



**CITY OF LONG LAKE
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
December 8, 2009**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:45 p.m. by Chair Crump.

Present: Committee Members Hultmann, Crump, Skjaret, Hoen and Loosen; City Councilmember Olson; City Administrator Post.

Absent: None.

APPROVE AGENDA

Commissioner Loosen moved to approve the agenda as presented. Commissioner Skjaret seconded. Ayes: all.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes of the November 10, 2009 Planning Commission Meeting

Commissioner Hultmann moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Commissioner Skjaret seconded. Ayes: all.

OPEN CORRESPONDENCE

None.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Continuing Discussion of Rebranding, Zoning Amnesty, Rezoning, and High Speed Internet Issues Raised at the November 10, 2009 Meeting Under Open Correspondence

City Administrator Post reviewed the staff report for the Commission. He explained that the purpose of the discussion was to continue the conversation from the previous meeting and provide any updates or additional information.

Commissioner Loosen advised that the group, composed of concerned business owners and residents, had talked again about rebranding and were having a difficult time developing a catch phrase. He questioned the best method to develop a partnership

between the businesses and the City and how best to get the word out, that the City of Long Lake is open, closely located to downtown Minneapolis, and ready for business.

Jim Gulbranson stated that the group decided to drop the concept of zoning amnesty, as some people were scared by that terminology.

Commissioner Loosen advised that “an invitation to businesses” may be a better phrase.

Commissioner Hultmann stated that it is clear there are vacant properties in the City and a need for new business to come into the City but questioned how that could happen.

Commissioner Loosen stated that the next step would be for the powers to be to get together and develop a plan. He suggested the possibility of hiring an advertising agent for the City and thought that it would be a viable expense for the City.

Gulbranson stated that the Council had completed a goal setting session earlier in the year and advised that a plan for developers was among the goals set. He asked if there was anything that the group of concerned citizens and business owners could do to help the City accomplish that goal, which could help bring business into the City. He advised that true high-speed internet would be another benefit for local businesses.

Commissioner Loosen reported that Qwest was in the process of bringing true high-speed internet into parts of the City, which would be approximately 15 times faster than the current internet service available to Long Lake residents and businesses. He stated that the current internet provider to the City may consider upgrading their service due to the new competition.

Chair Crump confirmed that the City would need to revision itself without using words like zoning amnesty and questioned the availability of grant funds from the Metropolitan Council.

City Administrator Post advised that grant funds were received recently to complete a project and explained the guidelines that the Met Council uses for grant applications, such as population and the availability of low income housing.

Chair Crump questioned the process that the City would need to go through to ensure that business and the local economy is more successful.

City Administrator Post advised that a grant from the Met Council was received in 2003 in the amount of \$50,000 to assist with creating the downtown village master plan. He explained that the City is now seven years out from that time and questioned if the vision needed to be revisited and reviewed.

Chair Crump agreed that the plan may need to be revisited because of the completion of the highway. He explained that the plan was completed in 2003 with the vision of how the highway completion would affect the City but without fully knowing the reality of the

current economy and conditions. He stated that the plan should be updated, possibly on a five year basis. He suggested reviewing the two large vacant properties that are for sale in the downtown area and determining how businesses in today's market are working to make the properties more marketable.

Commissioner Skjaret stated that the businesses that were doing well in Long Lake are destination businesses, such as Gear West, and questioned how that could be duplicated and how a service business, with a larger draw, could be recruited into Long Lake.

Gulbranson stated that models like Hopkins and Excelsior Boulevard have failed nationwide and explained that the models are not working the way people originally thought they would.

Commissioner Loosen stated that he has learned that cities move slowly and did not think that feet could be dragged any longer.

City Administrator Post questioned if the focus would be on the retail aspect or the combination of industrial, commercial and manufacturing that existing in Long Lake.

Commissioner Loosen stated that he believed the City would need to look at the broad perspective.

Chair Crump stated that the zoning regulations currently do not allow for certain auto businesses, such as sales and recycling and questioned if the regulations needed to be rethought.

Commissioner Loosen confirmed those types of thoughts are exactly the open mindedness that the group is looking for.

City Administrator Post advised that this process also requires the private sector to invest in building, such as the Billy's Lighthouse property.

Commissioner Loosen agreed but advised that the City still needs to get the word out that they are open to business and welcome new ideas. He stated that he believed that Long Lake was being looked over by realtors because of the impression that Long Lake is difficult compared to other cities.

Commissioner Hultmann suggested inviting property owners and relative professionals to sit down with the City and have these types of discussions.

Commissioner Loosen confirmed that people are willing to do that and stated that Bob Erickson, an experienced commercial real estate professional, was present at the meeting tonight.

