

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
Planning Commission Members
FROM: Paul Kenaga, Building Official/Zoning Administrator
DATE: October 5, 2013
RE: Planning Commission Minutes

The Planning Commission met at 5:15 p.m., on Tuesday October 1, 2013, in the City Council Chambers at City Hall. The following members were present: Don Smith, Jerry Steffes, Richard Wieser, Dave Hanifl and Linda Larson. Members Randy Corcoran and Earl Welch were not present at the meeting. Ex-officio members Shawn Wetterlin and John Graft were also present. Bill Waller and Skip Wieser were not present. Paul Kenaga was also in attendance.

1. Meeting was called to order by Chairman Smith and roll call taken. The minutes of September 17th, 2013, were approved as written with the following addition by the consensus of the Planning Commission to item 2, under finding of fact.

5. The topography and the strange angle of the lot make a variance a necessity.

2. Notice is hereby given that the Planning Commission of the City Zoning Authority will hold a public meeting at the La Crescent City Hall, 315 Main Street, in said City on Tuesday, October 1st, 2013 at 5:25 o'clock P.M. to consider the application for a variance to allow for the construction of a new residential structure with the garage set back in front of the principal structure while the zoning ordinance requires attached garages to be at the same or greater set back as the principal structure (12.15, Subd. 6, A., 4.)

The variance request concerns certain premises situate in said City described as follows, parcel #25.0678.000, to wit; more commonly identified as 230 Shore Acres Road.

Jim Dawson, 226 Shore Acres Road (neighbor) came to speak in favor of the variance request.

Motion by Hanifl, seconded by Wieser to approve the variance request as written.

Upon a roll call vote, all members present voted in favor of the motion as proposed.

In recommending that the variance request be approved, the Planning Commission referenced the following findings of fact:

1. The variance request from the homeowner is to use the property in a reasonable manner; the garage would not fit any other way.
2. The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the particular lot in that it is a narrower than usual lot.
3. The variance will not alter the essential character of the locality; this design is the same as the neighbors to the South have built too.
4. The variance is consistent with the La Crescent Comprehensive Plan.
5. The rule of thumb for Shore Acres, since there is only one side for access, is that the garage is set in front of the main structure.
6. In this design, there is also living area about the garage utilizing space effecently.

3. The Planning Commission had a discussion regarding the Minnesota Small Cities Development Grant (SCDP) for owner occupied and rental housing rehabilitation in the city of La Crescent.

Motion be Hanifl, seconded by Wieser: that the City consider applying for a grant and requests that the City Administrator and the Planning Commission Chair, Building Official and one other member of the Planning Commission (Dick Wieser) identify an area of the original Plated City to include in the grant and prepare a final recommendation on submission of a grant application to the City Council for their consideration at the October 14th meeting.

Upon a roll call vote, all members present voted in favor of the motion as proposed.

Background: Michelle Vrieze from Community Development Associates would complete the application for \$1000 if submitting a grant were endorsed.

This fiscal year leveraged funds are suggested to make the application more competitive. It is suggested that local banks be approached along with the Community Foundation to accumulate up to \$20,000 and that the City match the pledged funds to serve as leverage funds. Both rental and single family homes can be included in the application. We can also use a landowner investment and a 10% landowner match should be considered. The goal is 20-30% of the grant amount as a match.

Recall that the City receives the repayment of the loans, which do not meet the 10 year forgiveness period, to reinvest.

Four years ago the City received a grant for \$440,000 that rehabilitated 26 homes in La Crescent. This improvement in the housing stock reduced blight, inspired neighbors to invest in their properties both making the City a more attractive community in which to live.

The Preliminary Proposal is due November 14th and the Full Application is due February 27, 2014.

By unanimous approval the Planning Commission also recommended to bring the following concern to the attention of the City “that either the lack of enforcement of existing regulation, or the lack of regulatory tools is leading to a decay of some housing units within the City, many of which appear to be rental units”.

Several examples of blighted homes were discussed as well as calls to the fire department, sometimes directed by the Building Official to ‘do something’ to help resolve renter concerns for building safety related to rented properties. Neighborhood blight begins one property at a time and results in deteriorating neighborhoods, crime and increased fire risk. It was noted if increased enforcement was coupled with availability of forgivable loans progress related to the issue could more easily occur.

Several questions must be answered for the City by the Department of Economic Development in order to know if a competitive application can be submitted by La Crescent.

4. There being no further business to discuss, Motion by Wieser seconded by Steffes to adjourn the meeting at 6:48 P.M.

Upon a roll call vote, all members present voted in favor of the motion as proposed.

Saved as minutes of October 1, 2013 Planning Commission.