

MINUTES OF THE CITY OF AMES PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

AMES, IOWA

APRIL 16, 2025

The Regular Meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on April 16, 2025 in the Council Chambers at 515 Clark Avenue. Commission Members present were Mike LaPietra, Julie Winter, Mike Sullivan, Mike Clayton, Matthew Voss and Jim Blickensdorf.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved by Clayton, seconded by Voss, to approve the Agenda for the meeting of April 16, 2025. Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion passed.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 2, 2025 MEETING

Moved by Blickensdorf, seconded by Sullivan, to approve the Minutes of April 2, 2025. Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion passed.

PUBLIC FORUM

Chairperson LaPietra opened the public forum and closed it when no one came forward to speak.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mike Sullivan was unanimously elected Chairperson. Matthew Voss was unanimously elected Vice-Chairperson.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FOR 113 NORTH DAKOTA AVENUE (DAKOTA TOWNES), INCLUDING REZONING TO RESIDENTIAL MEDIUM (RM) DENSITY WITH A PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) OVERLAY, MAJOR SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN, AND A PRELIMINARY PLAT

Planner Amelia Schoeneman presented the staff report and stated the request is for a rezoning from Residential Low Density to Residential Medium Density with a Planned Unit Development Overlay (PUD), a Major Site Development Plan, and a Preliminary Plat. The applicant is proposing to develop the site as 20 single-family attached townhomes.

Ms. Schoeneman explained the Preliminary Plat is included so each unit can be located on a separate lot allowing them to be ownership housing if desired, and Rezoning to Residential Medium Density allows for single-family attached housing. City Council mandated the PUD Overlay be part of the request because of the environmentally sensitive areas on the property, as well as a way to implement the future land use designation of Urban Corridor (UC). The site will have one access point off North Dakota Avenue, and there are steep slopes on the northern portion of the property with a slope protection easement to the south of approximately 12,500 square feet, which exceeds the common open space requirement for a PUD. The density of the site is 14.25 units, which is within the guidelines for Medium Density.

Ms. Schoeneman stated certain deviations from the zoning requirements can be granted with a PUD if compatibility standards and design requirements are met. A summary of the setback deviations requested by the applicant are: front perimeter setback with North Dakota from 25' to 8'; internal front setback from private street from 25' to 5'; internal side setback without party wall from 10' to 0'; internal rear without party wall from 25' to 5'; internal side setback for corner lots from 15' to 3'; and decks will encroach into setback up to 3' to the south. The applicant is also requesting an alternative landscape plan.

Ms. Schoeneman said neighborhood outreach was organized by the applicant and the general feedback at the neighborhood meeting was concern about the site being developed under the RM zone rather than RL and questioning why it couldn't just left as open space. The Commission received emails from citizens expressing concern about the impact to the viewshed from the removal of trees and having views of a three-story townhome approximately 33.5' tall, which is roughly 15 feet higher in elevation than the houses on the other side of the ravine. Another concern was how stormwater would be handled from the site. Ms. Schoeneman said the site does not meet the threshold to require a full storm water management plan as they are not adding enough impervious area, although the applicant submitted a storm water memo to show how run off would be directed from the site east towards North Dakota, which was found to be satisfactory by staff. The applicant also submitted a tree survey and a natural resource inventory. Ms. Schoeneman noted the neighbors submitted a protest, which requires City Council to have a super majority to approve the project.

Julie Winter asked about the deviations to the landscape plan. Ms. Schoeneman explained the alternative landscape plan is to allow the relocation of the trees, so instead of the trees being located along the private streets, 9 of 14 trees will be relocated to the northern part of the property to provide screening for the parking lot and the northern units.

Mike Sullivan asked about the slope stability easement and if there were concerns with it during construction or with proximity to the northern units. Ms. Schoeneman said there is a retaining wall proposed for that area of the site and erosion will be controlled by the wall and other site features that will slow run off to rock check dams and other stormwater best management practices.

Ms. Winter addressed the concerns that were expressed in the emails to the Commission about the deviations and setbacks being allowed based on the PUD. She was interested in the 8' setback on North Dakota and asked staff to walk through how the site plan was developed. Ms. Schoeneman explained that with the project being on an infill site, street presence is desired, and a reduced setback helps allow for a walk-up townhome. Initially, there were two accesses proposed onto North Dakota and there was no internal street connection. Concerns were raised at the neighborhood meeting about the southern access and the turn lane there, so the current layout was proposed instead. Ms. Winter also questioned if the south sideyard setback would potentially hinder future development on the lot to the south. Director Diekmann said there is no correlation between the setbacks on this site to the property to the south and what might happen on that lot in the future; that lot would have to meet its own standards.

