

## **PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES - CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS**

Tuesday, January 3, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.  
City Hall Chambers - 8150 Barbara Avenue

Chair Bartholomew called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Tom Bartholomew  
Armando Lissarrague  
Paul Hark  
Dennis Wippermann  
Pat Simon  
Victoria Elsmore  
Harold Gooch  
Mike Schaeffer  
Tony Scales

Commissioners Absent:

Others Present: Tom Link, Community Development Director  
Eric Carlson, Park and Recreation Director

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the December 6, 2011 meeting were approved as submitted.

### **CITY OF INVER GROVE HEIGHTS**

#### **Reading of Notice**

No public hearing notice.

#### **Presentation of Request**

Tom Link, Community Development Director, explained the request as detailed in the report. He advised that the Planning Commission is being asked to consider whether the sale of excess golf course property to the Inver Grove Heights Economic Development Authority (EDA) would be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The properties in question are left over from a 280 acre purchase for the golf course, and are located on the northwest corner of 70<sup>th</sup> and Babcock and the south side of 70<sup>th</sup> Street just west of the golf course parking lot. The golf course has been operational for 20 years and has no need for the two parcels in question. At its last meeting the EDA directed staff to proceed with the potential sale of the excess golf course properties to the EDA. Part of that process involves a determination by the Planning Commission as to whether the sale is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Link explained the history of the EDA and its recent reaffirmation and reactivation. He explained that EDA's have greater flexibility than cities in regard to financial tools, property ownership, etc.

He advised that the City's Comprehensive Plan designates both properties as Public Park/Open Space. Staff finds the sale of the properties to the EDA would be consistent with that designation as the sale of the properties would not affect the principle use of the golf course. The Comprehensive Plan also addresses economic development, including a guiding principle of developing and maintaining a well balanced tax base. It also states that the EDA should take various steps to provide for the growth and development of the community. The sale of the two properties to the EDA would be consistent with that principle and with those economic development statements because at some future time the EDA could then market and sell the

properties for development. At this time the future use has not yet been determined; however, the Planning Commission would have to consider a Comprehensive Plan Amendment prior to an EDA sale of the property. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission find the sale of the excess golf course properties consistent with the Inver Grove Heights Comprehensive Plan.

Chair Bartholomew asked if the proposed use would be something other than low density residential.

Mr. Link stated the City has not determined the future use. There has been discussion of different types of residential, as well as possible commercial. He advised that the golf course adds value to both parcels and regardless of what kind of use goes in, it should generate additional tax base.

Chair Bartholomew stated that it made sense to sell the properties to the EDA; however, he anticipated opposition from the neighboring residents should something other than residential be proposed.

Mr. Link stated the determination of future land use is a complicated issue with many variables, including the fact that utilities would have to be provided to the properties before development could occur. He stated that as development near 70<sup>th</sup> and Robert occurs the character of this part of the City will change and make the properties more valuable.

Commissioner Wippermann questioned the motivation and asked if there was a pending deal.

Mr. Link replied there was not. He advised the two things that precipitated this request were the reactivation of the EDA and the possibility of retiring the golf course debt. He stated that if the EDA buys the excess golf course properties from the City, the proceeds from that sale would go back to the golf course which would enable them to retire the remaining debt.

Commissioner Wippermann questioned why the matter had not been reviewed by the Park and Recreation Commission prior to coming to the Planning Commission. He stated he would like to hear comment from that Commission as to possible potential need for the property for park and recreational use.

Eric Carlson, Parks and Recreation Director, advised that the matter would be brought before the Park and Recreation Commission on January 11<sup>th</sup>. He stated the Comprehensive Park Plan does not indicate a need for additional park space in this general location. He stated the golf course has not used the properties in the last 20 years and anticipates no future need for it. The sale would help retire the debt and put the golf course in a better financial position.

Commissioner Wippermann reiterated that he would have preferred to hear the Park and Recreation Commission's position on the matter and questioned why the process was not done in an orderly sequence.

Mr. Carlson advised that two years ago an operational assessment was done on the golf course. One of the consultant's recommendations was that the Park and Recreation Commission not be as involved in the operation of the golf course. The matter will be brought to the Park and Recreation Commission for informational purposes rather than for a recommendation.

Commissioner Wippermann stated he would like to know the history of how the City acquired the property; in particular whether any of it was donated and whether there were any understandings as to how the property would be used.

Mr. Link stated he was not involved in the original acquisition but knew the property was acquired

from Ed Kurth who has since passed away.

Mr. Carlson stated the acquisition took place before he worked for the City as well but it was his understanding that all the property for the golf course was purchased from a private owner; none of it was donated. He added that the City has a long standing practice of requiring that no deed restrictions be placed on property they are acquiring which could potentially prevent the City from selling the property or changing its use.

Mr. Link stated his recollection was that the City granted Mr. Kurth a life estate, to which Mr. Carlson advised that was his understanding as well.

