

**City of Falcon Heights
Planning Commission Minutes
October 25, 2011**

PRESENT: Commissioners Fite, Gustafson, Minns, Noble, Wartick, Council Member Harris, Staff Liaison Jones.

ABSENT: (with notice) Commissioners Black and Brown

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by the Vice Chair, Commissioner Noble, who noted that a quorum was present.

The minutes for June 28 and September 27 were approved as submitted.

PRESENTATION: Proposed renovation of Buck's Furniture building by Cox Insurance Company

Staff liaison Jones introduced the presentation by providing some background on the history of the building, which began as a clothing store in the 1950s. It has been vacant for over a year and has recently been purchased by Cox Insurance, a local company, which has approached the city with proposed plans for renovation and an addition. Jones said great care has been taken to keep the proposed project within the requirements of the existing code for the Snelling-Larpenteur Central Business District. Therefore, no special permits or variances are needed, only building permits. This evening's presentation is simply for public information, so the community will know what is being done at the site.

Ric Cox, owner of Cox Insurance, told the Commission and audience a little about his company, a 60+ year old, third generation family owned business presently located in Roseville. He expressed appreciation for the welcome and cooperation the company has received from Falcon Heights staff. He and his family grew up in the area and lived in Falcon Heights in the past, so when their business outgrew its present facility, they searched for a new location and found that the Buck's site would suit their needs and could be renovated to accommodate their company. Their proposed plan will add over 3000 square feet to the building in the front and completely renovate the existing building and the landscaping.

They believe in sustainable architecture and plan to substantially increase the amount of green space on the property. They will also provide office space for the law firm that shares their present building, a retail space at the southeast corner of the building, and space in the common area for local artists to show their work. Mr. Cox said his company is an advocate of helping kids in need and runs a non-profit called "Soup it up" that raises money for local children in need.

Mr. Cox introduced his architect, Dave Clark of WCL Associates, who showed a "fly through" graphic of the proposed renovation and described the plans. The building will be in a modern style and make an architectural "statement" on the street. Vehicle access cuts will be removed from Larpenteur. A new parking lot access would be put in from Fry Street to the west parking space.

Commissioners had some questions about parking. Jones said staff had taken a careful look at the parking configuration and the ordinance and concluded that parking would be "ample" for the proposed use. There will be no need to overlap with the restaurant parking to meet requirements, though property owners would be free to make arrangements on their own.

Mr. Cox returned to the podium to show a preliminary plan for the landscaping. He said the company hoped to start construction in January and complete work in early August, 2012. In response to Commissioner Wartick's question about signage, Jones said that would be permitted separately. Mr. Clark said signage plans were not yet set. Mr. Cox said Commissioners are welcome to stop by their current building on Fairview at County Road D.

Commissioners' response to the renovation plan was uniformly positive

Information And Announcements:

The only announcement was a staff reminder to the public that the Commission would be adjourning to workshop to finish their work on considering changes to the City's ordinances to allow more in the way of front entry porches than the code now permits.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Jones, Staff Liaison