landscape and lighting plans? Hurlburt said that a permit could be approved with conditions, if the Council is comfortable with that. She recommended conditions that would give specific direction for the lighting and landscape plans. A grading plan, however, is needed to make sure the layout will work.

Yehle said that the city has received comments from the public that the amount of lighting needs to be minimized.

Schwarz commented on a note he had received from Planning Commissioner Christine Maefsky, who was not in attendance at the meeting.

Pastor Reis asked why, if they can screen parking lot, why do they need to move the building at all? The church needs to decide if it's worth the cost of redoing the plan.

Planner Buss said that the benefit of moving the building is that it would not be quite as much in the viewshed of people passing by, and it provides 50 more feet in front for landscaping—landform and plants—to develop good screening in a natural, more substantive manner that will help fit community better and hide more of the parking lot better.

Mayor Seefeldt said that it would also help to minimize height of building and make it less obtrusive. The plan meets the height limit but part of structure is taller (45 ft) due to the pitched roof. It would accomplish a lot of same purposes as moving the parking lot to the rear, but without such major design changes to the church.

Schwarz stated that the church is welcome in the community.

Doehrmann said that the next step would be to revise the site plan, including grading, if the church board approves. They could prepare concepts on the landscaping and ideas for lighting.

There was discussion on the timing of the next meeting with the Planning Commission. On March 5, they will receive a report of this special meeting. In order to provide time for the church council to review, the April 1 meeting may be best for consideration of a new plan and possible conditional approval.

The meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Hurlburt  
City Administrator/ Clerk