Chairperson Joseph Stumph called the Regular Meeting of the Vadnais Heights Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on February 26, 2019.

ROLL CALL

Joseph Stumph, Chairperson Present
Dave Anderson Absent
Linda Bigelbach Present
Edward Caillier Absent
Brian Carnes Present
Evan Cordes Present
Martin Jokinen Present
Curt Cooper, First Alternate (voting member) Present
Jerry Moynagh, Second Alternate (voting member) Present

Also present: Nolan Wall, Planning/Community Development Director; Jeff Melcoch, Cable Producer.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Upon motion by Commissioner Cordes, seconded by Commissioner Bigelbach, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the February 26, 2019, Regular Meeting Agenda.”

Ayes – 7  Nays – 0

The motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Carnes referred to two corrections needed to the minutes: 1) Line 91 change to who made the reference as he did not recall making the statement and

“Commissioner Carnes Anderson commented on the length of time it takes for transit projects,…; and 2) Line 100 “…that while he feels there may be a need for this type of service, the cost is astronomical…”

Upon motion by Commissioner Cordes, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve the minutes of the November 27, 2018, Regular Meeting as amended with technical changes to lines 91 through 101.”
The motion carried.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Chairperson Stumph opened the floor to the public at 7:05 p.m. for questions and comments on items not on the agenda.

No one wished to address the Commission, Chairperson Stumph closed the meeting to the public at 7:05 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Case 19-001: Outfront Media LLC. Variances for Billboard at 3364 Rice Street

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the applicant is requesting four separate variance requests to the property to construct a new billboard on the subject property.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said Chapter 38, Article VI, Sec. 38-700 of the City Code allows billboards on certain property in compliance with applicable standards. Wall then outlined the applicant’s variance that is to request a height variance from 35 feet to 50 feet that the applicant feels is necessary to allow for greater visibility over the future bridge ramps. He shared several graphics depicting the proposed location with the new ramps that would create difficulty to be compliant to the City Code height standards.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the applicant was also requesting a 66-foot building setback due to Country Drive being rerouted leaving the available land 21,000 square feet less which will create difficulty with a new billboard meeting the setback. He stated the proposed location is as far back as possible but there is only a small area left from the Ramsey County right-of-way.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall then explained the air space occupation variance where the billboard would occupy airspace over or above a driveway or parking area and how relocation was constrained due to relocation of Country Drive, County right-of-way, the parking lot expansion itself, building location and the proposed billboard’s orientation. Staff does believe that four of the proposed parking stalls could be removed to increase green space.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall outlined the requested wetland setback variance of 281 feet. He shared that the buffer covers the entire subject property and said the last variance was based on the former billboard. He said that staff believes a 15-foot higher billboard in the same general location as the current one will not have any additional negative impacts. He shared details of the billboard with one side being a dynamic face and the other static then shared photos of existing billboards for comparison.
Planning/Community Development Director Wall reviewed building setbacks and stated both adjacent property owners, Ramsey County and Caribou Coffee, voiced support of the variance requests. Wall said that staff are recommending approval of the variance requests: height to 50 feet with added architectural treatments around the pylon; building setback to 33.4 feet; air space approval for the driveway but denial of the parking area request with the requirement to remove parking stalls directly under the billboard; and the wetland setback variance to 219 feet.

Commissioner Carnes asked to review photos of any billboards in the City that fully comply with the Ordinance. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said billboard regulations have changed over time and that many do not fully comply.

Commissioner Carnes asked what the economic benefit would be to the City to approve the variances and questioned why codes were established if variances are continually approved. He said while he understood there was a billboard in this location before maybe the location should be changed and asked why parking was not recommended under the billboard. Commissioner Jokinen said the reason was for the potential of snow and ice falling from the structure.

Commissioner Cordes asked if this land would be annexed to Little Canada in the future. Planning/Community Development Director Wall responded that staff spoke with the City of Little Canada about that possibility and while they are not interested at this time it is possible based on the roundabout completion in the future as it will include a leg of Country Drive that will have to be addressed with regards to maintenance, plowing, etc.

Commissioner Cordes inquired about the schedule, as Little Canada does not allow new billboards. Planning/Community Development Director Wall replied construction would occur this year so plans for landscaping, sidewalk connections and plowing will need to be determined fairly soon.

Commissioner Carnes asked if the height request and graphics were based on actual bridge heights or speculation and asked about the possibility that they will need the billboard even higher. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the request was based on the best information they have to date and that 50 feet would provide the visibility the applicant needs.

