

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING

URBANA PLAN COMMISSION

APPROVED

DATE: November 24, 2020

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PLACE: Zoom Webinar

MEMBERS ATTENDING REMOTELY: Dustin Allred, Jane Billman, Andrew Fell, Lew Hopkins, Jonah Weisskopf, Chenxi Yu

MEMBER ATTENDING AT CITY BUILDING: Tyler Fitch

STAFF PRESENT: City of Urbana (Host); Jason Liggett, UPTV Manager, Kevin Garcia, Principal Planner; Kat Trotter, Planner I

OTHERS ATTENDING: Annie Adams, Tracy Chong, Josh Daly, C.K. Gunsalus, Christopher Hansen, Deborah Liu, Jacob Unzicker

1. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chair Fitch called the special meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Roll call was taken, and there was a quorum with all members present.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There were none.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

PLAN CASE Nos. 2411-PUD-20 and 2412-PUD-20

Communications received in Opposition:

- Letter from Elizabeth Cardman
- Email from Nancy Uchtmann
- Email from Esther Patt

Chair Fitch and Kat Trotter summarized the communications, all in opposition of the requested Planned Unit Development.

5. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

Plan Case Nos. 2411-PUD-20 and 2412-PUD-20 – A request by CCH Development, LLC for preliminary and final approvals of a residential Planned Unit Development at 805, 807, and 809 West California Avenue; 602 and 604 South Lincoln Avenue; 804, 806, 808, 808 ½, and 810 West Oregon Avenue under Section XIII-3 of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance.

Chair Fitch opened the continued public hearing for this case.

Kevin Garcia, Principal Planner, presented the staff report for Plan Case Nos. 2411-PUD-20 and 2412-PUD-20. Pertaining to questions from the previous meeting, he explained what can be built on the site by-right, under the current zoning. He explained the uses and floor area ratio allowed in the R-4 and R-7 zoning districts. He noted Table VI-3. Development Regulations by District, footnote 14 states *“in the R-4 District, the maximum floor area ratio may be increased to 0.70, provided that there is a minimum of 2,000 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit,”* and if the developers chose to build four-bedroom units, the floor area ratio could’ve been increased by-right on the parcels zoned R-4.

Mr. Hopkins clarified that under footnote 14, the developers could build 27 four-bedroom units, which would be 108 total units, and floor area ratio would likely be greater than 0.50.

Mr. Weisskopf noted that the developers are using the additional floor area ratio for larger one-bedroom apartments, rather than maximize the number of units.

Ms. Yu stated that the proposed occupancy is lower than the occupancy if they were built as four-bedroom units.

Mr. Fell noted that in the R-7 zoning district, rooming and boarding houses are limited to 15 total occupants.

Mr. Garcia continued, and gave a brief explanation of the traffic flow in the area and on the site. He stated that Shannon Beranek, Public Works, noted that Lincoln Avenue sees 16,000 trips per day, and the Planned Unit Development site would generate 22 trips at peak hours. He said Ms. Beranek stated that consolidating the number of driveways on the site would reduce the number of conflict points between pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles. Mr. Garcia also explained the relocation and widening of the sidewalk on Lincoln Avenue, as a public benefit of the Planned Unit Development. Plans to relocate or rebuild the sidewalk are not in the City’s Capital Improvements Plan, and there would be no widening or rebuilding of the sidewalk if the site were redeveloped by-right. The estimated cost of the sidewalk improvements is \$15,500, which does not include the costs to the City to acquire an easement.

Mr. Fell asked if the repositioning and widening of the sidewalk would be an intent of the City for future developments along Lincoln Avenue. Mr. Garcia clarified that the City does not have any intent to expect repositioning or widening of the sidewalk for other developments along Lincoln Avenue, and that this request was specific to this development.

Mr. Garcia also stated that the proposal would go to the Design Review Board for consideration, pending Plan Commission and City Council approval.

