

CITY OF PORTAGE PLANNING COMMISSION

AGENDA

Thursday, February 16, 2023
7:00 PM

Portage City Hall Council Chambers

CALL TO ORDER

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. Minutes dated January 19, 2023

PUBLIC HEARINGS

SITE/FINAL PLANS:

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Zoning Update Workshop

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS:

ADJOURNMENT:

Star (*) indicates printed material within the agenda packet.

CITY OF PORTAGE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, January 19, 2023

7:00 PM Portage

City Hall Council Chambers

The City of Portage Planning Commission meeting of January 19, 2023, was called to order by Chair Corradini at 7:00 p.m.

IN ATTENDANCE

- Eric Feldt, City Senior Planner
- Biqi Zhao, Deputy Director of Planning and Zoning
- Kelly Peterson, Director of Community Development
- Catherine Kaufman, City Attorney

ROLL CALL

Mr. Feldt called the roll: Chairman Corradini (yes); Vice Chair Joshi (yes); Fries (yes); Pezzoli (excused); Baldwin (yes); Adams (yes); Youngs (excused); Kasper (yes); and Freiman (yes).

Vice Chair Joshi motioned to excuse Commissioners Pezzoli and Youngs; Commissioner Baldwin supported the motion. Motion carried 7-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Commissioner Baldwin, seconded by Vice Chair Joshi to approve the Planning Commission Meeting Minutes of December 15, 2022, as submitted. Motion carried 7-0.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Tentative Plan and Rezoning Application (#22/23-7), from Commercial Planned Development (CPD) to Planned Development (PD) for a proposed mixed-use development at 412 W. Centre Avenue and 7860 Shaver Road.

Mr. Feldt provided a presentation of the project called 'River Caddis', stating that the proposal consists of six three-story apartment buildings, one community building, two 'live/ work' buildings with apartments above, and various site amenities. Further, he indicated that the development would connect to city water and sewer, and private on-site stormwater system. The development showed three proposed access points: two along Shaver Road and one along W. Centre Avenue. The applicant is responsible for obtaining necessary agreements to use these three access points. Mr. Feldt presented the applicant's site drawings and illustrations and recent pictures of the site, and explained pertinent code sections. He indicated that the recommended traffic impact study was recently submitted but not fully reviewed by city staff in time for the Commission meeting, and the applicant would seek approvals from the State to develop within mapped wetlands and 100-year flood zone. Mr. Feldt stated that the applicant is seeking Commission approval for a lower parking requirement of 1.5 spaces/ unit instead of 2 spaces/ unit, and higher density from 7 units/ acre to 21.5 units/ acre.

Mr. Feldt stated that the proposed Tentative Plan and Rezoning were found to substantially meet applicable zoning regulations and are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan. Due to the pending review of the traffic study, he recommended two options for the Planning Commission consideration. Option 1 is that the Commission accepts the application and recommends approval of the Tentative Plan and Rezoning with conditions to City Council. Mr. Feldt stated that under this option, if any substantial changes to the application are not in substantial compliance with the original Tentative Plan, the application shall be reviewed again by the Commission for Tentative Plan approval. Option 2 is that the Commission determines the application is incomplete and requests the submittal of a city staff's full review of the traffic impact study.

Applicant and property owner representative, John McGraw, 700 Mall Drive, Portage, MI, presented his company, other similar projects in Michigan and other states, and described the subject site and project. He explained the 'live/ work' element and floor plan and shared various factors in support of the project. Mr. McGraw indicated that the project fulfills housing needs in the Portage community and is supported by a market study.

The applicant's architect, Mike Corby, Integrated Architecture, explained the details of the site plan, indicated that the plan is a tentative drawing, and mentioned that the project helps address housing demand and Council's strategic goals. Mr. Corby explained that the project would achieve the desired number of housing units and building heights. He further explained that the project's parking plan reflects a similar lower parking demand at the State and national level. He generally described the underground stormwater system, indicated that they will do a soil testing, and that Hurley & Stewart will be part of the overall development team to assist in the design of the project. Mr. Corby described the architectural design of the proposed buildings in the back will have a residential feel, and the architectural design of the front buildings will feel more commercial.

Chair Corradini asked Mr. Corby about the 'live/ work' units.

Mr. Corby stated that these are becoming popular, listing examples in Grand Rapids. The 'work' portion is attractive to entrepreneurs, and other users such as architect's office.