Commissioner Moynagh asked if there is any other potential use for that land or is it land locked and is this the only option for use of the property. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said Ramsey County is expecting to sell the property to Caribou Coffee for parking expansion. It is a very small piece of property that does not have much viability and right-of-way access is very limited and said that using it for a billboard is probably the highest and best use. He noted billboards are allowed in the zoning district along Interstate 694 but that it just does not comply with several of our standards and that is why they are requesting variances.

John Bodger and Scott Christensen, Outfront Media, shared how this was a great example of the tenant, the property owner, Ramsey County and the City working together. They said the billboard has been there since 1986 and they are just working to relocate the
Chairperson Stumph opened the public hearing at 7:31 p.m.

No one wished to address the Commission, Chairperson Stumph closed the public hearing at 7:31 p.m.

Upon motion by Commissioner Cooper, seconded by Commissioner Jokinen, it was

"RESOLVED, to recommend approval of the Variance requests as presented by staff, based on the following findings of fact:

1. The proposed billboard replaces a former non-conforming billboard removed to facilitate construction of a public roadway improvement project.
2. The proposed billboard is a permitted accessory use within the C-2 District and is compliant with the Comprehensive Plan.
3. Several unique circumstances exist that create practical difficulties for the applicant to construct the proposed billboard on the subject property in compliance with certain applicable City Code standards, including:
   a. Limited freeway visibility due to the location of the proposed ramps/bridges for the Rice Street/I-694 interchange reconstruction project and proposed billboard orientation;
   b. Reduction in size of the subject property due to required right-of-way acquisition;
   c. Location of the existing building on the property to the south and potential parking lot expansion project; and
   d. Location of the existing wetland complex to the south/east.
4. The proposed billboard will not negatively affect the character of the surrounding area.
5. Several other existing billboards along the I-694 corridor in other communities exceed 35 feet in height.

Subject to the following conditions:

1. Sign and Building Permits shall be submitted for administrative review/approval, prior to any signage being installed on the subject property.
2. The applicant shall comply with all applicable State Statutes and City Code performance standards for construction and operation of the proposed billboard.
3. Parking stalls directly underneath the proposed billboard shall be prohibited, to be reviewed for compliance by the Community Development Department as part of any future parking lot expansion project or other future use of the subject property.
4. The applicant shall conceal the sign support column with an approved architectural treatment that is consistent with the colors and/or materials of the adjacent building, to be reviewed and approved by the Community Development Department.

Commissioner Cordes said that it seems premature to him, the entire corridor will be redone in the next year, may give land to Little Canada, speculating on bridge height, and
they may be back in a year asking for another variance and that he would rather wait, and
do it right once rather than doing it wrong. He said he would vote to table or say no at
this time and come back when bridge is complete and we know if its land within the City
of Vadnais Heights.

Commissioner Carnes said the Code needs to be reviewed to avoid having to issue so
many variances. He said while it may not be fair to this applicant that we say no when
we gave another billboard a variance. He said he understands that the billboard has been
there for 33 years and while the applicant has received a lot of revenue from it but
squeezing it into this small space may not be the best solution based on the current City
Code.

Commissioner Bigelbach said that she would also be willing to table the item to allow for
bridge completion and decide whose land it is.

Chairperson Stumph inquired about whether the City of Little Canada had any input if the
property were to be sold. Planning/Community Development Director Wall stated tabling
the item is not recommended as Council needs to take action, they can’t table things for
an entire construction season. The Commission could deny the request which would
allow Council to consider the request at their next meeting.

Commissioner Cordes asked if the variance was denied at this time could the applicant
come back for another variance. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said
there were some time restraints on applying for a variance if a variance was denied but it
would be up to the Council, adding that the applicant could withdraw their request and
reapply instead of having a denial on the record that might have some sort of time
constraint.

Commissioner Moynagh said he would like to see the barrier size first before considering
the variance request.

Commissioner Jokinen asked when construction would occur. Mr. Bodger said they plan
to construct this summer and said the variance application is based on the fact that some
of the Caribou Coffee land will have to be condemned to make the loop. He noted that
Ramsey County signed-off on the application.

Commissioner Cooper said it would have been good to have Ramsey County present to
answer questions. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the County
owns the property and the renderings show the proposed interchange and confirmed the
County supported the variance on the property they currently own and will do the land
transfer with a right-of-way swap and acquisition. He stated that while these are separate
actions, they do come together in this application.

Commissioner Jokinen said he has no objection in proceeding and that he is comfortable
supporting the request as requested and he sees no reason to delay consideration for the
applicant. He is not in favor of tabling it. Commissioner Cooper agreed.
Commissioner Cordes said there is too much uncertainty and expressed concern regarding Ramsey County’s due diligence and unintended consequences. He stated his intent is to vote no and the Commission should tell the Council that this request is premature.

