

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the City of Rensselaer Planning Commission
First Floor Court Room, Rensselaer Community Center, 62 Washington Street
October 9, 2012

Members Present:

Charles Moore – Chair, Christine Van Vorst – Vice-Chair, Bob Campano, and George Farrell

Members Absent:

Tom Cardamone, James Ahlemeyer, and Frank Adams

Staff Present:

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

Others Present

Mr. Grant, Mr. Antonucci, Mr. Dunn, Mr. Bayly, Mr. Jakovic among others.

Call to Order:

Chairman Moore called the meeting of the City of Rensselaer Planning Commission to order at 6:30PM. Roll call was taken and quorum determined.

Adoption of Past Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes for September were reviewed and accepted.

Communications

None

Old Business:

- 1. 18 Fourth Ave – Renwyck Place:** A request by Renwyck Housing Associates to approve a subdivision into two parcels approximately 3.80 acres and 0.45 acres.

Mr. Antonucci, representing the applicant, discussed the minor changes made to the subdivision plat as required by the Planning Commission. Ms. Van Vorst reminded the Commission this plat was conditioned upon the acceptance of the quit claim by the Common Council. Answering Mr. Moore's question, Mr. Antonucci said he had not yet discussed the matter in front of the Common Council. He went on to state his firm will continue to move forward with discussions over quit claims with neighbors and the Common Council. The Director of Planning reminded the Commission that approval of the final site plan will still be contingent on the conditions of the prior approval.

- 2. 460 Forbes Ave - Van Rensselaer Heights:** A request by Rensselaer Housing Company to approve a subdivision into two parcels approximately 3.93 acres and 0.10 acres.

Mr. Antonucci continued on and discussed the second property, 460 Forbes Ave, saying there were no changes made to the plat or proposal. Mr. Campano made a motion, seconded by Mr. Farrell, to

approve the final subdivision plats for both 18 Fourth Ave and 460 Forbes Ave. The motion passed by all present.

New Business

- 3. 800 Broadway - Bayly:** An area variance request for relief of a total of 12 spaces from parking requirements.

Mr. Bayly spoke to the board about history with Rensselaer, raised here. State the building was previously cleaning business. Doing due diligence to make sure remediation if necessary. Introduced Mr. Dunn who spoke about the history of the property and its dimensions as a structure. Bayly talked about the aesthetics, spoke of vision of opening new businesses. Mr. Bayly's plan was viewed as very preliminary and conceptual at this point.

Mr. Bayly reached out to Mr. Atwater for parking at the corner of Lansing and Partition. Mr. Dunn explained parking would be impossible between buildings. Planning Commission discussed the relevance and preference for on street, out in front, parking. Bayly discussed buying the building once the potential environmental remediation is known. Employing 5 or more personnel. They have eliminated the recycling area from the plan. Sarah spoke about procedure. Dunn promised to put additional details to be on next plan. Sarah talked about how comprehensive plan shows a different vision than the zoning's parking.

There was much discussion from all members of the board about the availability of on-street parking. Ms. Van Vorst spoke positively about the proposed project and willingness to make a recommendation to the Zoning Board. Mr. Bayly made it known he was awaiting the results of the phase II environmental assessment to determine whether he will be able to purchase the property. The chair said that was really the only concern regarding the property, that it was remediated if necessary; otherwise the project was a positive step. Mr. Bayly reiterated after a question from Ms. Van Vorst that he was eliminating the recycling and the whole beverage mart; instead it would only be a wine and liquor store. The back area of the property would be for storage, office space and restroom.

The chair stated that this site plan was just conceptual and the board would not be voting on a preliminary plan until more of the necessary material was submitted. The Planning Director steered the board to ask any questions or request information that would be helpful for completing the preliminary site plan application and move to vote on the request for a variance. Mrs. Van Vorst motioned to make a positive recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals that they grant a variance for parking due in part to the location of the proposed business in an urban area and the design fitting the urban streetscape, was seconded by Mr. Farrell, all were in favor, the motion carried.

- 4. 336 Broadway - Grant:** Request for site plan approval to open a café/take-out. A request for an area variance for relief from parking requirements in an MU-1 district.

