

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

Date: June 6, 2012	Norman Cloud, Chairperson	2013
	Mark Stenberg	2013
Call to Order: 7:00 p.m.	Jeff Johnson	2014
	Troy Siefert	2014
Place: Ames City Hall	Debra Lee, Vice Chairperson	2015
Council Chambers	Rob Bowers	2015
	Yvonne Wannemuehler	2015
Adjournment: 8:38 p.m.	All Members Were Present	

**MAJOR TOPICS DISCUSSED:**

1. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Pertaining to Master Plan in Development Process
  2. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment to Reduce Retail Parking Standards or Adopt a Separate Standard for Farm & Home Stores
  3. Annual Review of Commission Bylaws
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**CALL TO ORDER:** Norman Cloud, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

MOTION: (Johnson/Siefert) to approve the Agenda for the meeting of June 6, 2012.

MOTION PASSED: 7 - 0

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF APRIL 18, 2012:**

MOTION: (Bowers/Wannemuehler) to approve the Minutes of the meeting of April 18, 2012.

MOTION PASSED: 7 - 0

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**PUBLIC FORUM:** There were no public comments.

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**Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Pertaining to Master Plan in Development Process**

Jeff Benson, Planner, said this is a significant change in the processing of applications for development of newly annexed lands which are zoned for residential development. He mentioned this proposed amendment has come about after discussions with local developers. The amendment relates to suburban residential low-density and suburban residential medium-density zoning districts. Mr. Benson discussed the existing process for master plans, which has created some burdens for developers because there is significant cost and time spent on preliminary plats, which are currently processed at the same time as the master plan. As time goes on and the preliminary plat needs to be revised, the master plan also needs to be revised. This requires the entire process be repeated since the master plan was approved as part of the zoning. Projects must be designed using zoning codes for things such as lot size and density, and the master plan does not really add any further information to that. If there is confidence in

the standards and the proposal follows those standards, a master plan doesn't help make the zoning decision. This proposal separates the subdivision process and the rezoning process. In the rezoning process there would still be a master plan and a zoning application, but only in certain cases. City Council would make a determination early in the rezoning process whether a master plan is required. This would usually be because there are specific conditions in or around the site, or because the design affects general health, safety, and welfare concerns. Mr. Benson pointed out the relevant section of the Municipal Code. With the new process, the City Council may request a master plan when first considering any zoning request. This would cover other zoning districts besides the FS-RL and FS-RM.

Another change is that preliminary plats would no longer be required at the time of rezoning. The subdivision would be a separate process to take place after zoning is established, so they would no longer be coupled in one process. Zoning establishes the policy issues and the right of the property owner to develop that property according to the zoning ordinance at any time. The subdivision process comes later and establishes the design of the development and the infrastructure that is needed within the development according to standards established in the code.

Mr. Benson covered the differences between existing and proposed requirements for master plans and showed examples of each. He said master plans will be simplified with the proposed system, since they will be required to show a conceptual image of how the site will be developed rather than giving details of individual lots.

Mr. Benson noted that in cases where a master plan is required and approved, the rezoning would be contractual. In other words, the City agrees to rezone according to the application and the developer agrees to build the subdivision according to the master plan. Mr. Benson said one benefit to updating the requirements are that it would allow approval of the basic development parameters before proceeding with all the detailed engineering plans, which saves the developer the expense of producing preliminary plats. Also, some subdivisions take years to develop and during that time building needs can change. This would allow for flexibility by changing only the preliminary plat rather than the master plan.

Steve Osguthorpe, Planning Director, stated that there is a lot of redundancy in the current procedure since the master plan and preliminary plat are so similar. If the developer later wants to change the preliminary plan, there is nothing the City can do to say no as long as it matches the master plan and meets the code.

Mr. Benson said the one disadvantage to the change is that, since the Council needs to make a determination whether they are going to require a master plan for any FS-RL or FS-RM rezoning, there is an additional step. The alternatives to avoiding that step are to require a master plan for all rezonings, or to rely on City staff to make the interpretation based on code.

Jeff Johnson mentioned issues that have been brought to the Commission by neighbors about what will be in a proposed development, and asked what could be done to avoid those concerns. Mr. Benson said the proposed process can be easier to understand for those who are not planners.

Mr. Johnson discussed through streets and how they impact the areas adjacent to the proposed development. He thinks this proposal makes it much easier to see how those streets impact the development area.

Debra Lee asked whether having the less detailed plan would preclude the Commission from asking questions for more clarification. Mr. Benson answered that the Commission could ask questions, but anything not included on the master plan would not be part of the binding contract. Mr. Osguthorpe clarified that there would be a plat following this, and that would show details of each lot.

Mark Stenberg said a common complaint is that development will impact traffic or natural areas, rather than problems regarding specific lot lines. He agreed the proposed process would help.

Mr. Osguthorpe said this process will allow the Commission to focus on the things which are really important, rather than the details of every individual lot and allow developers to feel confident that the investment of time and money are worthwhile because the preliminary plat is likely to be approved.

Norman Cloud asked whether there is currently a situation where a master plan is required without a rezoning request. Mr. Benson said the only case he knows of is the northeast gateway. Mr. Cloud asked if there would be a case where the subdivision would be denied after approving the rezoning. Mr. Osguthorpe said he could think of two examples: 1) the subdivision was found to be inconsistent with the master plan, or 2) that when the preliminary plat is done there are problems with the exact numbers for things like traffic studies.