Commissioner Carnes said that he too will vote no.

Ayes – 3 (Stumph, Cooper, Jokinen) Nays – 4 (Bigelbach, Carnes, Cordes, Moynagh)

The motion failed.

Upon motion by Commissioner Cordes, seconded by Commissioner Bigelbach, it was

“RESOLVED, to recommend denial of the Variance requests based on being premature given construction and possible change in City ownership of that property and that City zoning laws may not even apply.”

Ayes – 4 (Bigelbach, Carnes, Cordes, Moynagh) Nays – 3 (Stumph, Cooper, Jokinen)

The motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Elect Chairperson

Upon motion by Commissioner Cooper, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was

“RESOLVED, to elect Commissioner Cordes as Chairperson for 2019.”

Ayes – 7 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

B. Elect Vice Chairperson

Upon motion by Commissioner Cooper, seconded by Commissioner Cordes, it was

“RESOLVED, to elect Commissioner Jokinen as Vice Chairperson for 2019.”

Ayes – 7 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

C. Appoint Economic Development Authority Representative and Alternate

Upon motion by Commissioner Cordes, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was
“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioner Cooper as Economic Development Authority Representative for 2019.”

Ayes – 7  Nays – 0

The motion carried.

Upon motion by Commissioner Cordes, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was

“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioner Moynagh as Economic Development Authority Representative Alternate for 2019.”

Ayes – 7  Nays – 0

The motion carried.

D. Appoint Garceau Corner Task Force Liaison and Alternate

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the Garceau Corner Task Force resulted from a series of conversations over the past two years with the goal of cleaning up this property and reviewing options. He said the City is ready to have a proactive community engagement process to create a vision for this site so the Task Force is comprised of a range in membership, including City Council, non-neighbors, local real estate professionals, businesses and stakeholders in order to present different perspectives for an equitable conversation. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the intent is to bring in market representatives to educate the Task Force members and that open houses and information will be shared online for resident updates.

Commissioner Bigelbach asked if other cities have had success utilizing the Task Force concept for property development and she asked if the meetings will be open to the public. Planning/Community Development Director Wall replied that other cities have used this type of process and the same was done for Koehler Road, adding that the public meetings will allow for information and input without having a specific project being proposed and will help the community feel more comfortable about the process. He noted that there is a webpage set up with information on the Task Force.

Commissioners Bigelbach, Jokinen, and Chairperson Stumph shared their interest in being appointed to the Task Force.

Commissioner Bigelbach shared that she was a 39-year resident of the City and knows the community well and believes she could be an asset to the group.

Commissioner Jokinen said he was a former city administrator and understands redevelopment projects, some with pollution concerns and the need to address this contaminated site.

Upon motion by Commissioner Carnes, seconded by Commissioner Cooper, it was
“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioner Bigelbach as Garceau Corner Task Force Liaison for 2019.”

Ayes – 5  Nays – 1 (Jokinen)  Abstained – 1 (Cordes)

The motion carried.

Chairperson Stumph withdrew his interest in being appointed.

Upon motion by Commissioner Cordes, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was

“RESOLVED, to appoint Commissioner Jokinen as Garceau Corner Task Force Alternate Liaison for 2019.”

Ayes – 7  Nays – 0

The motion carried.

E. Accept Annual Expense Allowance

Upon motion by Commissioner Cooper, seconded by Commissioner Carnes, it was

“RESOLVED, to accept the annual expense allowance for 2019.”

Ayes – 7  Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

REPORTS

A. Council Liaison

Council Liaison Youker said she was pleased to be there and thanked the Commission for allowing her to attend, adding she had nothing to report.

B. Planning Commissioners

None.

C. Staff

Planning/Community Development Director Wall stated that the Comprehensive Plan was submitted to the Metropolitan Council at the end of 2018 and have reviewed it and returned it to the City with comments which are mostly text revisions. He said staff was
currently working through the revisions and while technically incomplete he did not anticipate any portion would need to be brought back to the Commission for review.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall thanked Chairperson Stumph for his work as Chair the past two years. He noted that during the time he was chair the Planning Commission adopted a new City Code and worked through two fairly contentious proposals. He stated he appreciated Chairperson Stumph’s leadership during this time as chairing is not an easy job and he thanked him for his service to the community.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next Planning Commission meeting will be held on March 26, 2019.

**ADJOURN MEETING**

Upon motion by Commissioner Carnes, seconded by Commissioner Cordes the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Sorensen, *TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*