

**City of Falcon Heights  
Planning Commission Minutes  
April 23, 2013**

**PRESENT:** Commissioners Brown, Gustafson, Minns, Wartick, Council Member Harris, Staff Liaison Jones, City Attorney Soren Mattick.

**ABSENT:** Commissioners Black and Fite (with notice)

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by the Vice-Chair, Commissioner Wartick, who noted that a quorum was present.

**Public Hearing on a Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Rezoning for a PUD at the former Hermes Nursery site and Preliminary Subdivision**

Zoning and Planning Director Deb Jones gave a brief introduction. The former Hermes Nursery property at 1750-1790 Larpenteur is in the process of being purchased by the Carl and Eloise Pohlada Foundation with the intention of reusing two thirds of the site as an urban farm, growing and distributing healthy produce. The Foundation will partner with CommonBond Communities, who will build a 47 unit apartment building on the northeast portion of the site.

In order to carry out the plan, three zoning actions are needed. First, the text of the City's Comprehensive Plan needs to be amended to modify the definition of Mixed Use Residential, to allow the mixed uses to be within the site, not just within a structure, and to allow a food-growing operation. Second, the property needs to be rezoned as a Planned Unit Development. Third, the Commission needs to make a recommendation on the proposed subdivision of the site. Jones turned invited the applicants to present their plan

Terry Egge, Senior Program Officer of the Carl and Eloise Pohlada Foundation, introduced the other members of her team and introduced the audience to the concept of an urban farm and the Foundation's intent to create a "healthy living" campus that will incorporate housing, the growing and distribution of healthy food and training and education in urban farming. Ms. Egge named an impressive list of the organizations and individuals that will make up the advisory board, bringing wide expertise to the operation. Over the long term the operation will be a for-profit entity.

Ellen Higgins, Vice President of Development for CommonBond Communities, introduced her organization, a major supplier of workforce, senior and affordable housing in the Twin Cities. She said CommonBond builds communities, and the proposed multi-family building would be a community closely integrated with the healthy living programs of the urban farm, with training and job opportunities on the site. She said this project has excited a great deal of interest among organizations dedicated to improving health and housing.

Andy Madson, architect with LHB, walked the audience through the preliminary site plan. The existing access openings to Larpenteur would be preserved. The apartment building would be 4 stories with 40 underground parking spaces and additional surface parking. Units

would be 1, 2 or 3 bedrooms, with common areas on the ground floor offering amenities for residents and program space for CommonBond services to residents.

Two of the existing structures on the farm portion of the property would be kept in place and re-used for the farming operation after renovation. Ms. Egge explained that the southern portion of the south building will be moved to the north side. Gardening would take place on the southern portion of the lot and on the roof of the existing west building. Portions of the same building would accommodate training, offices and a small retail operation. Most of the building would serve as a distribution warehouse for a co-op of small, local farms. The rooftop garden would be lower than the maximum height for the district.

In response to a question from Commissioner Minns, Ms. Egge said that aquaponics would be a potential part of the operation. Aquaponics balances the growing of fish with the growing of produce. Though the land will be divided and developed and managed separately, the site will be designed as an integrated campus.

The presenters responded to questions from Commissioners and Council Member Harris, on building design, traffic including truck traffic, hours and other public impact topics. The public hearing was opened.

The first speaker was John Leehy, resident of 1800 Larpenteur Avenue West, next to the Hermes property. He said the idea sounds good, but he is concerned about the traffic. Even now with very little use on the site, traffic is often backed up from Snelling making access difficult for residents of his building. He asked that this be taken into consideration for the impact of additional traffic.

John Stiehm, one of the owners of 1800-1818 Larpenteur, asked if the land would be changed to agricultural use and taxed as farmland. He also asked what the rents would be on the market rate and affordable units. City Attorney answered the first question. Zoning is changed to Planned Unit Development, a designation specific to the site. What the effect on taxation will be is up to the County and is undetermined at this time. Ms. Higgins said rents on the market rate will range from \$786 to \$1300. For the affordable units, the rents would range from \$680 to about \$1000, which is fairly standard. She said there is a rigorous selection process for residents of the affordable units.

In answer to a question from Council Member Harris, Ms. Higgins said that if the project is approved by the City Council, Common Bond will proceed to assemble the financing. Opening would be expected in 2014. Ms. Egge said work would begin very soon and the “grand opening” of the farm operation would be in the spring of 2014.

There being no further comments, the hearing was closed.

### **Planning Commission Discussion and Action**

Staff and the City Attorney described the actions to be taken and the order in which recommendations needed to be made.

Gustafson moved, Minns seconded, that the Commission recommend approval of the text amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

On the rezoning, Council Member Harris raised some questions about the uses for the urban farm. She felt it was vague and expressed concern about the warehousing and potential traffic bringing in large quantities of produce from “everywhere.” Ms. Egge stated that the operation would not be open to every farmer but would be limited to a small handpicked co-op of growers transporting small quantities of produce. Attorney Mattick clarified that this rezoning would apply to this site only.

Commissioner Gustafson asked if the livestock prohibition would extend to the sale and distribution of animal products or would only apply to the production. Jones said that the definition could be worked on before the Council receives the ordinance.

Commissioner Wartick reminded the Commission that their recommendation would need to be conditional on addition of certain components that are not included on this draft, including the traffic study, engineers’ comments, the stormwater plan and any other studies that may be relevant. He made a motion to that effect with the added stipulation that the urban farm definition would be revised. Brown seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The proposed subdivision of the site would take the existing three lots and re-divide them into two parcels, one for the apartment building and one for the farm. They would be owned separately; the Foundation will sell the apartment parcel to CommonBond. Future ownership and land use issues would be handled the same way it would elsewhere in the city where parcels are adjacent.

Commissioner Gustafson asked how the “mixed use” designation would apply when one parcel will be exclusively residential and one will be exclusively commercial. Mr. Mattick said this is provided for very specifically in the PUD ordinance. The Comprehensive Plan describes the whole site, not specific parcels, so it’s not a contradiction.

Minns moved, Brown seconded, that the Commission recommend approval of the preliminary plat. The motion passed unanimously.

The City Council will take up these items on Wednesday, May 22.

**Minutes for February 26:** Due to technical difficulties with the video recording, the minutes are incomplete. Approval was tabled.

**Information and Announcements:**

Jones announced that the Spring Together event is coming up May 21. See the City website for detailed information.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah Jones, Staff Liaison