

**MINUTES
CITY OF AMES
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

Date: December 1, 2010	Kori Heuss, Chairperson	2011
	* Jeff Johnson	2011
Call to Order: 7:00 p.m.	Debra Lee	2012
	Chuck Jons	2012
Place: Ames City Hall	* Elizabeth Beck, Vice-Chairperson	2012
Council Chambers	Norman Cloud	2013
	* Mark Stenberg	2013
Adjournment: 7:23 p.m.		
	* Absent	

MAJOR TOPICS DISCUSSED:

1. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments Related to Parking Area and Perimeter Landscaping Requirements
-

CALL TO ORDER: Kori Heuss, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

MOTION: (JONS/LEE) to approve the Agenda for the meeting of December 1, 2010.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 17, 2010:

MOTION: (CLOUD/JONS) to approve the Minutes of the meeting of November 17, 2010.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

PUBLIC FORUM: There were no public comments.

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments Related to Parking Area and Perimeter Landscaping Requirements

Steve Osguthorpe, Director, gave an overview of the proposed Zoning Ordinance text amendments. During recent reviews of two separate applications for minor subdivisions creating two-lot splits, staff encountered a situation common to both proposals that will prove to be problematic for these current customers, and which has also proven problematic in past applications. It pertains to proposed divisions of property down the center of existing paved areas. Currently, the code requires landscaping along the perimeter of parking lots and along some defined lot lines. The issue is that when someone proposes to divide land across an existing parking lot, such division creates a landscaping nonconformity because there would not be the required perimeter landscaping along the new property line. Currently, the only way to address this is to either remove pavement to facilitate required landscaping, or to divide ownership of the property through a horizontal property regime.

To address this problem, staff is proposing text amendments that would basically exempt new lot lines across existing parking lots from the perimeter landscaping requirements, while making it clear that landscaping requirements only apply to the site being divided or developed. These amendments would not result in any changes to properties that would alter the existing physical and visual features of the site; it addresses only the legal boundaries of the site. Additionally, it should not create any health/safety concerns because it does not pertain to above-ground structures that must otherwise meet setback requirements for fire code and other practical considerations. The only essential consideration when dividing a lot across an existing parking lot is to ensure that the divided parking lot functions independently on both new lots, or that adequate cross-access easements are in place to facilitate existing circulation patterns.

The proposed amendments provide relief to a current impediment to subdivisions across existing paved areas without any changes to the existing physical landscape. Staff believes this type of amendment is in line with the Council's goal to eliminate unnecessary impediments to development. The amendments also affirm the long-standing practice to provide landscaping on the subject site of development, and make it clear that changes pertaining to expansions or enlargements only apply to the site being altered.

Scott Renaud, FOX Engineering, 1601 Golden Aspen Drive, Ames, Iowa, expressed his support for the proposed text amendments in general. He did, however, mention that there will be problems with these amendments when redevelopment occurs when trying to put landscaping in the middle of odd configured parking lots. He said staff is being very proactive with the proposed amendments, but thinks it should be taken further to allow staff to waive landscaping rules on central portions of lots when parking lots are being shared.

Chuck Jons asked for an example of the difficulties Mr. Renaud is referring to.

Mr. Renaud gave an example of the mall areas that are set up as multiple parcels, such as K-Mart and Hy-vee, where sometimes there are landscaping issues that can't be addressed when these areas are developed. He also mentioned the area in Campustown, where the old railroad right-of-way was located. He said this was a situation where the parking was angled and both neighbors had parking lots with issues. He said they were able to gain 14 parking spaces after they combined the two lots, reconfigured it, and eliminated the landscape strip on this odd configured lot. He said the reason he thinks this is important is because the City emphasizes within the LUPP a wise and intensive use of property. However, regardless of that, we do have parking areas that are required, and these perimeter areas in most cases are not going to gain much and will look odd because it will be a cobbled situation. Mr. Renaud said he applauds staff for being proactive and understands why the amendments are being proposed, but thinks some additional changes to the landscaping requirements need to occur.

Mr. Osguthorpe said he thinks what Mr. Renaud is addressing is a higher level review of the landscaping requirements to allow staff more flexibility. What we are discussing tonight is not trying to change the code as much as trying to address an existing situation. He said the discussions we need to have to address Mr. Renaud's concerns are what the landscaping code requires, where it is required, and what the implications are for changing it. Mr. Renaud raises some good points; however, this is something that needs more analysis and a more focused discussion than what we are dealing with tonight.

MOTION: (CLOUD/JONS) to accept Alternative #1, which states:

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended that the City Council approve the text amendments related to parking area and perimeter landscaping requirements.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

COMMISSION COMMENTS: Norman Cloud expressed his appreciation for Mr. Renaud's comments related to the proposed text amendments for parking areas and perimeter landscaping.

STAFF COMMENTS: Staff reviewed the tentative agenda for the meeting of December 15, 2010.

With no further business coming before the Commission, the Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Kori Heuss, Chairperson
Planning & Zoning Commission

Cindy L. Hollar, Recording Secretary
Department of Planning & Housing