

Planning Commission
Regular Meeting
Wednesday, February 3, 2010
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: A. Parent, T. Schweitzer, C. Rypma, J. Hickey, Chairman; C. Gornowich, T. Byle, D. Brown, and T. Korfhage. Absent: M. Huizenga. Also Present: F. Wash, Planning Director, and P. Dlouhy, CDD-Planning Asst.

Chairman Hickey opened the meeting and C. Rypma gave the invocation.

Approval of Minutes – January 20, 2010

Motion by C. Gornowich, supported by C. Rypma, to approve the minutes of January 20, 2010 as printed. Motion carried.

General Public Comment

There were no comments at this time.

Election of Officers

After discussion, there was a motion by T. Byle, supported by T. Korfhage, to re-elect J. Hickey as Chairman of the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals Representative, C. Rypma as Vice-Chairman; and C. Gornowich as Secretary. Motion carried 8-0.

Case #10-569 – Best Buy – CPUD - FASP Amendment – Public Hearing
3410 Alpine Avenue

Chairman Hickey read the application requesting amendment of the Green Ridge Square (CPUD) Commercial Planned Unit Development to allow the modifications to the former Circuit City building to accommodate a proposed Best Buy tenant, located at 3410 Alpine Avenue.

Planner Wash reviewed a REGIS map and oblique photo showing the area and businesses in the Green Ridge Shopping Center. He related that Best Buy proposes to fill the vacant space that was previously occupied by Circuit City. Wash related that this is a Commercial Planned Unit Development amendment of the Green Ridge Square Final Area Site Plan. A public hearing notice was published in accordance with State law, with notification to property owners within a 300 foot range.

Wash related that Diane Mikovsky, Senior Tenant Coordinator, Developers Diversified Realty (DDR) was present on behalf of the request. Traci Golownia, Plan Designer, Dorsky, Hodgson,

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Parrish, and Yue, was also present and responsible for the design and retrofit of the building, truck docks, circulation and signage.

Wash then reviewed his staff report dated January 26, 2010 and the site plans for the project. He related that sidewalk does not exist along North Center Drive. He stated that this area has become much more of a pedestrian environment, with people moving about from adjacent apartments plus business patrons and employees. Wash noted that there are 2 public bus stops along North Center Drive. He recommends that public sidewalk be installed along North Center Drive from Alpine Avenue to the property line specific to this project. The issue is that trees may have to be removed to accommodate the new sidewalk, which would be unfortunate. There may be other options to custom fit the sidewalks without removing the existing trees. Also ADA compliant curb cuts and city standard walks through the driveways should be part of this requirement as a condition of Final Area Site Plan approval.

Wash related that the north side of the building would be affected by the creation of a second truck dock (and its delivery vehicle turning impacts) and a relocated dumpster. Wash related that the plan design shows removal of multiple parking places to accommodate these changes while maintaining a two-way traffic aisle around the building. Wash indicated that delivery trucks would be directed to the second driveway on North Center Drive.

Wash stated that he is in agreement with these changes provided that the new striping for the drive aisle and "No Parking" areas are repainted on an annual basis. This should help guide vehicles around the building and through the offset drive aisle. The same annual restriping requirement should also be applied to the crosswalk area by the front door. These should be conditions of Final Area Site Plan approval.

Wash related that he cannot support the parking of the "Geek Squad" car on the front sidewalk due to public safety concerns. A "Geek Squad" sign is proposed on the colored building elevation, and the "Geek Squad" car would serve as a portable sign.

Planner Wash reviewed Scott Connors report dated January 25, 2010, and related that Scott's biggest concern is the stormwater pond behind the building along North Center Dr. and Weatherford. Wash related that the detention basin was built to old standards. The main concern is for the pond to be maintained and to repair the fence. The pond will need to be maintained annually. An operation and maintenance agreement may be required soon due to regulatory changes.

Wash indicated that four 1000-watt flood light fixtures are proposed on existing light poles near the front entrance. It appears that the fixtures will be tilted to shine on the front façade. Wash stated that the fixtures are permitted provided they are fully shielded and shining downwards. Also, all proposed exterior wall lighting fixtures must be fully shielded and set to shine downwards. This should be a condition of Final Area Site Plan approval.