Mr. Fitch asked if the approval of the site plan would be affected by suggestions proposed by the Design Review Board. Mr. Garcia clarified that any suggested design changes would not interfere with the approval of the site plan by the Plan Commission.

Additionally, Mr. Garcia proposed a condition to require a plan for tree protection during demolition and construction in coordination with the City's Landscape Supervisor, to ensure that mature trees on-site are protected.

Mr. Allred asked about the City's policy for tree planting and removal in the City right-of-way. Mr. Garcia stated that the City requires compensation when street trees are removed, and that Public Works handles tree planting and removal in the City right-of-way.

Mr. Garcia concluded the staff report and stated that Jacob Unzicker and Josh Daly [the architects working on the proposal] were present to answer questions.

Chair Fitch asked if the Plan Commission members had further questions for City staff.

Mr. Weisskopf asked if the development meets the requirements for building height and parking in the R-4 and R-7 zoning districts. Mr. Garcia confirmed that the development meets height and parking requirements, and all other development regulations [other than floor area ratio, for which a waiver is requested].

Chair Fitch opened the hearing for public input and explained the procedure. He invited the applicants to address the Plan Commission.

Jacob Unzicker and Josh Daly, representing the applicant, made a statement about the floor area ratio and the sustainability features of the proposed development. The sustainability features include fuel efficient vehicle charging stations, connectivity for transit, walking and biking, bicycle parking for 100% of the building occupants, a high percentage of open space, preservation of mature trees on-site, and infrastructure for future roof solar panels. The applicants also stated that floor area ratio varies depending on the configuration of the buildings on the site. They said that the building area of the proposed project is not substantially larger than the existing building area on the site now. They noted that the proposed development would be different from rooming or boarding houses permitted by-right, as the units will have cooking areas and bathrooms in each one-bedroom unit. They also said that they decided to split the building area up into three separate buildings, in an effort to make the buildings more attractive than one large building with the same amount of area. They stated that they provided the minimum amount of parking and more than the required amount of bicycle parking in an effort to meet the parking needs of the occupants, but not increase the amount of traffic in the area. The project was designed for residents to walk and bike to Campus. They stated that the proposed development will be ADA accessible and more sustainable than the buildings on the site now. To conclude, they reiterated that floor area ratio does not also apply well, when considering the constraints of the site, and the proposed development was not intended to maximize the floor area ratio or occupancy on the site.

Ms. Billman asked the applicants how they decided to build single-occupancy units. Mr. Unzicker stated that the applicant wanted single-occupancy units, and one-bedroom units are market driven, especially during and after Covid-19.

Mr. Weisskopf asked if the sustainability features included in this project are standard for all developments. Mr. Unzicker stated that these are unique features, specific to this development; these features are not any that would be expected in by-right developments. The active effort to protect the trees on the site is not something that is done in every development. Mr. Unzicker also mentioned that bicycle parking and fuel efficient charging stations are not typically included in other developments.

Ms. Billman asked if a tree expert has evaluated the trees on the site. Mr. Unzicker stated that the applicants have not consulted with a tree expert, but the applicants are amenable to the proposed condition to implement a tree protection plan during demolition and construction. The applicants intend to meet with the City arborist to configure the tree protection plan.

Chair Fitch invited those in support of the proposal to address the Plan Commission.

Annie Adams raised her hand to speak. She explained that she is someone who walks and bikes in the area, and would welcome the reduction in the number of driveways on the site, and the widening of the sidewalk on Lincoln Avenue. She stated that she is for sensible land use development and the reduction of car parking.

Tracy Chong raised her hand to speak. She stated she lives in the West Urbana neighborhood and is in support of the development. She appreciates that the proposed development includes large, quality one-bedroom apartments that could welcome a more diverse group of West Urbana neighborhood residents. She also mentioned that she is not concerned with a lack of car parking in the area, and residents of the area walk, bike and use public transit. She is also not concerned with a decline in property values in the area.

