

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**SOUTH ST. PAUL PLANNING COMMISISON**  
**May 6, 2020**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY VICE CHAIR DESMARAIS AT 7:00 P.M.

Present:       Angela DesMarais  
                  Jason Frankot  
                  Justin Humenek  
                  Ruth Krueger  
                  Matthew Thompson  
                  Michael Healy, City Planner

Absent:         Tim Felton  
                  Stephanie Yendell

- 1)       APPROVAL OF AGENDA – Motion to approve the agenda as presented –Huminek/DesMarais (5-0).
- 2)       APPROVAL OF MINUTES – March 4, 2020 – Motion to approve the minutes as presented –  
DesMarais/ Huminek (5-0).
- 3)       NEW BUSINESS  
  
None.
- 4)       PUBLIC HEARINGS  
  
A)       PC Case #2020-13: City of South St. Paul- 125 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue North – Reception Hall Ordinance  
Amendment.

Mr. Healy presented a proposed ordinance amendment to establish formal zoning standards for reception halls that would also allow reception halls in historic buildings in residential districts. The ordinance amendment was initiated by the City Council in January of 2020 but due to the technical nature of the ordinance, it took staff some time to have the item ready. Mr. Healy stated that the public hearing for this item was only for an ordinance amendment, not for a particular application. Mr. Healy stated that if an application came in after this ordinance was changed, a separate public hearing would be required.

The City Code defines a “reception hall” as a space that is rented out for private events. Mr. Healy explained that some business have receptions halls as part of their business, but the City Code lacks information about how to handle scenarios where a “reception hall” is the primary use of a property Previously reception hall-type businesses had been approved by a conditional use permit in situations where the business’s use was similar enough to other uses in a district. Mr. Healy explained that this is not a best practice because if a City wants a certain type of use to be allowed, it should be reflected in the code.

The City Council discussed the proposed ordinance at their January 13, 2020 work session. South St. Paul has a number of historic “ethnic halls” from the early 1900’s. The City has two surviving, fully intact ethic halls: the Croatian Hall and the Serbian Home. The Serbian Home lost its “grandfathering” in the 1980’s. Around this time, a number of the ethnic halls were rezoned to R-2, Single-and-Two- Family residential, making their use non-conforming. The R-2 district only allows certain uses such as churches, charitable and philanthropic

organizations and school uses to operate reception halls. Previous owners of the Serbian Home, a nonprofit board, obtained a Conditional Use Permit in 1996 to operate an ethnic cultural center/museum which could host up to 12 events a year so long as there was no alcohol served. In recent years, the ethnic/cultural center disbanded due to financial issues and the home was purchased by a new owner. The new owner would like to operate a for-profit reception hall. This is not an allowable use in the R-2 District.

The City Council was open to the idea of a for-profit reception hall/community space operating in the Serbian Home as long as alcohol was not sold to the general public. The City Council directed staff to create an ordinance which would allow historic building to be used as a reception hall with the goal of helping preserve historic buildings.

The proposed ordinance amendment would define “reception or meeting hall”; allow for reception or meeting halls that are not part of a church, school, charitable organization or other allowed use when contained within an existing building on the National Register of Historic Places as a Conditional Use in the R-1, R-2, R-3 and R-4 districts; and would allow “reception or meeting halls” in a district where “entertainment and amusement” uses are allowed. The proposed ordinance would also rename the “Public Halls” use in the General Business District to “reception or meeting halls”. Staff recommends adding “receptions or meetings halls” to the existing parking requirements for places of assembly.

Vice Chair DesMarais opened the public hearing.

Commissioner Thompson asked for clarification about the parking requirement. Mr. Healy acknowledged that the Serbian Home does not have adequate parking for a reception hall use. Mr. Healy explained that the code would require one (1) off-street parking space for every three (3) seats. A property is not required to have its parking stalls at the site and could purchase a separate property for parking or share parking with another site after a lease was put into place. Mr. Healy reiterated that if the Serbian Home came forward with a Conditional Use Permit proposal that would be heard at a different meeting with its own public hearing.

Alex Stojmenovic, the owner of the Serbian Home, shared with the Planning Commission that it would not be feasible for him to turn the property into a residential home so he believed that turning his property into a reception hall was the best way to preserve the building.

Vice Chair DesMarais closed the public hearing.

Motion to approve as presented- Thompson/ DesMarais (5-0)

5) OTHER BUSINESS

A) An Update on Hardman Triangle Plan and Concord Street Mixed-Use Districts.