Bob Erickson stated that he believed that the economy is 98 percent of the problem but confirmed that the traffic count would come into play as well. He advised that most

companies are not growing right now and are more in survival mode. He stated that the current economy is also challenging for start-up companies as it is difficult to obtain financing.

Commissioner Hoen questioned who the City would appeal to in the private sector to let them know that Long Lake is open to new business. He asked if there was a segment that should be targeted.

Commissioner Loosen stated that he believed that a marketing professional could lead the City in that direction and answer those questions.

Bob Erickson stated that there are very few sellers who are able to obtain the price that they need for their property in the current market. He advised that the economy drives the price and noted that some properties listed for sale in Long Lake have not adjusted their selling price to the current market.

Commissioner Hultmann advised that a lot of people are currently upside down on their mortgages because of the current market and thought that some of the commercial properties could be dealing with the same issue.

City Administrator Post questioned if there was any sense in the real estate world that the City of Long Lake is more difficult to work with in terms of zoning requirements compared to other neighboring communities.

Bob Erickson stated that he did not believe that to be the case and thought that other communities in the area were actually more stringent in their requirements.

Commissioner Loosen stated that he also did not believe that Long Lake was any stricter than other communities but clarified that the perception is out there and the Commission is working hard to break that perception down.

Bob Erickson advised that the dynamics of economy have changed dramatically and stated that cities are struggling to adjust to those dynamics. He stated that if people really want to sell their property they will negotiate with the current market. He reported that another property foreclosed in the City which changed the value from over \$4,000,000 to just over \$1,000,000, which could affect the tax base if those situations become reoccurring. He stated that you are not able to change the market so the big thing would become how to get traffic off the highway and into Long Lake. He stated that if the City is able to figure out that resolution businesses and developers would take note. He noted that the EDA may be the place to hold this discussion. He questioned how the City could entice, or make it possible, for businesses to relocate in the industrial park, and get off of the main artery, which would make it possible to improve the main artery and make it more presentable.

Chair Crump stated that it is assumed that the businesses in Long Lake want to be in Long Lake and questioned how the City could help those businesses as well as the City overall.

Commissioner Loosen agreed that the EDA may be the best forum for this discussion.

Gulbranson stated that the group is not looking for City funds, but was looking for a change in the group dynamic and getting everyone on the same page to move forward and continue to think outside of the box.

Commissioner Hultmann discussed possibly moving some businesses around the City, such as Elite.

Commissioner Loosen stated that this is the open mindedness that the group is looking for.

Chair Crump commented that this could be a great time for the City of Long Lake to adjust to the bypass and turn the situation into an advantage.

Commissioner Hoen questioned how long property owners could continue to keep properties vacant.

Bob Erickson advised that commercial property owners were looking for properties in stable area, such as anchored to a grocery store or shadowing a grocery store. He encouraged the Commission to embrace that type of development rather than fear it, as it could bring in customers. He advised that a guide plan for the redevelopment of Willow Drive/Wayzata Boulevard area could be developed, as well as thoughts for how the City could encourage that development. He stated that most other communities have had patchwork redevelopment and therefore do not have a large block area that could be redeveloped as Long Lake does and commented that it is a unique opportunity. He explained that redevelopment is far more expensive economically than new development and questioned what could be done in the time being to make things better and more presentable. He suggested that the City “stage” itself and make improvements to the main artery so that people passing through have something decent to look at. He noted that the City had already started the process by burying utilities and replacing the water main. He commented that while the City may think they are being “business friendly” by making an exception for one business that could be interpreted in a different way to the other businesses that are playing by the rules.

City Administrator Post confirmed that this item could be moved from the Planning Commission to the EDA to further facilitate the discussion. He advised that during the past year the Chamber of Commerce interviewed some marketing specialists but chose not to pursue that option because of the price. He advised that the Chamber found it difficult to link the expenditure of \$50,000, to create a marketing program, with a result.

Chair Crump agreed that it would be beneficial for the discussion to be moved to the EDA and advised that the Planning Commission would continue to offer their assistance.

OTHER BUSINESS

Council Liaison Report

Nothing to report.

Commission Member Business

Commissioner Hultmann suggested that staff put together a thank you letter acknowledging the improvement in a commercial property.

Commissioner Hoen stated that this would be his last meeting as a Planning Commissioner and was thankful for the opportunity to work with the Commission and develop friendships. He was appreciative of being a part of the Commission and their work for the past four years and stated that he would take away great memories.

Chair Crump stated that the signage on Highway 12 is not working, even with the addition of the orange signs. He stated that the area needs larger signs that clearly identify which lane someone would need to be in to get to each city.

Staff Business

City Administrator Post noted that the owners of Creek Ridge Center gave the property back to the underlying owner, as the past owners had a difficult time attempting to lease out the space previously occupied by the church.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Hoen moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 p.m. Commissioner Hultmann seconded. Ayes: all.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Post
City Administrator