

**PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
November 20, 2008**

I. ROLL CALL

Fred Walstrom	Present
Andrew Bowman	Present
Jack Deegan	Present
Jeff Ford	Present
Mary Ellen Hughes	Present
Laura Kors	Present
Lee Kramer	Present
Sheryl McCleery	Absent
Sara Smith	Present

Also present were City Attorney Jim Ramer, City Planner Larry Nix and City Manager Fred Geuder.

Chairman Fred Walstrom called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. MINUTES

Motion by Smith, seconded by Bowman, to approve the minutes of the October 16, 2008, regular meeting, as presented. Motion carried.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT AND CORRESPONDENCE

None.

IV. NEW AND OLD BUSINESS

A. Public Hearing—Proposed Special Land Use—Irish 669 E. Bluff, Two-Story Accessory Living Quarters

The City Manager noted that Mark Buday was present on behalf of the applicant.

Buday stated that the proposed project was intended for use as a guest house (accessory living quarters), and that it was designed to meet all applicable setbacks. Buday also noted that the project would require the removal of only one tree; they also intend to hand excavate for footings in order to minimize damage to other tree roots.

No public comment was received.

Walstrom closed the Public Hearing.

B. Consideration of SLU-2008-03, proposed Two-Story Accessory Living Quarters, at 669 East Bluff, Ann Irish Trust

The City Manager noted that the applicant had addressed all standards and was in compliance. The City Manager did note that a condition of the approval should be that the applicant file the prescribed affidavit acknowledging the use restrictions for Accessory Living Quarters.

Planner Larry Nix noted that he had to review the rules for a through lot, but after doing so, noted that all setbacks and other standards were in compliance. Nix also noted that he reviewed the project in light of the Special Land Use standards, and felt that the project was also in compliance with all of those standards. He recommended approval.

Motion by Kramer, seconded by Bowman, to approve SLU-2008-03, Two-Story Accessory Living Quarters, as presented, at 669 East Bluff, noting that Special Land Use standards have been reviewed and the proposed plan is found to be in compliance with those standards, and approved with a condition that the applicant file an affidavit acknowledging the use restrictions, prior to commencing construction. Motion carried, 7-0.

Enter Deegan.

C. Zoning Code Discussion

The City Manager noted the on-going discussions the Planning Commission has had concerning potential changes to the Zoning Code. What was being proposed for discussion was a reduction in the current lot coverage percentages for all buildings on a lot as a means of setting a new ceiling on the size of homes that could be built. The new proposed limits would not necessarily mean smaller homes than what has been seen, but it would mean that they would not become larger. The proposed limits are a reflection of what is being currently constructed.

Planner Larry Nix acknowledged that this does not necessarily get at all the concerns but it would be a pro-active step in limiting the maximum size.

Bowman asked whether there could be some type of a graduated front setback to address the bulk of houses on the street side.

Nix commented that in doing that, you may be moving towards a form-based code, where the individual neighborhoods look at what is there and design a code to meet each neighborhood. The City of Grand Haven has done this, but since its adoption there has not been any real examples brought forward for review. It has not been challenged either, but it may be only because it has not been tested yet.

After some discussion, Nix noted that a problem with trying to design architectural standards is that it becomes very subjective. The Zoning Administrator (the City Manager in our case) would

be required to make very subjective judgments on such architectural proposals. Usually such standards are designed where a community has a full-time planning staff.

The discussion returned to how much of a problem this really is in the community.

Kors said that sometimes it comes back to simply the mass of a building. Bowman noted that only 2 or 3 houses have been the problem, and sometimes they grow on you with time.

The City Manager noted that sometimes as the landscaping matures, the problem is lessened to some extent.

Ford noted that the proposal before the Commission is something that can be done, and the things we have done in the past are things that can be done. He suggested we move on those type of things that we can.

Nix noted two different ways to look at mass issues:

1. Use a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) instead of a Lot Coverage Percentage. The square feet of all structures, not the footprint, is used to calculate the FAR. The total square footage is divided by the lot size to come up with the FAR.
2. For the height, especially with a sloping lot, the allowable height on the front is reduced, and a height number is assigned for the rear side of a lot. A lower maximum height would reduce the bulk.

The City Manager noted that a 35' maximum is now calculated as absolute, rather than peak averaging, and that has certainly made for smaller buildings than could have been built 20 years ago.

The City Manager also showed a chart looking at side setbacks as a percentage of minimum lot sizes that may be another numerical way to look at limits.

The City Attorney noted that any changes of this nature must have some type of rationale in order to be defensible, so he suggested that planners think about this before proceeding.

It was generally suggested that a reason for proposing such limitations is to preserve the character of the community and neighborhoods, and to limit the bulk of any given home relative to other ones in the neighborhood.

The City Manager will continue to look at the numbers and to work with the City Planner to provide a proposal for consideration.

D. 2009 PC Meeting Schedule

The City Manager proposed a meeting schedule for 2009, which was approved by consensus.

V. MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

VI. Adjournment

The next regular meeting of the Planning Commission is scheduled for December 18, 2008, pending business on the agenda. The City Manager noted that there would unlikely be a December meeting unless a specific item came up for review.

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Frederick W. Geuder, City Manager