

**City of Lake Elmo
Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes of November 14, 2011**

Chairman Van Zandt called to order the meeting of the Lake Elmo Planning Commission at 7:01 p.m. COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Van Zandt, Bidon, Fliflet, Hall, Obermueller, Pelletier, Ziertman, and Haggard (left at 8:45). Absent: Williams. STAFF PRESENT: Planning Director Klatt

Agenda

M/S/P, Hall/Bidon, move to approve the agenda as amended. Vote: 6-0

Minutes – None

Public Hearing – *Christ Lutheran Church Expansion Conditional Use Permit Amendment and Variances*

Planning Director Klatt presented a report describing a request from Christ Lutheran Church to expand its present facility at 11194 36th Street North. The proposed improvements would allow the church to increase accessibility, improve entrances into the building, provide better interior circulation, and to provide additional space for learning and hospitality. In order to move forward with its plans, the Church has requested: a Conditional Use Permit amendment to allow for the expansion of an existing structure that pre-dates the City's zoning regulations, a variance from the side yard setback requirements within a PF –Public Facility zoning district, a variance from the parking requirements for a PF – Public Facility Zoning District to allow the expansion of a building without an increase in available off-street parking.

Klatt stated that the expansion into the existing side yard setbacks would allow the Church to create upgraded entrances into the facility in the form of two new vestibules and covered roof canopies over both of these entrances. The proposed plans also call for a major reconfiguration of Laverne Avenue as part of the eastern entrance improvements. The applicant is proposing to reconstruct the boulevard along Lavern Avenue to create a drop-off area for visitors to the Church and to install a new sidewalk within the street right-of-way along the length of its property. These improvements would tie in with the overall plans to improve access into the Church facility. Although the request to improve the right-of-way is technically a separate action for consideration by the City, Klatt noted that staffs is recommending that these improvements be considered as part of the overall site plan review by the Planning Commission and included in the Planning Commission's recommendation to the City Council.

Fliflet questioned how close the existing building is to the Church's property lines. Klatt replied that the building is presently set back 24 feet from the eastern property line and 39 feet from the westerly line whereas the Zoning Ordinance requires a 50 foot setback from these lines. Kevin Busch of Busch Architects, representing the applicant, reviewed the proposed site plans with the Commission. He indicated that the church has four entrances into the facility, and that they are planning to improve two of them as part of the proposed project. The work would also

improve circulation within the building. Busch stated that the church would like to enclose an interior courtyard to create a new gathering space and to further help with interior circulation issues. On the second floor, classrooms would be added to the building that could serve multiple purposes, including choir practice, Sunday school, meeting space, and space for other similar activities.

Busch displayed images of the proposed building elevations and noted that the church has been looking into the issues associated with the on-site septic system. He indicated that they will be preparing a report and are potentially looking to install a holding tank. The church has proposed a right-of-way concept, but could move forwardly separately with this aspect of the project. He further explained that his firm is working with a civil engineer to put together a drainage plan for the site.

THE CHAIRMAN OPENED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 7:53 P.M.

Bruce Buetel, 3590 Laverne Avenue, stated that he lives across the street from the church and that 36th Street used to be the main entrance into the facility. He expressed concern that there is a lot of traffic on Laverne Avenue, which also provides access to the fire station. He indicated that 36th Street is a better access point for the church. Buetel also stated that church membership has decreased over time, and that the proposed project might be too ambitious at the present time.

David Faint, 3617 Laverne Avenue North, noted that he lives on the east side of the church and that he had concerns with how far the building would be encroaching towards the road. In particular, he noted his concern over the loss of space for the storage of snow, the potential impact to the drain field, and the frequency of septic trucks visiting the site. Faint questioned the potential loss of parking should the church sell the commercial property it owns along Lake Elmo Avenue. He supported the planned reconstruction of the atrium into interior space.

Jim Lohman stated that he owns property at 3604 Layton Avenue and that he is the chairman of the facilities task force for the church. He indicated that the church would be building around the existing drain field and that if the church's commercial property is sold they will continue to be able to use the parking lot. Lohman also commented that the south side of the church is frequently used for drop-offs, and that a lot of people are also using the northern entrance for this purposes.

