

January 6, 2015

The Scandia Planning Commission held their regular monthly meeting on the above date. Chair Christine Maefsky called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. The following were in attendance: Commissioners Jan Hogle, Dan Squyres and Chair Christine Maefsky. Staff present: City Planner Sherri Buss and Deputy Clerk Brenda Eklund. City Council members Chris Ness and Dan Lee were also in attendance. Commissioner Travis Loffler arrived at 7:06 p.m. Commissioner Steve Philippi arrived at 7:39 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA, MINUTES

Squyres, seconded by Hogle, moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously by those present.

Hogle, seconded by Squyres, moved to approve the December 2, 2014 minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously by those present.

DISCUSSION OF VILLAGE AREA LAND USE AND DENSITY ISSUES RELATED TO LIFE CYCLE HOUSING

At its December meeting, the Planning Commission held a joint meeting with the Economic Development Authority to discuss the vision for life-cycle and affordable housing and the planning and zoning issues related to this type of housing. The EDA has asked the Commissioners to consider potential changes in zoning and ordinance requirements to allow for more lifecycle housing and affordable housing, if this is the direction the City wants to pursue. Buss provided a summary of the Comp Plan housing goals, which support additional lifecycle and affordable housing in Scandia, and current zoning requirements for housing in the Village Area and other zoning districts.

There are four zoning districts in the Village Area – Village Mixed Use A and B, Village Neighborhood and Industrial Park. The Village Mixed Use A allows for the smallest lot size of 17 units per acre, which Buss stated could support townhomes with the issuance of a CUP. Accessory apartments are allowed in the VMU A, VMU B and Industrial Park districts with a CUP, but with an Administrative Permit in the VN, General Rural and Agriculture Core Districts. Chair Maefsky noted that since accessory apartments are allowed in the IP, the definition should be amended from being attached to an “owner-occupied single-family dwelling unit” to include commercial buildings as well. The reasoning is to allow a caretaker to live within a business.

There was discussion on performance standards for accessory apartments, and current code requirements for the owner to obtain an annual Administrative Permit for accessory apartments. This procedure of issuing an annual permit is not currently enforced, and could be changed.

Buss explained that Planned Unit Developments could allow for development of varied lot sizes to accommodate a wider variety of housing, but PUD’s must meet the density requirements of each zoning district.

Maefsky stated that during the latest Comp Plan update, Transfer of Development Rights were offered as an option that would have allowed for increased density in the VN, but this was met

with resistance from residents in the Village area that did not support an increase in density. She stated it may be worth exploring again.

Commissioner Squyres stated that communities thrive with population growth versus a shrinking population, and it would be beneficial to develop wisely while maintaining the character of the city.

Buss noted that business owners and residents have commented that there are aging residents who would like to remain in Scandia if they could move to smaller properties. All agreed that there is a need to pursue the Comp Plan goal to expand life-cycle housing opportunities for residents at all points of life.

Pam Arnold, 16560 220th Street, voiced her concerns on the limitations of the current zoning rules. She gave as an example that she would like to build an accessory dwelling for her farm workers and her plans to stay on her farm as she ages with the assistance of those living in the secondary dwelling. Although a trailer is allowed for farm workers, she questioned if this is the vision they want for Scandia. She would have liked this option when caring for her mother, as building an addition to her farmhouse was not viable. She asked the Commissioners to consider creative ideas and options as they take on this issue for lifecycle housing opportunities and to think progressively about how people can live and stay on their farm since not everyone wants to live in multiple family housing.

Council member and EDA member Dan Lee stated that the EDA has the potential to finance projects and assist developers to build housing for the elderly. He asked the Commissioners to look at code and ordinance changes to alter densities and standards which would support development of life-cycle housing.

Squyres stated that higher densities should remain in the Village Center, but since this is already squeezed, expansion should be looked at, such as building multi-family and lifecycle housing behind the firehall. Ms. Arnold asked why the city would want to encourage segregating this type of housing to one area.

Maefsky noted that public input into development of the next Comp Plan will be essential, but talking about these issues now prepares them for these types of concerns.

Buss stated that there are simple changes that could be done now that are not at the level and scale of Comp Plan matters, such as allowing accessory apartments by an Admin Permit instead of a CUP in all districts. Squyres agreed that the process could be made simpler; Maefsky noted that this would only change the permit requirements for the VMU A and B districts, IP District, and perhaps the Rural Commercial District.

Squyres questioned if it would be beneficial to consider changing accessory apartments from attached to detached, if certain standards were met such as location, size, etc. Maefsky noted that each zoning district should be treated differently since there are small lots in the Village Area and lot coverage could be a factor. Commissioner Loffler agreed that all creative options should be looked at, and described how apartments above storefronts would really fit Scandia's

character. Buss explained that mixed use structures are allowed by a PUD, but it is a complicated process which could be made easier. The City could consider including some Mixed Use Districts in the Village area, where buildings with a mix of apartments and commercial uses could be a permitted use.

Commissioner Hogle stated that this issue could evolve, like the changes to accessory structures did. The question of how to make densities work differently is the challenge, such as how to keep two families living on one parcel. How different is having living quarters above a garage versus a separate structure that shares one septic system with the main house – one should question this logic.

Discussion continued on the Met Council's reasons to preserve large tracts of land for agriculture, but goals within the Village Area can be different. Squyres reasoned that allowing a detached accessory apartment on the same site could encourage agriculture and prevent breaking up large lots.

Buss summarized the suggested action items for continued discussion on this. Administrator Handt is completing an inventory of vacant parcels near the Village Area which would have the potential for housing for the next meeting, and a market discussion with developers could be scheduled at a future meeting. Maefsky noted that the developers should be aware that this would be a very preliminary discussion.

Buss will also draft performance standards such as size, location and materials to apply to accessory apartments for both attached and detached units.

Council member Ness suggested that the Commissioners also explore the conversion of existing structures to living space, such as for properties that have old barns on them. Ness also asked that a more streamlined process for minor subdivisions be looked at that would cut the red tape and expenses for the land owner. Buss will provide information about whether the City can change the requirements for minor subdivisions, based on State Statutes.

Loffler noted that affordable housing options could include accessory apartments above retail, be attached or detached to homes, or modification of existing structures. Lifecycle housing like the Cottages could also be explored. One thing he would not encourage is tract housing or series of apartment buildings. Buss noted that the City does not have the infrastructure to support these.

Commissioner Philippi stated that housing over retail would be located near the Village Center and could be part of a larger goal that should be compatible with the Comp Plan.

Buss stated that she would also bring back a revised definition of accessory apartment and draft ordinance revisions to change the requirement for a Conditional Use Permit to Administrative Permit for accessory apartments in some districts.

LOG HOUSE LANDING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT UPDATE AND SPECIAL MEETING DATE

Maefsky reported that the Log House Landing Improvement Committee will be meeting on January 8 and 15, at which point a final design plan will be approved. The Commissioners agreed to hold a Special Meeting on January 16, 2015 at 3:30 p.m. to hear the recommendation and forward this to the City Council for their January 20th meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Loffler, seconded by Squyres, moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Eklund
Deputy Clerk