Matthew Voss asked for clarification about the setback on North Dakota. Ms. Schoeneman explained there is an 8 foot setback from the property line to the homes and additional 8 feet from the sidewalk and the property line, staff said it was about 16 feet total from the sidewalk.

The applicant, Luke Jensen with RES Development, addressed the Commission. Mr. Jensen summarized the proposal and said the project is designed to complement the surrounding neighborhood and address the need for new housing at an affordable price point, and will provide a new type of housing for the community.

Chairperson Sullivan opened public comment and multiple neighbors stood up to speak.

Liz Block of 4618 Westbend Drive expressed concern for the neighborhood, the woods, the wildlife in the area, and the removal of the mature trees. Ms. Block stated her opposition to the proposed development.

Don Eichner of 4538 Westbend Drive expressed appreciation for the woods, ravine and wildlife in the area. He stressed the removal of large old growth oak trees for the development of this project does not align with Ames being designated as a Tree City.

Meghan Stephenson of 4530 Westbend Drive stated concern about the viewshed with the proposed development which will negatively impact the property values of the adjacent homes. She also stressed concern about the removal of century old oak trees, as well as the height of the buildings and the large retaining wall.

Justin Landhuis of 212 Westbend Circle stated he has a background in environmental science and forestry and has great concern about the proposal. In summary, the proposed development is too dense and it is on too steep of a slope; especially considering the new climactic events occurring with increased rainfall. The site alteration as proposed will have a devastating point source and downstream effects. The proposal also goes against the Tree City USA program and the bird and pollinator initiative, as oaks are the number one bird and pollinator habitat. The proposal does not meet the goals of an Urban Corridor under the 2040 plan.

Amy Erica Smith of 4923 Westbend Drive was concerned about sightline issues and traffic from the new development having to pull out onto North Dakota in the winter when it is icy and hilly, which is a maneuver that other people in the neighborhood avoid by going around to other streets.

Ryan Lilith Jeffrey of 234 Parkridge Circle stated the number of variances requested by the applicant indicates the project is not a good fit for the site, and the PUD is being used to request a variance in every numerical category instead of being used as intended, which is to make minor adjustments for a project to fit in with the neighborhood and the lot. Also, the density proposed is too dense for the buildable area on the site.

Matt Stephenson of 4530 Westbend Drive stated he has a PHD in Wildlife Ecology and although he has other concerns with the development, he is concerned about the trees. He was provided with a tree inventory and determined there are seventeen oak trees which he

estimates to be older than 100 years, with the largest six around 200 years old; it would be a shame to cut them down. Mr. Stephenson said Ames Plan 2040 identifies the parcel for the proposed development as Urban Corridor with the only compatible zoning as Lincoln Way Mixed-Use Overlay; Residential Medium Density with a PUD is inappropriate. He summarized the goals stated for UC: to respect past development patterns, enhance the street environment and redevelop oversized parking lots, vacant buildings, and underused sites. Also, it should be of an intensity and density appropriate for the context of the area. The proposed development does not meet the goals of Ames Plan 2040 nor a PUD.

Chairperson Sullivan closed public comment.

Jim Blickensdorf asked about the zoning district height requirements for the PUD. Ms. Schoeneman said in the RM zone it is 50' or 4 stories, whichever is lower.

Mr. Voss asked what considerations were taken for the open space on the north side of the site. Director Diekmann said when the applicant switched to a platted project with individual ownership opportunities, the open space became the yard space rather than having additional open space in the middle of the site. Ms. Schoeneman said the total open space including the yard space is 41.5% of the site.

Commissioners expressed interest in townhomes, but had questions about site design and discussed continuing the item to have the developer address their questions. Director Diekmann reviewed the overall process and advised the Commission the developer did not have to provide alternative plans. He also noted the Commission should try to be specific about what details they may want. The Commission could recommend to approve with conditions, delay for more information up to 30 days, or to deny the project and explain their rationale.

Moved by Voss, seconded by to LaPietra, to recommend that the City Council deny the rezoning to Residential Medium (RM) Density for 113 North Dakota with:

- (a) A Planned Unit Development (PUD) with Major Site Development Plan; and
- (b) and Preliminary Plat

For the reasons of limited setbacks on North Dakota, concern about equitable yard size and access to open space throughout the development, design considerations along North Dakota that fit the context of the neighborhood, and preservation of the old growth trees to the extent possible.

Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion Passed.

COMMISSION REFERRAL OF DISCUSSION OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDER CRITERIA

Brief discussion was held about social service providers; no action was taken.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

None

STAFF COMMENTS

Director Diekmann summarized the Zoning Ordinance Update Process that will be occurring over the next couple of years.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Clayton to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Mike Sullivan, Chairperson

Eileen Carter, Recording Secretary