Vice Chair Joshi asked Mr. Corby about 'live/ work' traffic counts. Mr. Corby answered they are typically lower than typical retail because the 'work' may not be open during general operating hours of a typical retail use.

Mr. Corby indicated that none of the residential units will be studios. It will be a mix of 1- and 2-bedroom units. Further, he stated that the smallest 1-bedroom unit will be 570 – 825 square feet; and the two-bedrooms between 950-1050 square feet. The 'work/ live' are 1,000 square feet. There is no wall between the 'work' and 'live' areas - designed for user flexibility.

Commissioner Fries asked why the development did not propose taller buildings and more units. Mr. McGraw stated that the 3-story building height was preferred to maximize cost effectiveness.

Commissioner Kasper asked about adding more parking and if parking could be provided inside any of the buildings. Mr. Corby indicated that it would increase costs and constructing carports/ garages would increase costs, too.

Chair Corradini expressed concerns about Fire Department activity nearby impacting future tenants of the development. Mr. McGraw indicated that they are aware of it and will address it later as the project moves to Final PD Plan.

Chair Corradini asked about the traffic impact study. Mr. Corby indicated that the road system was set up for a lot of traffic. The traffic engineer recommended minor changes to the traffic light timing. No substantial improvements to the streets were recommended.

Chair Corradini opened public hearing.

Public testimony as follows:

- Jonnie Richards, 2016 Woodbine Avenue, voiced concerns about how the overall project should be classified. Mr. Richards alleges that the zoning code does not specify 'live/ work' in the 'Planned Development' zoning district. He had additional concerns about perceived traffic. Further, he spoke against the proposed density increase and reduction of parking, and questioned the requested rezoning to 'Planned Development' instead of RM Multifamily. Mr. Richards further spoke about the need of housing affordability, area median income, and did not believe this project would provide affordable housing.

No other public testimony was received.

Commissioner Fries motioned to close public hearing; motion was supported by Commissioner Baldwin. Motion carried 7-0 upon a voice vote.

Vice Chair Joshi motioned to adjourn deliberation on the project to the 2/2/23 Planning Commission meeting to receive staff's full review comments on the traffic impact study, 2016 rental needs study, housing units added since 2016, and further Commission deliberation. Motion supported by Commissioner Freiman. Vice Chair Joshi asked Mr. Feldt if all materials can be provided in time for the Commission meeting on 2/2/23. Mr. Feldt said yes, but additional time to gather the requested information would be appreciated. Vice Chair Joshi then amended her motion to table deliberation to a future Commission meeting. The amendment was seconded by Commissioner Freiman. Motion carried 6-1 upon a voice vote, with Commissioner Adams voting no.

Commissioner Fries commented about supporting a lower parking requirement than what is required in the code due to overall lower parking demand. He also indicated support for higher density housing.

Commissioner Kasper asked if the draft Master Plan is addressing density and reclassifying concerns of density? Mr. Feldt stated yes but did not have details at this time.

Chair Corradini stated support for density due to limited land availability and support of taller buildings to help achieve high density levels. The higher density also supports the Council's Attainable Housing Plan.

Commissioner Adams stated support for the project due to low impact to neighbors, minimal impact to traffic, and lower parking requirement. He also indicated that people are now buying few cars, driving fewer miles, and that the city should plan for that lower automobile need. Mr. Adams indicated that the city should position the community for the future.

Chair Corradini spoke about pedestrian circulation in the area, car and pedestrian crashes at nearby street intersections, and asked Mr. Feldt if a bike path down Shaver Road is feasible to provide access to non-motorized users. Mr. Feldt indicated that the City Centre Plan will need to strategically plan for non-motorized users, examine street and railroad crossings for non-motorized users, and address overall non-motorized transportation in the draft Master Plan.

Kelly Peterson, Community Development Director, added to Mr. Feldt’s comments by indicating that many streets in Portage have been designed with a vehicular priority, but recognized that these streets should be designed for all users. She further indicated a need for street intersection signaling to be designed for non-motorized users.

Chair Corradini remarked on the lack of continuous sidewalks along both sides of W. Centre Avenue, the residential neighborhoods along W. Centre Avenue that could use those sidewalks, and the nearby Central Portage Public Schools complex, which is within walking/ bicycle distance to nearby residential neighborhoods.

