



**City of Lake Elmo  
Planning Commission Meeting  
Minutes of June 8, 2015**

Chairman Dodson called to order the meeting of the Lake Elmo Planning Commission at 7:00 p.m.

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:** Dodson, Dorschner, Williams, Fields, and Griffin

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:** Kreimer

**STAFF PRESENT:** City Planner Johnson

**Approve Agenda:**

The agenda was accepted as presented.

**Approve Minutes: May 27, 2015**

M/S/P: Dorschner/Griffin, move to approve minutes as amended, **Vote: 5-0, motion carried** with Haggard and Larson not voting.

**Business Item: Proposed Nature Center, Sunfish Lake Park – Tony Manzara**

Planner Johnson stated the Mr. Manzara would be presenting tonight. He also stated that the role of the Planning Commission tonight is to determine if this proposal meets the Comprehensive Plan. This proposal has already gone through the Park Commission.

Mr. Manzara began his presentation about the proposed nature center in Sunfish Lake Park. He talked about the non-profit that would be set up to fundraise to support this use to minimize the tax burden to the City. Once the building was built, the ownership would transfer to the City. He noted several community benefits associated with the nature center. First, there would be an educational benefit that may include a relationship with the ISD 834 school district. He then described how the City's Comprehensive Plan relates to the proposal. In addition, Mr. Manzara highlighted how the proposed use would be allowed under the existing conservation easement on Sunfish Lake Park with the Minnesota Land Trust.

Dodson asked about additional parking. Manzara stated that if the parking lot was marked, you could use striping for bus lanes. There is also room for expansion. Manzara stated that he is contributing \$125K and the rest will be obtained through fundraising.

Lake Elmo Planning Commission Minutes; 6-8-15

Mr. Manzara then showed an aerial photo of the parking area of Sunfish Lake Park. He described two possible locations for the proposed building. Moving on to the building itself, he showed several examples of proposed designs for the building. In addition, he described interior uses of the building. Goals for the building include low maintenance design, exhibit space, classroom or presentation space, a possible gift shop, restrooms, among other uses. As far as utilities go, electrical is available, geothermal would be possible for heating, and water could be available through a well.

With regards to process and timeline, Mr. Manzara identified the activities he has completed to date. He presented a proposed timeline with next steps. Next steps include presentation to the City Council, establishment of the non-profit organization, completion of plans, and construction to start in May of 2016. Mr. Manzara also identified other parties that he intends to contact for further feedback.

Fields asked if there is an Oak Savannah area in Sunfish Lake Park. Larson confirmed that the park contains the largest stand of oak savannah in Washington County.

Fields also encouraged Mr. Manzara to determine annual maintenance costs.

Haggard noted that some nature centers have difficulty being fully staffed because of funding. She also suggested a partnership with Stillwater High School. Students often need volunteer credits for science related courses.

Dodson asked if Mr. Manzara has contacted the MN Land Trust. In addition, he asked about contacting the Ski Club. Manzara will contact both of these organizations prior to presenting to the City Council. Dodson suggested considering some form of agricultural themed architecture.

Williams supports the idea and finds it consistent with the Comprehensive plan. He feels the Planning Commission should recommend approval of the request.

Haggard supports the idea. She offered two points: 1) There is concern about the cost of operation and maintenance, and 2) proposed location #1 for the building may be preferable as it is further away from the residential home.

Larson stated that North Star Ski Club uses the park frequently. There is enough demand in his view to warrant exploration of the proposal. Larson noted that he served on the Park Commission, and the proposed location is consistent with the desire of the previous Park Commission that developed the conservation easement for the park. Larson provided feedback about the proposed locations based on his knowledge of the park. Dodson asked for best location for a septic drainfield. Larson noted that it would be best to the south of the structure.

Griffin asked about exterior lighting. Mr. Manzara noted that he will use downcast lighting. Johnson noted that any lighting would be required to meet the City's Dark Sky Ordinance.

M/S/P: Williams/Fields, move that the proposed nature center should be pursued and is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, **Vote: 7-0 motion carried unanimously.**

#### **Council Updates – June 2, 2015 Meeting**

1. Village Preserve Developers Agreement – passed.
2. Wedding Venue Ordinance Amendment – postponed.

Williams was concerned that the City Council seemed not be willing to change parts of the ordinance and seemed to have more of a take it or leave it kind of approach. Johnson stated that sometimes if there are major changes to what is presented, staff is asked to bring it back to the Planning Commission with those changes.

3. Interim Ordinance – postponed.

#### **Staff Updates**

1. Upcoming Meetings
  - a. June 22, 2015
  - b. July 13, 2015

#### ***Commission Concerns***

Williams noted his concern about the Easton Village construction not starting. Johnson noted that Easton Village is working with Gonyea and Engstrom to finalize plans to complete construction on the final sewer segment.

Meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Ziertman  
Planning Program Assistant