

**City of Falcon Heights  
Planning Commission Minutes  
February 25, 2014**

**PRESENT:** Commissioners Alexander, Black, Brown, Gustafson, Murphy, Wartick, Staff Liaison Jones

**ABSENT:** Commissioner Fite and Council Member Harris (both with notice)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by the Chair, Commissioner Black, who noted that a quorum was present. The minutes of the October 22, 2013, meeting of the Planning Commission were approved.

Commission Black was re-elected Chair. Commissioner Brown was elected Vice-Chair.

**Public Hearing on Setback and Area Variances for Garage at 1403 Hoyt Avenue.**

Zoning and Planning Director Deb Jones presented the staff report on the case. 1403 Hoyt is the house on the northwest corner of Hoyt and Albert. The applicant proposes to replace the original small double garage (20' x 20') with a modern standard double garage (22' x 26' or 24' x 24') at the same setback from the Albert side property line as the existing garage. Because the existing garage is non-conforming with respect to setback on that side, and because the new garage would enlarge the non-conformity, the owner needs a variance. The new garage would also exceed the area allowed for an accessory structure in the rear 30 feet of the lot (40% or 518 square feet), so the owner is also applying for an area variance.

Jones explained that 1403 Hoyt is unique in having an unusually narrow width (43 feet) and being a corner lot, with the extra side setback required on the side street side. This creates a practical difficulty in complying with the letter of the ordinance. The proposed replacement garage would remain in line with the three other garages at the intersection of the alley and Albert Street, all of which have approximately the same setback of 10 feet from the property lines. The narrow lot width also causes a practical difficulty in that the allowed area is too small to accommodate a standard double garage.

Commissioners had several questions regarding the placement of the existing garage, the other setbacks in operation and the characteristics of nearby garages.

The Chair opened the hearing. The first speaker was the applicant, Phil Behrens of 1403 W. Hoyt Avenue. The family have been residents of the neighborhood for 21 years and want to stay, but the garage is in poor repair and insufficient size to accommodate the reasonable needs of the family. He feels the variances are reasonable and have the support of neighbors.

Fred Maske, 1402 Iowa, across the alley: The garages and houses are lined up now. Moving the new garage back would "look funny." He supports the variances.

Barb Amidon, 1418 Iowa, supports the variance.

Mark Amidon, 1418 Iowa, supports the variance.

Steven Hecht, 1394 Iowa, supports the variance, feels that moving the garage back to the west would negatively affect the symmetry of the neighborhood.

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

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

Commissioner Black asked if the new garage couldn't be moved west and turned to face the alley, eliminating more paved surface. Jones replied that the City could not require the property owner to re-orient the garage if they don't want to. Commissioner Minns felt the additional garage access to the alley would be a negative impact. Commissioner Murphy made a similar comment. Jones said that, while reducing impervious coverage is a general goal in the City, lot coverage is not part of this variance and any option taken by the owner would not exceed their allowed coverage; therefore, the City cannot require a reduction as part of this variance determination. Most of the paved driveway is on the public right of way and is not counted toward lot coverage.

Minns commented that there is no issue of parking across a sidewalk here, which he personally finds annoying. He feels that the variance is reasonable. Commissioner Alexander agreed that granting the variances would be more reasonable than requiring the garage to be moved west and asked why that option is even raised. Jones replied that Commissioners often ask what other options are available, so staff prepared for that.

Commissioner Murphy said he felt the variance was reasonable, but he would like to offer as advice that the property owner look at access from the alley as an alternative that would increase pervious surface. Alexander asked if new pervious pavements couldn't be considered. Jones replied that the Falcon Heights code doesn't yet provide for that.

Commissioner Gustafson moved, Commissioner Minns seconded, that the Planning Commission recommend that the City Council grant a variance to Section 113-240(p) and a variance to Section 113-240(c) to 1403 Hoyt Avenue West, Falcon Heights. The motion was approved unanimously. The Council will take action on this application on March 12.

**Annual Review of Standing Rules:** Jones gave a brief historic background to this annual housekeeping item. In practice, most of the more formal aspects of the standing rules have not been needed in many years. The consensus of

### **Information and Announcements:**

Ms. Jones introduced Chelsea Petersen, the Administrative Coordinator on the City Staff, who is here to familiarize herself with Planning Commission operations. She asked that Commissioners stay for a few minutes after the meeting to let her know what paper copies they need of basic Commission documents.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:44 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