

**City of Falcon Heights
Planning Commission Minutes
May 27, 2014**

PRESENT: Commissioners Alexander, Black, Gustafson, Murphy, Wartick, Council Member Harris, Staff Liaison Jones, Staff Liaison Petersen

ABSENT: Commissioner Fite

The meeting was delayed from 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. because of the lack of a quorum. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by the Chair, Commissioner Black, who noted that a quorum was present at that time. The minutes of the February 25, 2014, meeting of the Planning Commission were approved.

Public Hearing on Setback Variance 1565 Hamline Avenue.

Zoning and Planning Director Deb Jones presented the staff report on the case. 1565 Hamline Ave is the auto service business located on the northwest corner of Hamline and Hoyt. The applicant is requesting a setback variance of 3.5' in order to build an addition on the south side of the building in order to accommodate a customer waiting area. The current building cannot accommodate a waiting area so the applicant wishes to extend the building to the south by 10'. The required setback for the area is 30' and the building currently sits back 36.5', so they need an additional 3.5' to allow for the new 10' expansion.

Jones explained that to allow for this addition some of the landscaped area would need to be taken out, and the lot is already non-conforming to the lot coverage ordinance. To make up for this, the applicant is proposing to add additional landscaped area on the northwest corner of the lot which will increase their overall green space. Jones advised that the City Attorney had been consulted on the matter and said that the proposal was allowable.

Jones went over the staff findings including that the variance requested is in harmony with the purpose and intent of the zoning chapter as stated in Section 113-1, it is consistent with the comprehensive plan and that it will not impair or diminish property values or improvements in the area, that there are practical difficulties in complying with the code and that the variance is a reasonable solution to help remedy that situation, and that this variance would not impose on the surrounding areas or pose a threat to public safety.

The Chair opened the hearing. The first speaker was Peter Lee of Honest One Auto Care of Roseville, who is seeking to purchase the business. He stated that the additional space would be used to create a more comfortable waiting area for customers with modern amenities such as wifi and beverages.

Barb Brehmer, 1372 Iowa, questioned why the original letter did not state that the business was potentially going to be sold. Jones advised that the current owner of the property needs to be the one to apply for the variance so that is the reason for only listing the current owner on the public mailing and notice. Brehmer asked the potential new owner if they expect to change the business plan or increase traffic in the neighborhood. Lee stated that while he would like to increase the customer base, it is his goal to keep the neighborhood relatively

unchanged and to maintain the character of the building and surrounding area. Brehmer asked about other improvements to the area including landscaping or structural changes. Lee stated that building and grounds will remain largely unchanged with the exception of some cosmetic improvements.

There being no other persons wishing to speak, the hearing was closed.

Planning Commission Discussion and Action

Murphy addressed the applicant and asked about current landscaping and what is going to be done. The applicant said that most of the landscaping has moved from flowerbeds to mainly grass because of recent road improvements and general street maintenance damaging the vegetation. He also stated that the addition would be facing away from residents in the area and that he has always done his best to keep traffic in the streets instead of the alley.

Alexander addressed the applicant in regard to the selling of the property, and asked if the potential new owner will keep the same business hours and if they will likely have relatively the same traffic flow and business base. The applicant said that everything is intended to be initially the same and the potential new owner will reevaluate as needed.

Gustafson asked to clarify that the only change to the footprint of the building is the 10' addition, the applicant confirmed that it is. Jones also added that in addition to the footprint remaining largely the same that the use of the overall business will not change either. Gustafson stated that he agrees with staff findings that the practical difficulty is unique to the location and the variance is a reasonable request in order to encourage the business to remain in the community.

Commissioner Gustafson moved, Commissioner Murphy seconded, that the Planning Commission recommend that the City Council grant a variance to Section 113-177(g)(5). The motion was approved unanimously. The Council will take action on this application on June 25.

Election of new Planning Commission Vice Chair

Vice Chair David Brown has recently moved out of Falcon Heights and is no longer able to serve on the Planning Commission. Commissioner Gustafson nominated Commissioner Wartick, election was unanimous.

Information and Announcements:

Jones announced that the Planning Commission has recently lost two commissioners, David Brown and Christopher Minns. The Commission thanks them for their service and wishes them well.

Petersen announced several upcoming City-sponsored events including the Spring Together Event at Curtiss Field, Movie in the Park at Community Park, Ice Cream Social at Community Park.

Black requested an update from Jones on the ongoing Hermes project. Jones advised that there was not much to update at this time as the Pohlad Foundation needed to reevaluate the project as the buildings were found to be unusable. The existing buildings were demolished and now similar but new plans are being established. The Foundation will still be pursuing the urban farm project but does not have any specific plans in place at this time.

Gustafson asked Jones if there had been any permits requested for chicken keeping since the ordinance was passed. Jones advised that there had been one request and everything was in order so the permit was granted.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chelsea Petersen".

Chelsea Petersen, Staff Liaison