

**Falcon Heights Planning Commission
Workshop Minutes – April 26, 2011**

The purpose of the workshop was to consider the status of the Ramsey County Historical Society's property at the northwest corner of Larpenteur and Cleveland Avenues, which comprises the Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakotah Life and the adjacent house at 2129 Larpenteur, formerly a private home that operated for some years as a bed and breakfast inn. The latter property is zoned R-1; the Gibbs Museum property is P-1/R-1 and has been part of the Public P-1 overlay zone for years.

In March Commissioners had expressed concerns about the existing zoning treating the Historical Society property as public land as the Society is a not-for-profit organization and not a public institution like the University of Minnesota and the State Fair. The existing city code places essentially no controls on use of lands in P-1/R-1. While this makes sense for the large public institutions that are not under city jurisdiction, the Commission's concern was that this should not apply to what is essentially privately owned land. Staff had consulted City Attorney Roger Knutson and he agreed with Commission concerns.

Commissioners, staff and City Attorney Tom Scott met on April 26 with Priscilla Farnham, Executive Director of the Ramsey County Historical Society, and Joanne Englund, chair of the Gibbs Museum Committee. Ms. Farnham and Ms. Englund gave a presentation on the RCHS long range strategic planning for the Gibbs site and distributed a "visionary" site plan of what the Society hopes to do on the Gibbs site in the future and the programs the Society hopes to provide to the community. Long range plans call for creating much more programming about the Dakotah people who lived in the area when the Gibbs family first settled at the site. The presentation included a lot of history of the area that was fascinating to all present. Commissioners expressed positive reactions to the plan and had many questions.

The house at 2129 Larpenteur is not part of this long range plan. Attempts to sell the house to be moved to another site have not been successful. At present the house is being used to house some administrative offices supporting operations at Gibbs Museum. The house will not be razed until the Society is ready to carry out its long range plan.

For the City of Falcon Heights, the issue is what zoning is appropriate for a museum operated by a non-profit organization. Whatever decision is made, the 2129 Larpenteur property will be given the same zoning designation as Gibbs Farm, an intention made clear in the comprehensive plan, which shows the site as a museum for the lifetime of the plan (to 2030).

Staff presented some research showing that, among the many museums and historical sites in the metropolitan area, zoning varies widely from residential to commercial to industrial. Attorney Scott advised the Commission that the City needs to decide what controls it wants over future use of the property. There are basically no controls at present

and the property reverts to R-1 if the Society sells it. Commissioners assured the representatives of the RCHS that they support The Gibbs Museum as a prized community asset and the Society's long term plans for the site but need to figure out the best way to provide for this use in the city code while making sure that the City's interests are protected with regard to any future changes.

Following considerable discussion, and with advice from Mr. Scott, commissioners articulated three options:

1. Rezone the RCHS site (both properties) as a Planned Unit Development tailored to the needs and plans of the Ramsey County Historical Society for the future operation of the Gibbs Museum
2. Create a new zoning district that includes the museum as a conditional use
3. Add the museum use as a conditional use in an existing district.

The consensus of the Commission was that they favored the P.U.D. option as providing the best support for the vision of the RCHS, allowing a tailor-made plan that would define setbacks, etc. for this property specifically. This would provide more flexibility than either of the other two options and would safeguard the land from being converted to some other use without City approval. The rezoning would be initiated by the City, but it would require the presentation of a full plan from the Ramsey County Historical Society.

This matter will be taken up again at a future meeting.