

**Minnetonka Planning Commission
Virtual Meeting Minutes**

Oct. 8, 2020

1. Call to Order

Chair Sewall called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Commissioners Maxwell, Powers, Waterman, Hanson, Henry, and Sewall were present. Luke was absent.

Staff members present: Community Development Director Julie Wischnack, City Planner Loren Gordon, Assistant City Planner Susan Thomas, Network Administrator Jeff Dulac, and IT Assistant Gary Wicks.

3. Approval of Agenda

Hanson moved, second by Henry, to approve the agenda as submitted with the removal of Item 8A, variances for 3274 Fairchild Ave., as provided in the change memo dated Oct. 8, 2020.

Maxwell, Powers, Waterman, Hanson, Henry, and Sewall voted yes. Luke was absent. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes: Sept. 10, 2020

Powers moved, second by Waterman, to approve the Sept. 10, 2020 meeting minutes as submitted.

Maxwell, Powers, Waterman, Hanson, Henry, and Sewall voted yes. Luke was absent. Motion carried.

5. Report from Staff

Gordon briefed the commission on land use applications and other related matters considered by the city council at its meeting of Sept. 21, 2020:

- Adopted a resolution approving a wetland alternation permit for the Nine Mile Trail.
- Adopted a resolution approving a conditional use permit for an accessory apartment at 17003 Sherwood Road.
- Adopted a resolution approving a medical clinic and variance at 10201 Wayzata Blvd.
- Acknowledged the City of Minnetonka for achieving Step 5 of the Minnesota GreenStep Cities program.
- Introduced an ordinance to create a new sustainability commission.

Gordon noted that staff will be briefing the city council at its Oct. 12th meeting on housing proposals in Opus. The council will also consider a resolution ordering the preparation of an alternative urban areawide review (AUAR) for Opus. The planning commission will review the AUAR in January.

The next planning commission meeting is scheduled for Oct. 22, 2020.

6. Report from Planning Commission Members: None

7. Public Hearings: Consent Agenda

No item was removed from the consent agenda for discussion.

Maxwell moved, second by Hanson, to approve the item listed on the consent agenda as recommended in the staff report as follows:

A. Variance to allow for two wall signs at 3121 Groveland School Road.

Adopt the resolution approving a variance to allow two wall signs at 3121 Groveland School Road.

Maxwell, Powers, Waterman, Hanson, Henry, and Sewall voted yes. Luke was absent. Motion carried and the item on the consent agenda was approved as submitted.

Chair Sewall stated that an appeal of the planning commission's decision must be made in writing to the planning division within 10 days.

8. Public Hearings

A. Variance to declare a vacant lot developable and a front yard setback variance at 3274 Fairchild Ave.

This item was removed from the agenda.

9. Other Business

A. Concept plan for Minnetonka Station at 10400, 10500 and 10550 Bren Road East.

Chair Sewall introduced the proposal and called for the staff report.

Thomas reported. Staff recommends commissioners provide feedback on the key topics identified by staff and other land-use-related items that the commission deems appropriate. This discussion is intended to assist the applicant in the preparation of more detailed development plans.

Jeff McMann, representing the applicant, thanked staff for their help. He stated that:

- He's been working on the project for over a year. He would prefer to have face-to-face meetings, but decided to go ahead with the project with virtual meetings.
- He was excited for the project to be part of Opus.
- He has 20 years of experience as an architect and 20 years as a real estate developer.
- He hopes to close on the property in February of 2021, begin work in late April or May, and complete the project in the fall of 2022.

Mike Krych, managing partner of BKV Architects, representing the applicant, stated that:

- He worked with staff on the Dominion project which is now under construction and will be open soon.
- The Opus-area design has strong fundamentals which makes it unique in the suburban metro. The proposal would integrate with the new light rail, trail systems, and traffic pattern.
- The proposal would pay attention to Minnetonka's vision for the area and transform it from a corporate campus and industrial area to provide more residences and services.
- The natural habitat would be incorporated in the project.
- Positioning the building would be considered carefully. There are easements that surround the site and some that require the site to keep trail connections.
- He reviewed the surrounding intersections on Bren Road and the potential for adding art and green walls. There could be a public plaza area near the entrance of the building.
- The west edge could provide the stormwater management area.
- There could be designated areas for a pool, grills, and lawn games such as bocce ball.
- He reviewed the design of the building which would be mid-century, modern.
- There is the potential for photovoltaic panels to be placed on the roof to capture energy.
- He described the exterior renderings of the proposal and how it would relate to the trails. Every side of the building would be a front side.
- There could be a bike café that may be open to the public. He requested input for the bike café and public art.
- He reviewed options for the exterior canvas of the building.
- He looks forward to hearing commissioners' comments.

Chair Sewall appreciated the thorough presentation.

Henry asked what factors would determine if solar panels would be utilized. Mr. McMann answered efficiency and affordability. He was committed to trying to make it happen. Henry encouraged the applicant to utilize solar power.

Mr. Krych stated that a LEED evaluation would be done and provided in a future application. The Minnesota Energy code is robust and stringent to begin with, which he likes.

Robert Muller, of BKV Architects, representing the applicant, stated that all sustainable options would be researched and considered for the project.

Powers asked if the applicant has built a similar building and the mix of units for the proposed building. Mr. McMann explained how he and his associates worked on similar multi-family projects. This proposal would have a high price point and a lot of amenities.

Mr. Krych described the numerous sustainable and LEED-certified projects BKV has done including Blue Apartments in Uptown, Minneapolis, which was the first LEED apartment building in Minnesota and Penfield Apartments in St. Paul which retained a historic portion of a building and has a grocery store and multi-family apartments.

