



Land Use and Zoning Meeting #3 Notes

August 3, 2015
1:30 pm to 3:30 pm
City of Grand Rapids Parking Services
50 Ottawa Avenue, NW

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Sarah Abel, Pamela Benjamin, Janay Brower, Dotti Clune, Lamont Cole (Co-Chair), Sue DeVries, Tanya Gonzalez, Nancy Haynes, Jim Jones, Andy Lofgren, Denavvia Mojet, Julie Niemchick, Joy Pryor, Kristin Rahn-Tiemeyer, Brad Rosely, Margo Johnson, Jim Talen, and Stephen Wooden

STAFF PRESENT: Erin Banchoff, Landon Bartley, Connie Bohatch, Bill Hordyk, Johanna Schulte, Suzanne Schulz, and Kristin Turkelson

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Lamont Cole led the group through introductions.

Notes from the July 20, 2015 meeting were reviewed.

Landon Bartley discussed the Michigan Street Plan goals which will be reviewed at the next meeting.

TWO-FAMILY DWELLING UNIT DISCUSSION:

Kristin Turkelson led the group through the two-family dwelling unit document. In all residential zone districts, two-family dwellings must meet minimum lot area and width requirements. The ordinance requires that the lot area for two-family dwellings be fifty (50) percent greater than the median lot area of single-family lots on the same block. Ms. Turkelson explained that 11 out of 97 cases received by the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) were appealing this requirement. Nine (9) out of those 11 cases were approved by the BZA. Of the cases approved by the BZA, the average lot was 12.5 percent greater than the median (as opposed to the 50 percent required by the ordinance). Ms. Turkelson proposed the ordinance be changed to reflect what the BZA is already allowing. She explained this would only relate to new construction. Suzanne Schulz explained the issue about lot sizes generally comes down to parking. If there is an extra ten (10) feet of lot space, there will be enough room for a driveway. Ms. Turkelson explained the existing requirements on green space and parking would still be in place.

Mr. Bartley suggested the two-family dwelling lot size policy could be used to create incentives for desirable outcomes (i.e. affordable housing).

HEIGHT AND DENSITY BONUSES DISCUSSION:

The construction of a two-family dwelling is a special land use in low-density residential zones. This classification requires the review and approval by the Planning Commission. Planning Department staff proposed in the Height and Density Bonuses packet to make the two-family dwelling by right in low-density residential zones if they are built to meet ANSI standards for accessibility. The group discussed the different types of accessible units. The packet suggested type C but the group decided that type B would be more likely to create truly accessible units (as opposed to visitable units). Ms. Turkelson explained the City Attorney's Office expressed concern with treating similar uses alike. Nancy Haines suggested there can be more flexibility in federal programs and policies when the group being favored is disabled.

The group discussed reducing the minimum lot area requirement for multi-family residential units in low- and mixed-density residential zones by up to 500 square feet if a certain percentage of units are constructed to be accessible. Brad Rosely said that developers will want to avoid going to the BZA or Planning Commission so these smaller incentives will be useful.

Ms. Turkelson proposed an incentive to provide affordable housing in high cost neighborhoods and more market rate development in areas that have concentrated poverty. The group discussed that basing the incentive on average income in a census tract may not necessarily achieve that goal. The gap between those who qualify for assisted housing subsidies and those who can afford market rate was discussed. The group supported the concept of incentivizing development to increase income diversity within neighborhoods.

Ms. Schulz commented that adding incentives and flexibility to the policies could add to the housing stock for the "missing middle."

Ms. Turkelson explained the commercial district incentives may be less relevant to this group.

INCLUSIONARY ZONING DISCUSSION:

Mr. Bartley explained the City Attorney's Office has expressed an inclusionary zoning policy would be very difficult to enact under state law. Ms. Schulz explained it may be worth exploring incentives because there are some incentives which would not necessarily violate state law.

Stephen Wooden asked whether there could be an impact fee which is waived for affordable developments. Ms. Schulz explained impact fees are not allowed under state law.

Community Benefit Agreements were mentioned as a potential tool. The group looked at other cities' inclusionary zoning policies.

Mr. Bartley explained mandatory programs are generally more effective than voluntary programs. He brought up the Chapel Hill, NC program which was voluntary and worked well because it was rigorously marketed.

The group discussed exploring examples in comparable cities in terms of population and per capita income. Ms. Haynes stated that regional support and coordination would be more effective than an approach which only takes into consideration the City of Grand Rapids.

The group discussed that now might be a good time to start pursuing this issue.

MICRO UNITS, TINY HOUSES, AND DENSITY DISCUSSION:

Mr. Bartley explained multi-family units are not restricted by the zoning ordinance but the IPMC has limitations on efficiency units.

The group discussed what a “tiny house” really is. They discussed whether tiny houses should be required to have a foundation or how they might fit within neighborhood character. Ms. Schulz explained someone can ask for a variance for a tiny house but it would be hard for them to prove why they are unable to build a house that complies with regulations. She also pointed out that since requiring Planning Commission approval costs a significant amount of money, the process is not consistent with the goal of ensuring affordable housing options.

The group discussed the density bonus proposed by Mr. Bartley and agreed that it was a good idea.

The kind of design and quality requirements that could be applied to tiny houses were discussed. The group considered making it a Special Land Use so that neighbors could weigh in and then it would be by right over time.

The group discussed whether the garage size would be limited and how to handle accessory structures.

Jim Talen stated that he believed that micro-units would be a higher priority than tiny houses because it better addresses the issue of density. The group discussed that tiny houses may be more appropriate to discuss as a part of the accessory dwelling unit conversation. Ms. Schulz explained that staff would work on crafting the language of a recommendation for the policies discussed at this meeting and bring it to the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be on August 17, 2015 from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm.