

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the City of Rensselaer Planning Commission
First Floor Court Room, Rensselaer Community Center, 62 Washington Street
February 13, 2012**

Members Present:

Charles Moore – Chair, Christine Van Vorst – Vice-Chair, Tom Cardamone, Frank Adams, and George Farrell

Members Not Present:

James Ahlemeyer and Bob Campano

Staff Present:

Daniel Berheide – Asst. Planning Director and Sarah Crowell – Director of Planning.

Others Present

Dave Gardner, Brenda Jiguere, Martha Hobbs, Steven Erby, Bob Brayton, among others.

Call to Order:

Chair Moore called the meeting of the City of Rensselaer Planning Commission to order at 6:35PM. Roll call was taken and quorum determined.

Adoption of Past Meeting Minutes

The past meeting minutes were not included in the members packets and therefore the approval is pushed to the next meeting's agenda.

Communications

A reminder was made that training on the city's MS4 program would be held on February 15th prior to the Common Council meeting beginning at 5:30pm. These trainings will qualify for continuing education requirements for delegates. Addressing a question from the Chair of the Planning Commission, the Assistant Director of Planning stated each training will count for one hour of continuing education credit.

Old Business:

None

New Business

1. **Designation of officers** – the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary of the Planning Commission shall be (re)appointed. Charles Moore nominated Chris Van Vorst for reappointment as Vice-chair and was seconded by Frank Adams. Chris Van Vorst nominated Charles Moore for reappointment as Chair and was seconded by Frank Adams. Daniel Berheide was nominated Secretary by Chris Van Vorst and seconded by George Farrell. The motion to approve the nominations was made by Charles Moore, seconded by Chris Van Vorst and approved by unanimous vote.
2. **Approve Annual Report.** The Chair read aloud the annual report detailing the number of meetings and types of approvals the Planning Commission considered over the year and highlighted some of the more major projects. A motion to approve the annual report was made by George Farrell, seconded by Frank Adams, and a passed by all present.
3. **Brayton Construction, 90 Columbia Turnpike (aka Grossman’s lot), site-plan approval.** Mr. Brayton presented revised site-plans to the Planning Commission reflecting the changes as suggested by the Planning Department. During his presentation he described his proposal to demolish the existing storage barns, renovate the façade of the building, resurface the lot, and add some additional landscaping. Chris Van Vorst and Charles Moore asked a few questions to clarify how the existing property would be changed, such as the installation of a new fence, and how the applicant should consider reducing the number of spaces to the minimum. This prompted the applicant to begin discussing the plan to also rebuild on the adjacent lot. As the discussion strayed, the Assistant Director of Planning interjected to return the focus to the proposed project currently on the agenda. Christine Van Vorst made a motion, seconded by Charles Moore, to approve the site-plan for exterior renovations to the existing building and parking lot improvements for a new business complex in the Columbia St. overlay district. The motion passed.
4. **Monolith Solar, 442 Washington St., use variance recommendation and occupancy change/site-plan approval.** The Planning Director, Sarah Crowell, began by noting that though the space has been used as commercial space previously, because the building has been vacant for almost two years, the city statutes requires the owner to apply for a use variance as the property is located in an R-3 district. Mr. Steven Erby of Monolith Solar, began discussing the nature of his business including how the City of Rensselaer was where Mr. Erby started his business. Now as the business has grown, he is excited to relocate to a more central location. Monolith Solar is expected to expand from approximately 30 to 60 employees. Mr. Erby described the site as being largely perfect the way it is and other than resurfacing the existing parking areas he does not propose any exterior changes to the building. It was then mentioned that he is proposing to purchase the adjacent vacant lots for additional parking and is in negotiation with the City of Rensselaer. A motion to make a positive recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals was made by George Farrell, seconded by Frank Adams, and all voted yes to the motion. A second motion to approve the site-plan contingent on the Zoning Board of Appeals approving the use variance as well as administrative review of the signage, parking and fencing should the Common Council agree to the sale of the adjacent properties along Washington St. was made by Frank Adams, seconded by George Farrell, and passed unanimously. Finally, the Planning Director suggested the Planning Commission forward a recommendation to the Common Council to sell the properties (tax map # 143.)
5. **Martha Hobbs of Hobbs Community Chest, 112 Broadway, site-plan approval to establish a resale business and an area variance recommendation for relief from parking requirements in the Local Business District.** Martha Hobbs presented to the Planning Commission a general overview of her resale business. Chris Van Vorst raised the issue parking noting that there is little to no parking associated with the property. Following the comment, Charles Moore suggested the back

and the side of the building should provide sufficient space for loading and unloading and it should therefore be designated as such. The applicant agreed. There was some discussion about the proximity of other resale shops and the applicant described how her shop would complement these existing businesses and hopefully attract more customers to the downtown area. The applicant presented an image of the proposed sign to the Planning Commission on a mobile device. Following that a motion was made by Christine Van Vorst, seconded by George Farrell, to approve the site-plan contingent upon meeting the following conditions: 1. Employee parking and unloading and loading should be restricted from Broadway and utilize the area on the side and at the rear of the building; 2. The number of items displayed in front of building be limited so as to keep a sufficient area of the sidewalk free and clear for pedestrians; 3. Proposed signage is to be reviewed and approved by the Building and Zoning Administrator prior to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy; and 4. The applicant receive an area variance for relief from the parking requirements from the Zoning Board of Appeals. The motion passed unanimously. Following the approval of the site-plan, a motion was made by Frank Adams, seconded by Christine Van Vorst, to pass a positive recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals for complete relief from the parking requirements. All presented voted yes to the motion.

- 6. Review Zoning Code Update and Report to Common Council.** Charles Moore prefaced any discussion on the agenda item by providing some detail about the process. Christine Van Vorst raised a question about the definition of Residential Care Facility asking for clarification about the extent this would allow various uses. The Director of Planning, Sarah Crowell, responded by beginning to read from a series of draft responses to earlier public comment received. The response demonstrated that as an alternative to the way the existing draft zoning proposal is written, an amendment would be made to designate MU-1 and CI districts as the only areas where Residential Care Facilities would be allowed by a special use permit. From those attending a question asking for clarification as to how and why an environmental review of the zoning is necessary prompted discussion about the environmental quality review process. The resolution was read aloud to better explain that the Planning Commission is recommending the Common Council be the lead agency in the review of the zoning update. Christine Van Vorst provided some detail to the history of the zoning update process and asked the Planning Department forward public comments regarding the proposed zoning to the members of the committee involved in its development. A motion was made by Christine Van Vorst to adopt the appended resolution, seconded by George Farrell. The motion carried.

Adjournment:

A motion was made to adjourn by Charles Moore, seconded by George Farrell, and passed by all. Chair Moore motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 PM. Seconded by Frank Adams. Motion carried.

Next Meeting:

The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 12th at 6:30 PM.

Record of Decisions:

An official record of decisions noting the details of motions and votes from this meeting along with any conditions & stipulations of approval has been filed with the City Clerk and a copy maintained in Planning Department records.

Respectfully Submitted,

Daniel W. Berheide, Secretary