SITE/FINAL PLANS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

1. 2023 City Council Priorities
2. City of Portage Attainable Housing Plan

Director Peterson updated the Commission on City’s Attainable Housing Plan of December 2022 and Council Priorities of January 10, 2023. These will lead future planning items for the Commission review and consideration. She listed planning items such as housing strategies, implementing the Lake District Plan, addressing future conditions of the Crossroads Mall area, zoning changes, form-based zoning, and mentioned a series of public updates, updating the Master Plan, public education with future changes.

Director Peterson indicated that at the upcoming Commission meeting on either the 2/2/23 or 2/16/23 the Commission would further deliberate on the River Caddis project and then enter a workshop to discuss upcoming ordinance updates on the items mentioned within the City Council’s housing plan and priorities.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS

Jonny Richards, 2016 Woodbine Avenue, stated he did not see anything about the River Caddis project or other general support for electric vehicular charging stations.

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONERS

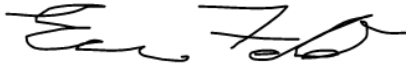
Vice Chair Joshi stated that the city should position itself now to plan for the future. She indicated a need to fully analyze the River Caddis project to ensure a comprehensive review and indicated support of the ‘live/ work’ scenario and lower parking requirement.

Chair Corradini thanked everyone for attendance. He asked if any Commissioner will be absent for the 2/2/23 and 2/16/23 Commission meetings. No Commissioners indicated their future absence.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair Corradini adjourned the meeting at 9:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Feldt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E" and "F".

Eric Feldt, AICP, CFM
City Senior Planner

TO: Planning Commission

DATE: February 10, 2023

FROM: Jonathon Hallberg, Interim Director of Community Development

SUBJECT: Zoning Update Workshop

In response to the [Kalamazoo County Housing Plan](#), published by the W.E. Upjohn Institute on December 14, 2022, Portage City Council adopted the [Portage Attainable Housing Plan](#) on December 20, 2022. Housing Strategies are also listed as part of the City Council priorities for Fiscal Year 2023-2024, adopted by City Council on January 10, 2023. This framework will allow the City to make meaningful and sensible changes to the Zoning Ordinance to encourage more housing, more affordable options, more efficient land use, and more flexibility for property owners, with an effort to control for negative side effects, and share communication strategies to build consensus about new housing best practices. Concentrating development in areas of existing infrastructure and social fabric will reduce urban sprawl and lessen the collective cost burden of maintaining these resources. While updating housing components in our zoning ordinance cannot solve this national problem, Portage will be doing its part to improve future outcomes and increase housing supply and choices.

The Planning Commission plays a vital role in this process. Throughout the next six months, City staff will work with the Planning Commission to evaluate and recommend changes to the Zoning Ordinance for review by City Council. We must devote a portion of future meetings for this activity on an ongoing basis and develop an efficient approach to this process.

To start the initiative, staff is preparing a workshop for the February 16, 2023, meeting to discuss the City and County Housing plans, review staff's ideas for possible zoning changes, explore and evaluate a couple of example opportunities, and discuss form-based codes. The workshop will finish with a prioritization exercise for the Planning Commission that will provide direction to staff for the next steps in implementing overall housing strategies.

WORKSHOP AGENDA

1. Review of County's 2022 Attainable Housing Plan (10 min.)
 - a. What stands out? What surprised you?
2. Review Portage Attainable Housing Plan (10 min.)
 - a. What zoning changes come to mind that could assist with this effort?
 - b. What externalities concern you?
3. Housing-Related Zoning Changes for Consideration (15 min.)
 - a. Focus is on ensuring all present understand what the changes could do.

4. Sample Opportunities – from other communities
 - a. Accessory Dwelling Units (10 min.)
 - b. On-Street Parking (5 min.)
 - c. Setback and Lot Coverage (5 min.)
5. BREAK (10 min.)
6. Understanding Form-Based Code (10 min.)
7. Ranking Exercise 1. (handout – 5 min.)
8. Ranking Exercise 2. (discussion and tune-up of Exercise 1 – 15 min.)
9. Plan for Next Steps (5 min.)
10. Revisit Related Topics from Workshop (10 min.)

The above agenda has timed segments to ensure we stay on topic. Additional discussion points are valuable, and we have reserved a discussion opportunity at the end of the workshop proper. We encourage you to explore the links shared in the previous paragraphs to enhance your working knowledge of both plans. Staff looks forward to working with the Planning Commission on the next steps in this process to affect meaningful and positive change for our community and region.