

**REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
VADNAIS HEIGHTS PLANNING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 28, 2023**

OPEN MEETING AND WELCOME

Vice Chairperson Moynagh called the Regular Meeting of the Vadnais Heights Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on February 28, 2023.

ROLL CALL

Curt Cooper, Chairperson	Absent
Jerry Moynagh, Vice Chairperson	Present
Terri Dresen	Present
Martin Jokinen	Present
Steve Jorissen	Present
Adam Schreiber	Present
Joseph Stumph	Present
Emily Dunn, First Alternate	Present
Joe Scrocca, Second Alternate	Present

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

“RESOLVED, to approve the February 28, 2023, Regular Meeting Agenda as presented.”

Ayes – 7

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Schreiber referred to Commissioner reference changes needed on Page 5, Lines 5, 19, 25 to Commissioner Jorissen and on Page 7, Line 14, to Commissioner Schreiber.

Upon motion by Commissioner Dresen, seconded by Commissioner Jorissen, it was

“RESOLVED, to approve minutes of the January 24, 2023, Regular Meeting as corrected.”

Ayes – 7

Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Vice Chairperson Moynagh opened the floor to the public at 7:08 p.m. for questions and comments on items not on the agenda.

As no one wished to address the Commission, Vice Chairperson Moynagh closed the meeting to the public at 7:08 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Planning Case 23-001: SBA Monarch Towers I, LLC – Site Plan Review at 3645 Centerville Road

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the request in this case concerns the property at 3645 Centerville Road, which is the Vadnais Heights Elementary School property. He stated that the proposal is to replace the existing telecommunications tower with a new tower design in the exact same location with no substantial changes to the site itself. Planning/Community Development Director Wall presented a photo of the existing 2007 stealth tower design and said the idea at the time it was installed was to make it blend into the area so it didn't look like a cell tower. However, that hurt its functionality and when cell companies are looking to make changes, they look for the most cost-effective approach to provide the highest service level, not only for personal lives, but for law enforcement and other uses. Planning/Community Development Director Wall presented a photo of a tower design that is similar to the new one proposed. He stated that the School District is supportive of this project. He felt the request is a simple one since there is no actual site work that's happening. He stated that the original tower was approved through the site plan review process. However, with the new request, there is no site planning going on other than the visual design of the tower.

Shane Stubblefield, representing the tower owner SBA on behalf of T-Mobile USA, said the project was just an effort to bring the tower up to today's standards for service coverage and emergency communications. He said when the tower was constructed 20 years ago, it was built for voice and texting only. He mentioned that now with data requests, they are not able to accommodate the service levels needed. He further stated that this change would be taking the top section of the pole and replacing it with a more traditional monopole structure containing exterior mounts and antennas. He assured everyone that no changes to the base or fencing were proposed.

Commissioner Schreiber asked if there would be any changes to the height of the tower. Stubblefield responded that no change in height is proposed. He stated that the pole will still be 88 feet with 92 feet at the tip.

Commissioner Jokinen asked when work will be commence. Stubblefield stated that they planned to start work early summer.

Vice Chairperson Moynagh opened the meeting to the public at 7:14 p.m.

As no one wished to address the Commission, Vice Chairperson Moynagh closed the meeting to the public at 7:17 p.m.

Commissioner Scrocca asked if the tower was visible to any of the housing units or lots nearby. Commissioner Dunn responded her neighbor lives nearby and can see the tower, but had no issues with it.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the tower is fairly blocked by the building, but depending on where you are located, it was certainly visible. He noted that the new design will make the tower more visible than the current design. He mentioned, as stated in the staff report, a lot has changed in telecommunications since 2007. There are now antennas on water towers as well as other locations throughout the City since they are needed and they all seem to blend in.

Commissioner Dresen asked if the tower would include NextGen 911 for public safety needs. Stubblefield said he was unsure, but noted anyone could utilize the tower signal, but T-Mobile was the existing carrier.

Upon motion by Commissioner Schreiber, seconded by Commissioner Dresen, it was

“RESOLVED to recommend approval of Planning Case 23-001: SBA Monarch Towers I, LLC – Site Plan Review at 3645 Centerville Road as presented, based on the findings of fact and subject to recommendations in the staff report.

Ayes – 7 Nays – 0

The motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Home Improvement Loan Program

Planning/Community Development Director Wall presented information about the Home Improvement Loan Program, stating that the program was before the Commission several years ago when some policy-related items needed to be resolved. He stated that housing is the key to the community, where most of our value and tax generation come from. He noted that Vadnais Heights has a great mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. However, he continued, our housing stock is aging and he felt we need to at least incentivize people to make improvements to their homes. He continued that this program provides a low interest loan to eligible property owners.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said that the City has pooled tax increment financing (TIF) funds that were collected for affordable housing initiatives and

developments in the past. He stated that the money that was pooled can only be spent on certain things that support affordable housing. The Home Improvement Loan Program does meet those statutory requirements so we will initially fund the program coming up this fall. Some of the details still need to be figured out, but he stated that we are looking at April 1 to release the program.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared detailed information on the program including a maximum loan amount of \$25,000 and borrower eligibility. He noted that the City cannot do everything and there are income restrictions so the City needs to ensure we are providing the best value with the limited funds available. He commented that there are substantial funds, but the projects are significant. The City decided to focus on exterior improvements and interior improvements that increase energy efficiency. He felt the program will provide a lot of value to those who can take advantage of it.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall stated that a third party, NeighborWorks Home Partners, will administer the program for us. NeighborWorks has confirmed that there is a substantial percentage of the community, based on our demographics and our housing stock, that qualifies for the program. NeighborWorks will intake the loans, do the financial and mortgage work, and everything else that's needed. He stated that staff's main role in the program will be to market it.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall stated that NeighborWorks provides similar services to other cities in the Metro Area and is knowledgeable about other loan programs available to residents. He felt they will be a great resource to property owners in the City, and will provide the City with a solution to offer those who have code enforcement issues. He stated that the program is slated to be rolled out this spring. A marketing flyer has been created and information will be available on our website and social media.