Deborah Liu raised her hand to speak. She stated that she is in favor of the proposal, and she bikes through the area regularly. She mentioned the Vision Zero policy and goal passed by the City of Urbana, that strives for zero pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries, and reducing the number of driveways on the site would promote safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. She also stated she appreciates the effort by the applicants to promote sustainability and connectivity. She made a suggestion to the Plan Commission that the sidewalk be widened as a multi-use path to promote safety and connectivity on Lincoln Avenue.

Christopher Hansen raised his hand to speak. He stated that he is in favor of the proposal, and that the applicants have made significant efforts to meet the needs of the West Urbana neighborhood. He reiterated the safety issues on Lincoln Avenue and welcomed the proposed sidewalk improvements. He mentioned that he did not like the façade choices or the proposed sidewalk lights, but that he would leave those comments for the Design Review Board. He also mentioned that he lived in a similar apartment building in the West Urbana neighborhood before purchasing a home in the area, and this project could be a stepping stone for future West Urbana neighborhood residents. Mr. Hansen also expressed a concern for the mature trees on site and asked that the applicants take care with the equipment they use to demolish the existing buildings and build around the trees.

Chair Fitch invited those opposed to the proposal to address the Plan Commission.

C.K. Gunsalus raised her hand to speak. She thanked the Plan Commission for serving and stated that she served on the Plan Commission several years ago. She acknowledged the positive features of the development including the parking on the interior of the site, the relocation of the sidewalk and the protection of the trees. She requested that the applicants revise their proposal to fit within the allowed floor area ratio for the zoning districts, 0.50. She also mentioned concerns about the design of the buildings, but that she would leave those comments for the Design Review Board.

With there being no further comments or questions from the public, Chair Fitch closed the public input portion of the hearing and opened it for Plan Commission discussion and/or motion(s).

Mr. Fell stated that the intent of floor area ratio is to limit building bulk, and floor area ratio is the most quantitative way to measure this. He stated the floor area ratio controls building volume. He assumed that the floor area ratio of the Europa House was significantly higher than that of the proposed development, and that the number is deceptive and not a foundational argument for denying the proposal.

Mr. Hopkins moved that the Plan Commission forward Plan Case Nos. 2411-PUD-20 and 2412-PUD-20 to the Urbana City Council with a recommendation for approval with the condition that *a plan for tree protection be implemented during demolition and construction in coordination with the City’s Landscape Supervisor*. City staff shall delete “*or approved revisions of these plans*” and rely on the standard language. Ms. Billman seconded the motion.

Mr. Hopkins then stated that the expressed concerns are focused on the sidewalk as the public benefit, and the floor area ratio of the proposed development. He stated that if the Plan Commission wants separated buildings and specific types of housing, the floor area ratio will be higher than in alternative developments. The larger floor area ratio does not equate to a meaningful increase in the building’s bulk, or an increase in the number of bedrooms allowed. He also stated that the public benefit of the improved sidewalk is only one of the nine criteria for a Planned Unit Development, and the proposal achieves more criteria than just the requirement for the public benefit.

Roll call on the motion was as follows:

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|---------------|---|-----|-------------|---|-----|
| Mr. Fell | - | Yes | Mr. Allred | - | Yes |
| Ms. Billman | - | Yes | Mr. Hopkins | - | Yes |
| Mr. Weisskopf | - | Yes | Ms. Yu | - | Yes |
| Mr. Fitch | - | Yes | | | |

The motion passed by unanimous vote. Mr. Garcia noted that this case would be forwarded to Committee of the Whole on December 7, 2020. Chair Fitch clarified that this case will go to the Design Review Board if it is approved by City Council.

6. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

7. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There was none.

8. NEW BUSINES

There was none.

9. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

10. STAFF REPORT

There was none.

11. STUDY SESSION

There was none.

12. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Garcia, Secretary
Urbana Plan Commission