Commissioner Elsmore asked if staff could clarify the advantages of EDA ownership.

Mr. Link explained that although the EDA is made up of the Mayor and Councilmembers, it is a separate organization from the City. EDA's have specific authority given to them for development that municipal corporations (cities) do not. They have more financial tools available, and more flexibility with ownership, development agreements, etc.

Commissioner Gooch asked how the EDA would fund the acquisition.

Mr. Link stated they are exploring alternative funding sources.

Commissioner Lissarrague asked what the value of the properties was.

Mr. Link advised that an appraisal was done; however, at this point the information is confidential as it would ultimately be used in negotiating with the developer. He advised that the value of the property exceeds the remaining golf course debt.

Commissioner Scales stated he used to farm for Ed Kurth and would like to know what his understanding was of the transaction as he felt it was unlikely that Mr. Kurth would have been agreeable with the City selling the property. He stated he would prefer to know what the plan was for the land before allowing it to be sold to the EDA.

Commissioner Schaeffer asked Mr. Link to explain how EDA's were generally funded and if the sale of the excess golf course property was to be a long-term funding mechanism for the EDA.

Mr. Link advised the primary ways EDA's were funded was through their ability to levy taxes up to a certain amount (the Inver Grove Heights' City Council has never discussed that) or transferring funds. In 2010 the City transferred \$500,000 out of the Host Community Fund for economic development purposes, and then again in 2011.

Commissioner Scales stated he was concerned that there was a plan in the background and that six months from now a developer would come forward with a plan.

Mr. Link stated there were no plans to proceed immediately with development and there has been no discussion of a timeline. The City has received occasional interest in the property on 70<sup>th</sup> and Babcock; however, in each case the City Council has said they were not interested at this time.

Commissioner Lissarrague stated it sounded as if the City was requesting to sell the property to the EDA as it was an entity that would have the flexibility to sell the property at the best possible time to the best buyer.

Commissioner Scales stated he was concerned about possibly transferring the debt from the City

to the taxpayer.

Mr. Link stated there was no impact to the taxpayer except perhaps a positive one of retiring the golf course debt. He advised that the issue before the Commission tonight was whether or not the sale of the properties was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan; staff believes it is.

Commissioner Schaeffer recommended the request be moved forward as it appeared to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that at time of development it would be brought back to the Planning Commission and the issues raised tonight could be addressed at that time.

### **Opening of Public Hearing**

There was no public testimony.

### **Planning Commission Discussion**

Chair Bartholomew stated that although the sale of the excess property was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, he would have preferred to have the Park and Recreation Commission's input before making a recommendation.

Commissioner Hark stated he believed the request was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and he was in favor of the sale, stating it would unburden the City from its debt and hopefully help out the underperforming golf course.

Commissioner Wippermann asked if it would be appropriate to table the request until the Park and Recreation Commission had opportunity to comment as to whether the property was needed for the golf course or other park and recreation use.

Mr. Link stated that would be up to the Planning Commission. The reason staff brought this item to tonight's meeting is because it would leave ample time to prepare minutes, etc. prior to distribution of the next EDA packet on January 20.

Commissioner Elsmore stated the purview of the Planning Commission was to determine whether the sale would be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan; the comments made tonight seem to indicate that it does. She stated the Park and Recreation Commission has a different jurisdiction and any comments from them would go to the EDA as well.

Commissioner Lissarrague stated he supported the request as it provided flexibility.

Commissioner Schaeffer asked for clarification of whether the Park and Recreation Commission would be asked for a recommendation of approval.

Mr. Carlson replied it is staffs intent to bring the matter to them for informational purposes. The Park and Recreation Commission would have an opportunity to make comment and those comments would be passed onto the City Council. He stated the Planning Commission's actions are separate from the Park and Recreation Commissions as they would make comment regarding potential golf course or park purpose rather than Comprehensive Plan consistency.

Commissioner Schaeffer stated it was unlikely that any comments made by the Park and Recreation Commission would change the Planning Commission's determination of consistency.

### **Planning Commission Recommendation**

Motion by Commissioner Elsmore, second by Commissioner Gooch, to recommend that the sale of the excess golf course properties to the EDA is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Motion carried (6/3 – Wippermann, Bartholomew and Scales). This item goes to the Economic Development Authority on February 6, 2012.

Chair Bartholomew asked if the EDA meetings were public, to which Mr. Link replied in the affirmative.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Elections**

Motion by Commissioner Schaeffer, second by Commissioner Wippermann, to nominate Tom Bartholomew to the position of Planning Commission Chair.

Commissioner Wippermann offered a friendly amendment to nominate Tom Bartholomew as Chair, Paul Hark as Vice-Chair, and Pat Simon as Secretary by white ballot.

Commissioner Schaeffer agreed to amend his motion.

Motion carried (9/0).

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Bartholomew adjourned the meeting at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Fox  
Recording Secretary