Mr. Muller stated that, of the total proposed 280 units, the breakdown would be 25 percent studio, 50 percent one-bedroom, 10 percent one-bedroom-plus and 15 percent two-bedroom apartments.

Hanson asked what uses the applicant would like to see added to the Opus area in the future. Mr. McMann felt that jobs and trails are the two most important items along with a pedestrian-friendly environment, light rail, grocery store, and restaurants.

Waterman asked if the building could be just as sustainable with seven stories as it could be with six stories. Mr. Krych explained that the seven-story building would have two levels of precast concrete framed for the first two levels and the five floors above would have wood framing. There are water-table issues which would require the building to be elevated.

Waterman asked if trees would be planted to replace the removed ones on the north side by the bike trail. Mr. Muller looked forward to meeting with staff to discuss a landscape plan and adding to the tree stock.

Waterman asked for more information on the bike café. Mr. McMann noted that it would be a great amenity to the bike trail. Options are being explored including adding benches, providing cover to repair a bike in bad weather, and creating a vending machine area that would provide refreshments and bike parts. Waterman likes the potential services that a bike café could provide.

Chair Sewall thought the concept plan has plenty of parking for residents. He asked about guest parking stalls. Mr. Krych pointed out nine to ten guest parking stalls on the south side of the garage entrance, east of the lobby.

In response to Henry's question, Mr. Muller stated that the concept plan has 318 parking stalls with a ratio of 1.1 parking stalls to units. There would be close to 317 bedrooms, so the ratio would almost equal one parking stall for each bedroom. Thomas added that those specific numbers would be provided in the staff report when the planning commission would review an application.

Maxwell stated that:

- She likes the concept plan overall. She previously worked, biked, and ran in the Opus complex.
- She likes that the residential use would incorporate art, natural spaces and provide a bike café with a vending area along the trail. She has commuted to work by bicycle and would appreciate a location to fix a flat tire and purchase a cup of coffee.
- She supports the use of photovoltaics to strengthen the project for the long run.
- She encouraged electric car chargers and bike parking for residents who live on the upper floors be provided.
- She would like more trees added in the plaza spaces between the arms of the "E" building footprint.
- It is a good concept plan.

Powers stated that:

- The location would be wonderful.
- He likes that the building would be seven stories instead of six stories.
- He likes the integration of art. Utilizing Native American art is one possible example to help integrate the proposal into Minnetonka.

Hanson thanked the presenters. He stated that:

- The art would be distinctive to other large apartment complexes. It would bring some life to the development and character to the Opus area. He would be excited to see creativity brought to the area. Murals and living walls attract people and energy. He was excited to see what an application would include.
- He likes the way the building sits on the property. In some ways it reminds him of the Walker Art Museum with the glass windows bringing the outdoors inside. That is a cool spot to have a cup of coffee. Aesthetically, he is excited about the look of the building. Having each part of the building act like a front is exciting.
- The concept plan's land use is more than appropriate, but he is concerned with the possibility that Opus, in the future, could be made up of ten large apartment buildings with no amenities close enough for

residents to travel to by walking or biking. He hopes other types of anchors will invest in the area.

- He supports the inclusion of a bike café like the Angry Catfish in south Minneapolis.
- The site would be pretty close to the Lone Lake trails.
- He wishes the applicant the best of luck.

Waterman stated that:

- He agrees with commissioners. The proposal would assist the city with its goal of adding more density to the Opus area.
- The building would look sharp. He likes the “E” shape and how it extends along Bren Road. No side of the building would be the back. He likes the walk-up aspect.
- He encouraged the applicant to plant additional trees.
- He would welcome some retail to the area.
- Public art could add a lot of vitality to the area, but he hopes the cost would not limit expenditures for environmental protections.
- He thanked the applicants for the presentation.

Henry stated that:

- He appreciates the amount of detail included in the concept plan and presentation.
- He also supports adding some retail. It would be a great amenity.
- The architecture with floor to ceiling glass would be beautiful. A lot of apartments in the area do not have that feature.
- He likes the density, but recommends breaking up the mass of the building on the north and west sides so it would not look so large from the bike trail. He likes how the south and east sides break up the mass of the building.
- He appreciates the concept plan making 20 percent of the units meet affordable housing standards.

Powers stated that:

- He appreciates the applicant’s presentation. The slides are gorgeous and easy to follow.
- He is not as enamored with solar panels and LEED certification as some of the other commissioners. He would not make a choice between art and solar panels. Technology that supports sustainability is constantly evolving and could quickly become outdated. He would trust the developer to make that balance.
- He was not concerned with a biker riding on a trail next to a seven-story building. The Foshay Tower was constructed in 1929. He felt the Opus area could handle the proposed building.

Chair Sewall stated that:

- He appreciates the applicant's integration of affordable-housing units with market-rate units.
- He agreed with Hanson that grocery and restaurant uses would benefit the high-density residential area. He likes the idea of a small café. An apartment building with a coffee stand or other retail would stand out among the rest and provide a huge benefit. Minnetonka residents are willing to walk and bike to amenities.
- The applicant will work with staff to determine the correct number of parking stalls. He thought a few more guest parking stalls would be beneficial since there would be no street parking.
- A dog walk and designated bathroom area would be beneficial.
- This is a strong concept plan.
- He agrees that including retail and other uses in the future would be helpful.

Mr. McMann appreciated the comments and will address them in the application. Mr. Krych appreciated the feedback. It would all be taken into consideration. Chair Sewall thanked them for submitting the concept plan and looks forward to reviewing the application.

10. Adjournment

Hanson moved, second by Waterman, to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

By: _____

Lois T. Mason
Planning Secretary