

On Thursday, July 16, 2020, at 7:03 p.m., a regular meeting of the Plan Commission was called to order via Zoom. Roll Call. Present: Chair Rene Morris, Doug Freed, Skip McCloud, Steve Munson and Joe Strabala-Bright. Absent: Aurelio Gallardo and Jamie Schwingle.

Also present were: Planners Dustin Wolff and Brian Carranza of Mead and Hunt, Building and Zoning Superintendent Amanda Schmidt, Attorney Tim Zollinger, City Manager Scott Shumard, Alderman Retha Elston, Alderman Jim Wise, City Clerk Teri Sathoff, and Assistant City Clerk Monique Castillo.

Munson made a motion to approve the amended minutes from May 21, 2020 as presented, it was not recorded that Alderman Elston was in attendance. The motion was seconded by Freed. Voting – Ayes: Freed, McCloud, Munson, Strabala-Bright and Morris. Nays: None. Motion carried.

McCloud made a motion to approve the minutes from June 25, 2020 as presented. The motion was seconded by Munson. Voting – Ayes: McCloud, Munson, Strabala-Bright, Morris and Freed. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Schmidt noted Council approved the request to annex the Steelton Subdivision – Group 7; the request from Majeski Motors to rezone land currently zoned as Community Business (CB) to Community Business with Special Use for the purpose of a parking lot and the request from Chavez Real Estate to annex the property at 407 East Avenue.

Chair Morris opened a Public Hearing at 7:07 p.m. to hear the recommendation from petitioner Diane Merdian to vacate an alley at 102 8th Avenue.

The Public Hearing was postponed due to technical difficulties.

Chair Morris opened a Public Hearing at 7:08 p.m. to hear the recommendation to Annex/Zone property contiguous to the city; Steelton Subdivision – Group 8.

Zollinger noted this is the continuation through this subdivision. As with the previous annexations/rezones, all properties have sewer access and pre-annexation agreements stating they would hook on when they became contiguous.

Wolff noted, as with the previous annexations, these properties are single family and will be rezoned to SR-8 to keep the properties legal and conforming as they all have small/side setbacks. Wolff also noted there is one commercial business that will be zoned Community Business (CB).

With no further discussion by staff, commissioners or guests, Chair Morris noted publications were made, fees were not applicable, notification requirements were met,

signage notifying the public of the hearing was not applicable and no written or verbal comments were made.

The Public Hearing was closed at 7:11 p.m.

Zollinger noted there are a number of properties in this subdivision that do not have pre-annexation agreements. These properties will be annexed with involuntary agreements, once we annex the properties that do have pre-annexation agreements.

McCloud made a motion to approve the Annexation and Rezoning of the properties contiguous to the City, in the Steelton Subdivision – Group 8. The motion was seconded by Freed. Voting – Ayes: Munson, Strabala-Bright, Morris, Freed and McCloud. Naves: None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris opened a Public Hearing at 7:13 p.m. to hear the recommendation from petitioner Diane Merdian to vacate an alley at 102 8th Avenue.

Merdian noted she is a long-time resident of Sterling. The property at 102 8th Avenue, is her childhood home and has been in her family for more than 50 years. The alley sits on a dead end, where her property is, the alley is not fully maintained and not graveled. For as long as she can remember, her family has always maintained the grass portion of the alley.

Merdian also noted, there are a lot of unfortunate events that happen, “in her back yard”, being so close to train tracks. If this vacation were to be approved, it may reduce such tragedies, as persons would be less likely to trespass on private property.

Wolff noted it appears no utilities will be impacted. He is unsure of gas service. If gas were to be impacted, an easement would be required. Staff is supportive of this vacation, so long as no utilities will be affected.

Zollinger noted for filing purposes, the map will need to be amended to reflect utilities and easements that may need to be covered by the City.

Charlene Nysather, 809 East 2nd Street, stated this alley is not accessible as it is blocked off with a fence and now, more recently and without proper permitting, a gate. This has caused plowing issues and she feels this is an area the entire neighborhood maintains and should remain open to all.