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Chairman Hickey asked if it is Best Buy's responsibility to maintain the pond. Diane Mikovsky stated that it is DDR's responsibility and Best Buy is their tenant.

Wash then reviewed the wall and pylon sign elevations. He related that the plans propose a total of 384 sq. ft. of Best Buy and "Geek Squad" wall signage. Also proposed is a pylon sign panel of 130 sq. ft. It was determined that the Greenridge CPUD was originally approved with significant signage and the current request is similar to the original approval. Wash stated that, given the regional attraction of a Best Buy, combined with the heavy traffic volumes on Alpine Avenue, he is supportive of the applicant's signage requests. He added that a sign permit is required for all new onsite signage. This should be a condition of approval.

Chairman Hickey asked if the sidewalk currently extends down to the bus stop on the north side of North Center Drive. Wash stated the sidewalk runs from Alpine Avenue and along North Center Dr. The area we are requesting sidewalk is from Alpine Ave. down North Center Dr. on the south side of the street.

Motion by C. Gornowich, supported by C. Rypma, to open the public hearing. Motion carried.

Traci Golownia, Plan Designer, stated that she is glad that Planner Wash looked at the tightness of this area for new sidewalks and is open to custom fitting them due to the existing trees, etc. Otherwise the trees would have to be removed if the sidewalks are installed at this location. Traci stated that the existing sidewalks across the street make more sense than new walks on the south side of North Center Drive.

Planner Wash stated that the No. 9 Bus-Alpine Avenue is the main line through North Center to Weatherford, behind Target and out to Alpine Ave. He related that this is a high ridership service.

Chairman Hickey asked if there is an area for people to walk to get to the bus stop. Wash stated yes, on the north side of North Center Drive. Traci Golownia added across Alpine Avenue on the north side of the street via a signaled crosswalk, sidewalks run down to Old Orchard. Because of the existing constraints on the south side with mature street trees and a close proximity to North Center Dr., she doesn't feel sidewalks can go at this location.

Member Byle stated that a public easement would be necessary for the sidewalks. He also feels that with the constraints of the trees and the road right-of-way, sidewalk design will take some survey work.

Planner Wash stated unless there are unique on-site situations, sidewalks should be required. We need to "field verify" if we can put the sidewalks in.

Member Parent stated that the problem with sidewalks against the street is the snow would be piled up there. He felt it is an expensive requirement for sidewalks and we should waive it for one year. After further discussion, it was determined that we would allow 6 months to “field verify” and then install the sidewalks unless deemed impossible.

Member Rypma asked if the sidewalks would have to go up to the curb. Planner Wash stated yes if only the right-of-way is considered. Rypma asked if there would be room for the existing lights. Member Byle stated, right on the property line. Wash stated we would need to “field verify” the light pole locations. Traci Golownia stated it would be tight and sidewalks might not fit.

Chairman Hickey asked if they could still get occupancy without the sidewalks in. Planner Wash stated that the city is looking forward to the Best Buy Store coming to Walker. We will work with them on the sidewalk issue as a condition of approval, not tied to building permits or occupancy.

Member Byle stated that with the bus stops and pedestrians in this area, it would be a good time to fix this problem. He felt that the planning commission needs to let staff work on this issue. Traci Golownia stated as long as they can proceed with this issue on hold, she is ok with it.

With regard to parking the “Geek Squad” car out front, Member Parent stated that he has no concern with it and felt it would be good advertising for them. Planner Wash stated that parking a vehicle adjacent to the cross walk is not allowed as it blocks emergency access and encourages other vehicles to park there. Similar comments were offered by the Walker Police and Fire Chiefs.

Diane Mikovsky stated that the small Volkswagen would be parked there only while they are promoting their “Geek Squad” services. She asked if the city would have any issues with the “Geek Squad” vehicle parked toward Alpine Avenue. Member Parent stated that he wants to promote the “Geek Squad” and doesn’t understand why it is such a big issue. Diane Mikovsky stated that Best Buy has signed a 10-year lease and they want to accommodate them the best DDR can.