Ms. Lee pointed out that Council can request a master plan for other types of zoning definitions. Mr. Benson said FS-RL and FS-RM are the only ones that go straight to Council. Council has broad authority to request things during a rezoning, including a master plan, but in that case it would happen much later in the process.

Mr. Benson said Council has mentioned in the past that they would like to know what would be built before they approve the rezoning, and this process would help with that. Yvonne Wannemuehler thinks this is another tool for Council to use.

Troy Siefert asked for a summary of the pros and cons for the City and development community. Mr. Benson said the master plan as it is currently conceived isn't very useful because it repeats what is in the preliminary plat. The new master plan process will allow an earlier idea of what the finished development might look like, and developers will get an answer from Council as to whether to go forward at an earlier date which will save time and money. The negative is that it still takes time to prepare the master plan when it is required, as well as the time for the extra step taking it to Council. Mr. Cloud agreed having a master plan virtually identical to the preliminary plat is not useful. Mr. Benson said the less detailed master plan will allow developers to find out whether they will be approved without the expenses required for a plat.

Chuck Winkleblack, 105 S. 16<sup>th</sup> Street, said many of the changes included in this proposed amendment came at his request. He gave an example of how the current process cost them time and money to make a change which had minimal impact on citizens. He asked staff what is submitted to Council in the new process. Mr. Benson said the pre-application conference information would be given to Council. Mr. Winkleblack said an extra step is much less costly than the current process and will answer most questions from people in the community.

Ms. Lee asked the rationale for not making it a requirement to have a master plan for every rezoning request. Mr. Benson said it's really not needed for all projects because many times it is clear what the finished development will look like based on the code.

MOTION: (Stenberg/Wannemuehler) to accept Alternative #1, which states:

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommends that the City Council approve zoning text amendments modifying the required process for amending the zoning map as described in Attachment B.

MOTION PASSED: 7 - 0

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**Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment to Reduce Retail Parking Standards or Adopt a Separate Standard for Farm & Home Stores**

Mr. Osguthorpe said this was prompted by the approval for Theisen's to expand. The expansion would normally require more parking; however they are concerned that the addition of more parking is unnecessary as their current parking is not fully used.

Mr. Osguthorpe said the first option is to lower parking requirements for all retail. Current standards impose higher numbers than is used on a typical day, and retailers will provide more parking than code where the market calls for it. Some jurisdictions have imposed maximum parking in order to ensure more efficient use of current parking and less environmental impact. The second option is to reduce the parking standard for farm and home stores only.

In order to determine what an appropriate reduction rate for retail, staff have reviewed aerial photos of six local retail stores over several years to determine the number of spaces which were occupied. The photos showed a significant surplus of parking. Staff is recommending 1 space per 300 square feet for the new standard, which provides additional space for higher volume times and fits with what some other municipalities are using. This is the standard used in the new Fareway. Staff think this is a median number which will accommodate demand.

Mr. Osguthorpe said one concern staff has with the second option is that the only specific retail type currently called out in code is grocery stores. The difference here is that, while grocery stores are fairly easy to define, most of the items sold at Theisen's are sold in some form in other stores. Also, there are times when a store changes the type of product it sells or the property is sold to a different retailer selling different products. Staff agrees there is a need to lower the standard in some cases, but it may be a challenge to accurately define this use.

Chris Theisen, 6201 Chavenelle Road, Dubuque, thanked City staff for their swift action on this. He said they'd originally requested 2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building space and he hoped the Commission will approve 3.0. If the decision is the 3.33 mentioned earlier, it will require more concrete.

Mr. Cloud pointed out the reduction of parking spaces required for large retailers follows with the City's move to be greener.

MOTION: (Stenberg/Siefert) to accept Alternative #1, which states:

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommends that the City Council approve zoning text amendments to Table 29.406(2) repealing current parking requirements for general retail sales and services, retail and shopping centers of any size, major retail and shopping centers, and grocery stores of any size, and to adopt in Table 29.406(2) a new parking requirement of 1 space per 300 square feet of building floor area for all retail sales.

MOTION PASSED: 7 - 0

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## **Annual Review of Commission Bylaws**

There were no changes suggested for the bylaws.

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COMMISSION COMMENTS: There was a discussion of whether there will be quorum at the June 20 meeting. It appears there will be.

Mark Stenberg said he has appreciated his time on the Commission, but he will be moving out of Ames.

Jeff Johnson stated his appreciation for Cindy Hollar, who left her position as Planning Secretary recently.

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STAFF COMMENTS: Staff reviewed the tentative agenda for the meeting of June 20, 2012.

Mr. Osguthorpe reminded the Commission that there will be presentations by the final four candidates for the open Planner position next week, and he encouraged everyone to attend.

Mr. Osguthorpe thanked Mr. Stenberg for his time on the Commission. He also stated his appreciation for Ms. Hollar, and welcomed Melissa DeBoer, her replacement.

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With no further business coming before the Commission, the Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

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Norman Cloud, Chairperson  
Planning & Zoning Commission

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Tami Moen, Recording Secretary  
Department of Planning & Housing

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