

City of Excelsior  
Hennepin County, Minnesota

Minutes  
Planning Commission

Monday, January 27, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Wallace called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Wallace, Craig, DiLorenzo, Harrison, Hersman, Holste, Noll

Commissioners Absent: None

Also Present: Planning Director Becker

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a) Planning Commission Meeting of December 23, 2019

Motion by Hersman, seconded by Harrison, to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes of December 23, 2019 as amended. Motion carried 5/0.

4. PUBLIC HEARINGS

**a) *430 Lafayette Avenue Variance Requests (19-16)***

Becker presented the report. Jon Monson, 202 Water Street, felt that the proposed plans meet the intent of the ordinance and the allowable 500 square-foot bonus for a garage being setback at least 60 feet from the front of the property and being accessible from the street as the property has essentially two fronts.

Diane Freeman, 425 Lafayette Avenue, felt that she should have received plans in the mail with the public notice and feels that standards should be followed.

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Carrie Larson, 200 Lake Street, feels that the home is appropriate for the area and that the variance should be granted. She does not feel that the applicant is asking for much of a variance.

Peter Hartwich, 186 George Street, addressed that approximately 80% of the variances that have been requested in the past few years have been approved. He feels that the middle class is being squeezed out of Excelsior because of the variances that have continually been approved. He is not convinced that there cannot be another moratorium.

Mark Brabec, 127 West Lake Street, spoke about the stress of asking for a variance. He spoke about the economic hardships of new construction or additions. He believes that the variance should be granted, as the 500 square foot bonus would be granted if the house were flipped.

Holste wanted to clarify if the house could be rebuilt if it were in the exact same footprint. Monson wanted to clarify if the house could be rebuilt provided the provision in the code that does not allow expansion to an extent exceed 50 percent of its market value. Staunton clarified that this only was applicable if the house expanded in any way.

Harrison asked the applicant if there was any discussion on design alternatives that would meet the standards. Monson stated that there was discussion on design alternatives and that state statute allows requesting a variance so long as the criteria is met.

Craig asked the applicant if they had considered moving the house back closer to its original footprint to be setback from the lake. Erica Hway, 202 Water Street, explained that the setback from the lake side is met, as it is proposed to be setback 50.4 feet from the Ordinary High-Water Level, and a minimum setback of 50 feet is required. Hersman asked if the applicant knew the wall plane length limitations, and Hway explained that the a recessed offset would not allow for a third car to be parked in the garage and that a projected offset would result in the garage exceeding the maximum square footage allowed for a detached garage.

Noll noted that the proposed plan reduces the building and lot coverage. He appreciates the reduction in square footage of the lot and building coverage. He is concerned about the runoff to the lake. Harrison feels that the design could be accomplished without a requirement for a variance.

Wallace opened the public hearing. Ann Barr, 438 Lafayette Avenue, wanted to see the plans and is not necessarily opposed to the proposal but wants to further understand it.

Matthew Pfohl, 248 Meadowbrook Road, Hopkins, MN, explained that they tried to reduce the impervious surface and understands that they are meant

Ron Wiese, 415 Lafayette Avenue, wanted to further understand the intent of the 500 square foot bonus and has concerns about losing the view of the lake. Krista Fleck, 415 Lafayette Avenue, would like to see the house setback further from the lake and would have liked to see the plans.

Wallace went over the wall plane length limitations. He first went over the front wall plane length variance. There didn't seem to be opposition with the front wall plane length variance. The side wall plane length variance request was discussed. Harrison did not feel that there was anything unique to the property that would necessitate a variance. Motion by DiLorenzo, seconded by Harrison, to recommend approval of the requested variance from the required wall plane length of the front side of the garage but to recommend denial of the rear wall plane length variance. Motion by Hersman, seconded by DiLorenzo to recommend approval of the maximum front wall plane length. Both motions carried 7-0.

Wallace does not feel that the intent of the ordinance regarding the bonus of the garage is met, as the intent is to allow for more impervious surface so long as the garage is hidden from the street. Motion by Harrison, seconded by Holste, to deny the variance request from the maximum impervious. Motion carried 7-0.

**b) *Residential District Ordinance Amendments***

Becker presented the report. Wallace opened the public hearing. Brabec did not feel that there should be such a limitation on Floor Area Ratio (FAR) that results in such a reduction in the size of homes that it becomes fiscally difficult to build or expand within the City. Hartwich feels that homes should be limited to 2500 square feet and that property owners should think of their neighbors when proposing a home. Larson feels that there should be an open forum regarding Floor Area Ratio so that people can better understand what the limitations are which includes renderings of what the approved FAR would look like.

There was discussion regarding the economic consequences of the proposed FAR numbers. Jules felt that perhaps that FAR should be what the staff recommendation was at the first meeting at which this was discussed. She then went on to say that perhaps building and lot coverages should be

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reduced instead of setting forth a maximum FAR. Craig feels that the formula is effective and would prefer FAR. Noll suggested we compare a number of different houses that are clearly below and above FAR and see if they meet or do not meet the proposed numbers.

It was felt that the FAR should be starting with 0.47. Wallace proposed that a single-story, open, street-facing porch should be exempt from FAR calculations in order to encourage front porches. He also proposed that half of the square footage of detached garages should be included in the FAR calculations in order to incentivize detached garages but also to not allow too much mass to be put back into the house.

Noll wondered if the exposed wall of a basement that should be counted towards FAR percentage should be changed from 42" to 48" (four feet) in order to simplify. Holste wanted to see new houses on William (Zerby, Hayes, and one on the other side of 19).

Wallace stated that the rest of the discussion items would be continued to the next meeting. The nonconforming provision that 50%...Harrison did not feel that there should be a requirement that the front entrance of a home face the lot line.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Craig seconded by Harrison, to adjourn at 9:23 pm. Motion carried 5/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Becker  
Planning Director