Traci Golownia reviewed the lighting plans for the building. She related that there are two existing light poles with fixtures mounted 18’ above grade. They propose flood lights directed downward to provide illumination to the front facade. Traci indicated that Best Buy would like to add accents via the directional flood lights, like shown in the pictures of a store in Brooklyn, OH. Traci related that the Best Buy’s façade would have more of a “punch” than with general illumination and that is good for navigating. They use these floodlights at all of their locations.

Member Gornowich asked if these lights are on all of the time. Ms. Golownia stated that the lights go off when the parking lights go out. Gornowich stated that she has concerns with light pollution, glare, and previous issues on Alpine Avenue.

Planner Wash stated that they also have a large internally illuminated "Best Buy" wall sign. Diane Mikovsky stated this is the prototype of all of Best Buy Stores.

Planner Wash asked if the directional floodlights were shielded fixtures or open fixtures. Ms. Golownia said that they are directional light fixtures. The up/down lights add accent to the building. She stated that layers of light add illumination and help people to navigate the center. The up-down lights would light the building up on the masonry so it is not too dark. The façade lights wash the wall with light.

Chairman Hickey asked if they would be using the existing parking lot lights. Ms. Golownia stated yes. She reviewed the spec sheets and photos of the façade with illumination. She stated that the parking lot lights are mounted 18' above grade. Wash stated that 1,000 watts throws significant light.

Member Korfhage stated that he doesn't have a problem with any of the lighting. This is a Best Buy store and it is their trademark to have this type of lighting on the building, etc. He asked how specific this is in the ordinance.

Planner Wash related that the ordinance indicates that exterior lighting shall not be directed toward residential areas, nor create a hazard for drivers.

Member Gornowich stated she is not opposed but doesn't think the parking lot lights need to be on all night long.

Ms. Golownia stated that illuminating the front face of the building, will provide even illumination than going higher with parking illumination.

Member Schweitzer stated he doesn't see the need for flood lights in addition to the other exterior lights. Traci Golownia stated there is a dark spot in between and they want to promote overall lighting while avoiding a harsh lit area and a harsh dark area. Schweitzer stated that he doesn't care for the flood lights.

Diane Mikovsky stated that the flood lights provide illumination transition between the parking lots and the building. They would be only on two poles, one at the corner and one at the entrance.

Planner Wash stated the DPW and staff will be meeting with the landlords on site to go over the storm pond maintenance. Wash stated that unfortunately the work cannot be done until the spring.

There was discussion of the truck access loading dock. It was determined that trucks had to access the second driveway on North Center Drive, pull forward then back into the truck docks.

Diane Mikovsky stated that semi's deliver in the early a.m. or in the evening, dropping stock when the store is less busy. They only use one dock most of the year with the exception of Christmas time; then they use two docks.

Chairman Hickey asked if there were problems with trucks backing across the drive aisle. Planner Wash noted the same design worked fine for Circuit City. Mirrors and striping are shown on the plans. Wash noted the Circuit City driveway is now restricted for left-hand turns on Alpine Ave. A signal is now active at North Center Drive.

Member Schweitzer stated that the striping of the north "no parking" area would be a good opportunity for landscaping or sidewalk in that area.

Planner Wash stated that staff can work with the applicant on the sidewalk issue to hopefully avoid removal of existing trees.

Wash stated the signage plan is ok from a planning standpoint, as Best Buy will have what Circuit City exhibited. Best Buy is a regional attraction and they utilize a fair amount of signage.

Member Schweitzer stated that he would rather see a shielded fixture for the two flood lights out front, and extra time frame for the sidewalks to be worked out with staff.

Ms. Golownia stated that the directional floodlights are intentionally aimed toward the façade. She stated that light would not bleed over the building and not toward the sky.

Member Schweitzer stated without the spec sheet, he cannot confirm this statement. If staff can verify that it is a directed light fixture he would be more comfortable with it. Planner Wash added that the fixture is noted as directed at the front facade as opposed to a "yard" fixture. Wash stated that we could look at a shut off during non-operational hours.