Lynn Rajnowski, 805-807 East 2nd Street, also noted plowing issues and further stated emergency vehicles had difficulties getting down that way because a 10 foot pole sat directly in the middle of the road, Rajnowski eventually had the pole removed.

Rajnowski noted she has lived in this neighborhood for over 47 years and she personally pays a private company to plow the area without reimbursement from the City. This area is maintained by all the residents in this neighborhood, not just the petitioner.

Nysather mentioned it was not until after the petitioner's mother moved back to the area that they started to maintain the alley. Prior to that everybody had access to the area, then a gate was put up, without permission of the City, blocking access.

Chair Morris considered tabling this item to gather additional information. Zollinger noted that would be a judgment call by the commission and reminded the group they are simply making a suggestion to the city council who will have the final say.

There was a brief discussion amongst the commission and staff regarding the time frames of when the fence and gate may have been installed. Merdian noted the fence was there when she was a child. The gate however, was more recent, but still a while ago. The area has been un-kept by the city, the petitioner has had trees removed and has maintained the un-leveled grass for a couple of years now. Merdian noted 8th Avenue is open and there is access to the river, the portion of the alley they wish to be vacated would not affect that access.

Wolff noted from the planning side we must consider if this area is still useful to the public. From the planning perspective, we must consider if the city is going to start maintaining the area should the request be denied.

Strabala-Bright noted we should want to do all we can to improve the city, he is supportive of this request.

Elston noted the area is overgrown with grass, she personally knows Merdian and her family have done what they can to maintain this property. No one has been able to access/drive through this alley for years. She is supportive of the request.

With no further discussion by staff, commissioners or guests, Chair Morris noted publications were made, fees were not applicable, notification requirements were met, signage notifying the public of the hearing was not applicable and no written or verbal comments were made.

The Public Hearing was closed at 7:45 p.m.

McCloud made a motion to approve the proposed vacation of the alley that extends from East 2nd Street to the railroad between 8th and 9th Avenues with the adoption of the planners report and confirmation that no utilities will be impacted otherwise an easement will be provided to the City for utilities that may be impacted. The motion was seconded by Strabala-Bright. Voting – Ayes: Strabala-Bright, Morris, Freed, McCloud and Munson. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Chair Morris noted this request will be referred to the city council for the August 3, 2020 meeting. She further noted, this is just the recommendation of this group, the city council will make the final approval.

Carranza expressed his excitement to be back with the group and introduced himself to new Commissioner Joe Strabala-Bright.

Carranza briefly reviewed Element 8; Intergovernmental Cooperation and explained how this and Elements 1-7 essentially tie into the 2040 Vision Statement.

Carranza emphasized the importance of Intergovernmental Cooperation as each neighboring community has similar opportunities and challenges to ours. Wolff noted, there are a lot of shared needs, it would make more sense to keep the communication lines open and work with each other rather than to compete with one another.

Carranza explored the existing and ongoing Intergovernmental Cooperation with the neighboring communities of Rock Falls, Dixon, Morrison and Lyndon. He further explored Opportunities for future Intergovernmental Cooperation within these communities.

Carranza gave a brief summary of Elements 1-8, he reminded the group it was with community interaction through workshops and surveys that we were able to develop this plan. He noted throughout this process there were several key objectives that developed into a recurring issue within each Element. He reiterated the progress made to date reflects the desires of our community and again essentially tie into the 2040 Vision Statement.

Carranza encouraged the group to review the comp plan in its entirety, now that a foundation has been laid. He is hopeful this will allow for a better understanding of what we really want. Then when we are able to meet in person we can focus on prioritizing our thoughts.

The next Plan Commission meeting is August 20, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. We will have a Public Hearing; Steelton Group 9, Public Hearing to rezone with a Special Use for a Cell Tower and continue discussion with the Comprehensive Plan. Hopefully we will be able to meet in person.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Monique Castillo
Assistant City Clerk