Van Zandt asked for clarification concerning the parking lot. Lohman replied that the parking lot would be part of the sales negotiation, and that it would be available for the church to use as long as the church is still there.

Fliflet asked why the encroachments are needed if the courtyard is being enclosed. Busch responded that they did consider putting a stairway in the atrium area, but that this location does not work as well for circulation in the upper level of the building.

Van Zandt asked if the church has funding to move forward with the proposed Lavern Avenue improvements. Busch indicated that none had been identified at this point in time.

Van Zandt requested clarification concerning the proposed timing of improvements. Busch stated that the courtyard, classroom, and entrances would be the first phase, with alternate bids being solicited to remodel some existing areas and to create more storage space on the main level. He noted that the drop-off and entrances could be handled as separate projects. The church would like to start construction in March, but needs to get bids soon in order to keep this schedule.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 8:12 P.M.

Bidon commented that the internal work makes sense, but expressed concern regarding the septic system and the design of the road and parking area. He indicated that he would like answers to the septic issues, and asked if there would be a different way to approach the drop-off area to minimize the impact on neighbors and to avoid any potential traffic problems.

Fliflet also expressed concern about the septic system, and although she stated that the Laverne Avenue work would be an improvement, she noted that she would like to look at other options for the roadway.

Fliflet commented that the proposed improvements would not necessarily increase membership or usage of the church unlike a major commercial expansion. She suggested that some of the issues noted by the Commission could be addressed at the City Council level.

M/S/P, Van Zandt/Pelletier, to recommend approval of the Conditional Use Permit and variances with the conditions as drafted by staff, but to separate out the Laverne Avenue decision as a separate decision that will require future review and approval from the Planning Commission and City Council and that an additional condition be attached to the permit that states: work within the Laverne Avenue right-of-way shall be brought back for approval by the City at a later date, subject to addressing the issues identified by staff. Vote: 7:0, MOTION CARRIED.

Public Hearing - 2012-2016 Capital Improvement Plan

Klatt reported that as part of its responsibility to review and approve a Comprehensive Plan (CIP) for the City, the Planning Commission is also required to review a five-year capital improvement plan, which is typically prepared in conjunction with the preparation of a budget for the following year. Staff scheduled a public hearing to review the 2012-2016 Capital Improvement Plan with the Planning Commission on October 4, 2011; however, the draft plan was not completed at that time. The Commission is therefore being asked to continue the public hearing at tonight's meeting.

Klatt reviewed highlights from proposed five-year plan with the Commission, and noted that staff was recommended approval of the plan as presented.

THE CHAIRMAN CONTINUED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 8:35 P.M.

No one spoke at the public hearing.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 8:35 P.M.

Obermueller asked if the plan would leave open an option for the library to purchase a building. Klatt noted that this option has been discussed by the Library Board, but at present is not one of the alternatives being considered.

Pelletier requested that a copy of the previous year's plan be provided as part of the Commission's review.

The Commission generally discussed plans for future municipal buildings, and did not want to see funds devoted to a building that would be abandoned in a short period of time.

Haggard left the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Obermueller expressed concern about the future costs associated with the purchase of fire equipment and asked how the fire department's needs are documents. Klatt noted that potential purchases are being shown on the plan, but that no funding has been identified and that they would still need to be approved by the Council. Van Zandt commented that there is a need for new equipment to keep up with development, and that the fire department has different needs than other City services.

M/S/P, Hall/Obermueller, to recommend approval of the proposed 2012-2016 Capital Improvement Plan, noting the comments made by the Commission during the meeting. Vote: 6:0, MOTION CARRIED.

Staff Updates

Klatt presented Council and staff updates to the Commission. Van Zandt noted that the terms for some members are coming up and that these members need to think about reapplying. A discussion concerning the current member terms was requested to be added to the next agenda.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle Klatt
Planning Director