Member Parent stated that he doesn't want to see the "Geek Squad" vehicle go away. Member Brown stated it is only for marketing events anyway and doesn't have a problem with it either.

Member Gornowich stated that she sees a glow from her backyard due to Alpine Avenue shopping center parking lot lighting.

Motion by C. Gornowich, supported by C. Rypma, to close the public hearing. Motion carried.

Motion by C. Gornowich, supported by T. Byle, to approve the submitted Final Area Site Plan amendment to the Greenridge Shopping Center CPUD for the Best Buy project at 3410 Alpine Avenue NW (PPN 41-13-01-151-008), as it does meet the standards set forth in the City of Walker Zoning Ordinance, with the following conditions of site plan approval:

1. The applicant agrees to all conditions noted in the City Planning Director's letter dated 1-26-10, unless otherwise noted.
2. The applicant agrees to all conditions noted in the City Engineer's letter dated 1-25-10, unless otherwise noted.
3. Sidewalk along North Center Drive will be installed by the applicant after onsite surveying and "custom fitting" involving city staff and the applicant's designer. There are physical limitations within the right-of-way combined with pedestrian safety issue that must be addressed, so a standard sidewalk location and alignment is unlikely. Staff will report back to the planning commission when the final sidewalk design has been created. Mature trees should be preserved, the light poles should remain, fire hydrants should not be moved, access should be provided to the Route #9 public bus stop and there should be separation between the driving lanes of North Center Drive and the sidewalk.
4. The stormwater operation and maintenance agreement is not a condition of approval. Maintenance of the stormwater pond, per city engineer approval, is a condition of approval. An onsite meeting is scheduled soon between staff and the applicants to clarify the pond maintenance list.
5. Pole-mounted floodlights must be directed at the front façade only. Staff must verify the directional design of the fixtures. The floodlights must be turned off after store closing.
6. The "Geek Squad" VW Bug cannot park in the front pedestrian area. It can park in any other non-ADA striped parking space.

Case #09-568 – Zoning Ordinance Amendments – tabled from 1-20-10

Planner Wash reviewed the redlined copies of the zoning ordinance amendments previously reviewed and amended by the planning commission on January 20, 2010.

Discussion centered on the temporary signage allowance during the "holiday periods." Opinions were raised to allow the holiday banner signs in locations other than building walls. It was clarified that a temporary sign permit allows a "yard sign" and such a permit could be applied for during the holiday periods, subject to the limitations and regulations of the sign ordinance.

Planning Commission members suggested the ordinance amendments had been carefully constructed over several months of review at the staff, ordinance committee and planning commission levels. Further modifications to the temporary sign provisions might dilute the code and sway from the original intent of the regulations which is a balance between reasonable business advertising and public safety improvements/visual clutter reduction.

Motion by C. Gornowich, supported by T. Byle, to move forward with a favorable recommendation to the City Commission on the Zoning Ordinance to Amend Sections 94-171, 94-61, 94-5, 94-406, 94-407, 94-409, 94-412, and 94-413 of Chapter 94 of the Code of Ordinances, City of Walker, regarding the housing of horses, Zoning Board of Appeals public noticing, signage and billboard regulations. Motion carried 7-1. (A. Parent-opposed).

Commissioner and Staff Update

Planner Wash informed the planning commission that Standale Lumber will be adding a new front façade to their building in Standale. He noted that, given the C-3 zoning of the lot, the current standards of the commercial architectural façade ordinance and the standards of the site plan review chapter, the façade change cannot be directed to the planning commission for review. While the proposed changes will be an improvement over the existing façade, they would not meet the standards of the new Standale Downtown District zoning (SDD) ordinance.

The planning commission recommended a joint meeting with the city commission on March 3rd to discuss a city-sponsored rezoning of certain properties in Standale to the new SDD zoning classification. Staff will generate the invitation to the city commission to attend the March 3rd planning commission meeting.

Adjournment

Motion by A. Parent, supported by D. Brown, to adjourn at 9:20 p.m. Motion carried.

Administrative Approval

Carol Gornowich, Secretary
Walker Planning Commission

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