Mr. Grant presented his plan to open a café for take-out meals. He says this used to be a small storefront business. It was noticed that a use variance was previously approved but that the use was now permitted under the recently adopted zoning ordinance. There would be very limited seating inside and some seats outside whether dependent. Mrs. Van Vorst was reminded of the prior approval and recalled some of the past discussion about where the food preparation was to occur. Mr. Grant noted that the only significant changes made from the prior approval is the main entrance will be moved to the corner of the building facing the intersecting streets rather than on the side facing

Broadway. Ms. Van Vorst asked more about the menu of the café. Mr. Grant said it was not strictly going to be sandwiches but would include rice dishes, juices, etc.

Noting how much he liked the improvement of the Broadway streetscape he reiterated his interest in establishing a café to serve those he believes will be coming downtown. He goes on to explain further the details of the operations as it is laid out on the site plan after questions from Charles Moore and Chris Van Vorst requiring clarification. The food preparation will occur in basement portion. There is no current intention to serve alcohol as this will primarily be open for lunch, but hoped to open for breakfast and dinner at some point. Mr. Moore made note of his concern about where the exhaust fans would be. Mr. Grant illustrated where the exhaust system was located on the plan. Mr. Grant said the building houses a couple tenants and hopefully a café too with the approval of the board. The Planning Director stated her assumption that the café would cater to many of the state employees working in the state facility just blocks away. She also made note that the new zoning will allow sidewalk seating. The board and applicant discussed whether even a dumpster was needed. It is thought simple bins would suffice.

Mr. Moore asked what the details of the canopy would be. Mr. Grant said it would be a flat roof with one post. Mr. Grant went on to demonstrate where the sign would be but noted the new zoning allows a lot of flexibility for the sort of signs he might be interested in. The discussion moved on to review the variance application for parking. Due to the small size of the café and the take-out nature of the business it was determined during discussion that very little parking was required. Chris Van Vorst made a motion to approve the site-plan for a café and make a positive recommendation to the ZBA to grant the area variance for relief from parking, seconded by George Farrell, and passed by all present.

5. **11 Aiken - Jakovic:** Request for a certificate of appropriateness to build an extension to the building. A request for relief of 8.5ft from the rear building set back requirements.

Mr. Jakovic began by describing the fire that happened July 1st that destroyed completed destroyed the wooden porch/addition and the interior of the primary structure. The proposal would be to rebuild the addition to project 13 feet beyond the former rear of the structure, over 8 feet beyond the setback requirements. The new addition will be sided with CertainTeed hardie board colored autumn red. He provided a sample of the material and stated the trim would be white. He is proposing to replace the chain link fence with the same wrought iron style (aluminum) he erected down Aiken at his other property. He continued on to describe the history of the property over the past 26 years and how the rental market and interest in the apartments has changed. Seeing the increased difficulty in attracting the sort of tenants he was seeking, he was advised to take this opportunity to build in new amenities that would be more desirable. This means rearranging the interior space and building out further than the previous addition to accommodate a new larger bedroom. He told the board of how the insurance company encouraged him to take the money and abandon the structure but how he instead thought that was unfair to the city and not his interest. He explains that his interest is to add some of his money to the settlement to improve the building adding something nice to the Historic District. Mrs. Van Vorst asked for clarification about the layout of the apartments. Mr. Jakovic described that he will be targeting professionals like those at Sterling Winthrop. Mr. Campano asked for clarification about the variance request and what the distance between the edge of the addition and the property line. Mr. Jakovic asked the board also take in consideration the impact would be minimal to the neighbors since the neighbors building is off the property line. There is a driveway in-between the property line and the building. The Assistant Director noted that he and the applicant had discussions about the purpose of the setbacks and screening to provide some privacy between neighbors. Mr. Jakovic demonstrated that if the magnolia tree the currently sits between the properties survives he would make an effort to put something else in its place. The board noted the letter from Historic Albany in support of the

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certificate of appropriateness. Mr. Farrell made a motion to approve the certificate of appropriateness, seconded by Mrs. Van Vorst, and approved unanimously. Again, Mr. Farrell made a motion to make a positive recommendation to the ZBA to grant relief from the setback requirements, seconded by Mrs. Van Vorst, and the board approved.

Adjournment:

A motion was made to adjourn by Charles Moore, seconded by George Farrell, and all agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 PM.

Next Meeting:

The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 13 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