Mr. Healy explained that he would be providing an update on the Hardman Triangle Plan and the mixed-use districts along Concord Street. The Hardman Triangle is a triangular piece of land bound by Grand Avenue, Hardman Avenue and Concord Street. The area was part of the historic Stockyards which were phased out in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. While the rest of the industrial district moved towards Light Industrial uses, the Hardman Triangle continued with its traditional industrial uses. In 2019, the City Council imposed a moratorium on the Hardman Triangle so the Hardman Triangle study could be completed.

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The Comprehensive Plan and our Zoning map will play an important role in the redevelopment of this area. While the 2030 Comprehensive Plan called for light industrial uses in the Hardman Triangle, the 2040 Comprehensive Plan calls for mixed-uses. This 2040 Comprehensive Plan should be approved by the Met Council and in place by the end of the year. In addition to the Comprehensive Plan steering this area towards mixed use, Concord Street is slated to be redone over the next couple of years. The newly improve Concord Street would encourage walkability with sidewalks and bike lanes. This type of walkability can spur mixed-use development.

South St. Paul's zoning map has two mixed-use districts: The Concord Gateway Mixed Use District and the North Concord Mixed Use District. The Concord Gateway Mixed-Use District (CGMU) is located along Concord Street and Concord Exchange. In 2002, the City hired a consultant to do a small area plan for this part of the City. This study spurred the creation of the Concord/Grand Gateway Streetscape and Redevelopment Plan which envisioned this area acting as the "main street downtown" for the City. The Concord Gateway Mixed Use District was created to encourage this type of development. This area did not develop as intended but shows potential for development today.

In 2004, the City Council created the North Concord Mixed Use District (NCMU) in response to the concerns about the proliferation of used car lots in the area. The Council created a committee of resident and business owners to help study the area. The Council decided to create a clone of the Concord Gateway Mixed Use District that explicitly forbids car sales lots. The area has not changed much since the enactment of the ordinance. The area is zoned in a way which only allows "downtown main street" development despite such zoning not fitting the nature of the corridor.

The City Council has shown an interest in these topics and requested that Staff facilitate a discussion about how to move forward with doing better planning for the Concord Street corridor. Staff created a workplan that breaks down planning in the corridor into 4 major projects. The Hardman Triangle takes the highest priority, especially since the moratorium on the area expires this month.

The Hardman Triangle Plan brings forward a vision of what the City wants to have happen with the Hardman Triangle. Many of the uses in this area are "grandfathered", meaning that they can continue unless market pressure drives them out or the City purchases their land. The first portion of the project will involve changing the zoning code and zoning map from this area. Staff will need input from the City Council and the Planning Commission in order to bring forward changes. Staff have recommended an in-person, joint meeting between the Planning Commission and City Council to start this process.

Commissioner Thompson asked for what the action plan would look like going forward and shared his concern that the mixed-use district scaring off developers. Mr. Healy explained that plans and goals that are too convoluted or vague can scare developers off as developers do not like uncertainty. A well-written code, consistent, and transparent code will not scare off developers even if some of the zoning concepts are complicated. Healy explained that the City now employs a dedicated economic development professional, Community Development Director, Ryan Garcia, who helps to explain the code to developers. This is not a position that the City has had in the past. Staff's objective is to find a way to rezone the Hardman Triangle that does not conflict with the other mixed-use districts.

Commissioner Frankot asked if there was a good way to redevelop an area without causing problems in a different area of the City. Mr. Healy responded that it depends on what the goals of a City are. Mr. Healy shared that he feels that many of South St. Paul's struggles with redevelopment have to do with the vagueness of the City Code because consistent standards aid in development. Mr. Healy noted that South St. Paul is well poised for future development.

Commissioner Krueger shared her excitement for the future of the Hardman Triangle.

Commissioner Thompson asked when the Hardman Triangle Redevelopment Plan was created. Mr. Healy stated that the project was commissioned in 2019 with the final product being delivered to the City in January of 2020.

Commissioner Frankot shared his excitement for the project and asked about a timeline for the project. Mr. Healy stated he hoped to have the zoning rules ready by the end of the summer. The rest of the development would depend on how the City wants to handle the development of the project. The City has already purchased about 1/5th of the Hardman Triangle and is slated to purchase more properties. If the City owns most of the properties, the City is able to better articulate how the process will go. Mr. Healy reminded that group that the process is not an overnight process and would take a number of years to complete.

6) ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn- Thompson/ Kruger (4-0).