Commissioner Jokinen asked if NeighborWorks is a non-profit organization. Planning/Community Development Director Wall confirmed that it is non-profit. However, they do not work for free so they will take a fee off of the loan, which is the cost of doing business. He stated that the City would not be able to offer the loans without a staff of finance and real estate professionals. He felt the program serves a need and provides good value. The program is not designed for kitchen remodels or other interior renovations, but rather items that have more exterior visual significance or provide energy efficiency.

Commissioner Jorissen commented a high efficiency induction stove purchased to replace a gas stove would qualify for the program since it's an interior energy efficiency improvement. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said that was correct, adding the program was not meant for interior aesthetics. New utilities or appliance replacements would have to be energy efficient.

Commissioner Jorissen asked about area medium income. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said he was unsure, but said it is a function of geographic area.

Commissioner Dunn asked if the program could be used to address overgrowth of trees or landscaping. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said landscaping would not qualify, but a driveway or structural retaining wall replacement would qualify.

Commissioner Dresen asked if there was a cap on the number of people in Vadnais Heights who can participate in the program. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said there is a cap, adding that the City is proposing to initially seed it with \$250,000 so that would amount to around 10 loans. However, the loan is revolving so as it gets paid back over time, there will be money available to fund other improvements.

Commissioner Schreiber inquired about loan default rates on these types of loans. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said he was not sure, but noted that NeighborWorks would be acting as the City would in reviewing and making sure that applicants can pay the loan amounts. He added, the City would be listed as second on the mortgage. He also stated that the money is coming from the City, but it's not taking money away from anything else. The money collected was intended for this purpose.

Commissioner Schreiber asked if solar or other green improvements qualify for the program. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said those types of projects have other resources already available. He also mentioned that solar projects require that homes be re-roofed so they are expensive and offer complicated pay-back. Therefore, it was decided not to include them in the program.

Commissioner Scrocca asked how NeighborWorks will decide who gets the loan if, for example, 20 applicants apply for it. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said applicants would be chosen on a first come first served basis.

Commissioner Scrocca asked if NeighborWorks would deny a solar project before another type of project. Planning/Community Development Director Wall confirmed that was correct and noted NeighborWorks would then offer property owners other resources that could be utilized.

Commissioner Dresen wanted to make sure that everyone understood that NeighborWorks would be implementing or managing the program, and she asked if the City would receive a reimbursement of any of the money they collect. Planning/Community Development Director Wall clarified NeighborWorks is paid through funds that are already dedicated as part of the loan process so they will take a fee out of the loan itself. They are acting on behalf of the City and we have a contract with them.

Vice Chairperson Moynagh asked about repayment terms and noted the loans would not be forgivable. Planning/Community Development Director Wall said the repayment terms are in the contract. The City sets the interest rate which would be close to the current rate but under it. He said the maximum loan term would be 20 years or due upon sale of the property, transfer of sale, refinance of property, or no longer owner-occupied.

Commissioner Jorrisen asked if the owner-occupied property had to be a permanent structure. Planning/Community Development Director Wall responded that the loans would be granted for permanent structures only, stating that there are other programs that could be utilized for mobile homes. He noted that Five-Star Mobile Home Estates has changed ownership resulting in many new units brought in, replacement of private utilities

and other improvements. He said they are a great partner and that staff didn't hear of a need for programs for their residents.

Commissioner Dunn asked if NeighborWorks also determines the improvements that meet the criteria. Planning/Community Development Director Wall confirmed that is correct.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall stated that no action is required on behalf of the Commission on this matter and that this agenda item was provided as information only. Commissioner Stumph said this program will help people in need of improvements see the full array of available programs.

REPORTS

A. Council Liaison

Council Liaison Kelly Jozwowski welcomed new Commissioners Dunn and Scrocca. She then shared about the recent Council goal setting session and the direction for a housing study to be completed.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall shared further about the housing study, which would include demographics, existing housing stock, and current market with the goal to identify needs, and identify tools and strategies to fill those needs. He said the Council recognizes and has some priorities around some specific housing goals and the study will inform the decision-making moving forward. He stated that the study would include multi-family housing, and he hoped to apply for a grant from Ramsey County to pay for it. However, if the grant is not received, that will not deter the City from pursuing it further.

B. Planning Commissioners

None.

C. Staff

Planning/Community Development Director Wall welcomed the new members then thanked Commissioner Caillier for his past service and former Commissioner Doll-Kanne for her continued work on the Council. He said the apartments on Rice and Vadnais Boulevard are currently under construction. State legislators will be present at the next Council meeting. He noted two Vadnais Heights residents were elected to the legislature which will provide a unique opportunity to support the City.

Commissioner Dunn shared her personal and professional background with the Commission and said she was excited to serve on the Commission.

Commissioner Scrocca shared his personal and professional background with the Commission and said he was happy to be in the City.

Planning/Community Development Director Wall congratulated Gentry Academy for winning the girls State hockey championship.

NEXT MEETING

The next Planning Commission meeting will be held on March 28, 2023.

ADJOURN MEETING

Upon motion by Commissioner Dresen, seconded by Commissioner Jorissen meeting was adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Sorensen
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.

APPROVED