

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

A meeting of the Planning Commission was held on Monday, May 9, 2022, commencing at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall. Chairperson Asmus called the meeting to order.

**A. ROLL CALL:**

Chairperson	Shannon Asmus	Present
Commissioner	Michael Flaata	Absent
Commissioner	Larry Dahl	Present
Commissioner	Eric Mathwig	Present
Commissioner	Jeff Woods	Present
Commissioner	Tom Zens	Present
Commissioner	James Ellingson	Present
City Planner	Hannah Rybak	Present

**B. ANNOUNCEMENT OF ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

It was moved by Commissioner Dahl, seconded by Commissioner Ellingson, to approve the minutes of the March 14, 2022, meeting. All members present voted aye.

Motion Carried.

**III. SCHEDULED ITEMS**

**A. PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

- 1. VARIANCE & SPECIAL SIGN PERMIT REQUEST*** – by Meeker Cooperative at 1725 E US Hwy 12 Variances to accommodate modifications to the existing monument sign on the property.

City Planner Rybak provided an overview of the request. She provided a recommendation to approve the requests for a variance of 173.45 square feet from the maximum allowable square footage (per sign) to allow a sign totaling 273.45 SF where 100 SF is the maximum allowed and a variance of four inches from the maximum allowable sign height of 25 feet to allow a sign with a height of 25 feet, four inches. One condition was recommended: A sign permit application shall be submitted for City approval ahead of installation, and submitted plans shall conform to the plans submitted with the variance application.

Commissioner Ellingson asked if there are any plans in the future to remove the lower signs in favor of adding additional cabinets at the top of the sign, as Vibrant Broadband is doing with this request. City Planner Rybak responded that any modifications resulting in additional square footage or height would require a

variance. Modifications resulting in the same or reduced square footage or height would be processed through a sign permit. She deferred to the Applicant to respond to the question regarding future plans.

Commissioner Asmus opened the Public Hearing.

This being the time, date, and place set, with all mailed and published notices given as required by law, the hearing was opened at approximately 5:40 p.m., May 9, 2022.

Steve Kosbab was in attendance on behalf of Meeker Cooperative. He stated that additional lighted cabinets comes down to cost. There are no plans to add any additional cabinets at this time. The electronic sign works for things like the 100 year celebration.

Commissioner Mathwig stated that the lowest two sign faces at the bottom of the monument are being removed. He asked if those could be added back without approval. City Planner Rybak responded that no, they cannot because that would increase overall signage over the square footage that is being approved.

Commissioner Asmus asked if the electronic sign is subject to the same rules as other signs that have to be at a certain dimness. City Planner Rybak responded that all electronic signs are subject to the same requirements.

No further comments were heard and the hearing was closed at approximately 5:44 p.m.

Commissioner Woods stated that even though they are adding some square footage, the sign is far enough from the road and won't interfere with traffic. This seems to be a simple and reasonable request.

Based on the findings of facts and submitted plans, Commissioner Dahl made a motion to recommend approval of the Variance Request by Meeker Cooperative, 1725 E US Hwy 12, subject to the recommended condition. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Woods. All members present voted aye.

Motion carried.

#### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

##### **A. ZONING ORDANCE AMENDMENTS**

Planner Rybak provided an update on the Zoning Ordinance Amendments. The Planning Commission discussed and provided various input and direction.

##### Table of Contents

The table of contents has been rearranged and reformatted. The purpose of this is to group similar provisions, to provide a user-friendly document to staff and the public. Currently, the existing section numbers remain. Upon finalization, the section numbers will be reformatted to reflect the new order of the provisions. Additionally, items to remove have been noted in red, and items to add have been noted in yellow.

### *Planning Commission Input*

Commissioner Asmus asked if the proposed table of contents is standard operating procedure in zoning, or is it specific to WSB? Would the City have to go back and change this if the City and WSB ever parted ways? City Planner Rybak responded that none of this is specific to WSB. The amendments are for the City and to provide a logical flow for the Zoning Ordinance. Currently, the provisions are placed randomly within the code. You cannot go to one section to find all of the information you are looking for. WSB along with other consulting firms do Zoning Ordinance updates for many cities. It is a contract service performed for the City and zoning ordinance users, not for the firm. There is nothing that we are doing here that will not translate to the next person acting as the City Planner and/or Zoning Administrator.

Commissioner Woods asked if enforcement staffing would be addressed in the Zoning Ordinance. City Planner Rybak responded that the process for enforcement is laid out within the Code, but the level of staffing is an administration and Council staffing issue.

### Definitions

A list of definitions has been created and is included in the packet for your review. A few of the code sections included definitions pertaining to the section (ex. adult-oriented uses, signs), but beyond that no definitions section or list exists within the current ordinance. There are references to “Appendix A: Definitions”, but the list has been missing. A list of definitions is an extremely important component of a Zoning Ordinance. If there is a question on interpretation of a certain code, the first step is to review the definitions to provide clarity on what, specifically, the provision applies to. We utilized the Planner’s Dictionary, American Planning Association and other cities’ definitions to compile the attached list.

### *Planning Commission Input*

The Planning Commission approved of the list of definitions and provided no input.

### Draft Exterior Storage Requirements

We have drafted a proposed revised provision relating to exterior storage. Input from the Planning Commission at the March meeting was the primary guidance for this draft. The attachment includes the existing code provision regarding exterior storage, followed by the proposed new language.

### *Planning Commission Input*

Commissioner Ellingson asked if the recommended five-foot setback for firewood is standard. City Planner Rybak responded that yes, that is a standard distance to ensure adequate separation and access to the firewood stack without going on to neighboring property.

Commissioner Zens asked if there is a setback required for fences. City Planner Rybak responded that there is not. Fencing serves a different purpose than storage. Typically, there is some separation required between storage and neighboring properties.

The consensus of the Planning Commission was to require a five-foot setback for firewood storage.

The Planning Commission discussed the number of recreational vehicles and trailers that may be stored outside on a property extensively. They recommended that the maximum number be three per property.

Commissioner Asmus asked about trash storage for multifamily housing. City Planner Rybak responded that a future recommendation is going to be to require screened dumpsters. The requirement we are reviewing tonight pertains to individual wheeled containers.

Commissioner Mathwig asked if an exemption should be written into the code for senior citizens who may have difficulty moving their containers around. City Planner Rybak recommended that an exemption not be created in the code, but through enforcement solutions can be reached for those who are not able to comply due to mobility issues.

The Planning Commission was supportive of the proposed amendment to require wheeled containers be stored outside of the front yard.

#### Parking Space Requirements

We have reviewed parking requirements extensively and have included a lot of information on this in the packet. First, a table was created with Litchfield's existing parking table, the recommendation from the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), and comparable cities' parking tables. We then evaluated Litchfield's current requirement against the ITE recommendation and comparable cities. This led to a recommendation to either keep Litchfield's existing parking requirement, increase the existing parking requirement, or decrease the existing parking requirement. A recommendation was also provided for a number of uses which are not currently included in Litchfield's parking table. Finally, a draft recommended table has been attached, which reflects the recommended changes.

#### *Planning Commission Input*

Commissioner Asmus asked what happens when the parking requirement is changed, and an existing parking situation then becomes out of conformance. City Planner Rybak responded that they become legal nonconforming. If the use is expanded, the parking must be brought into compliance, or a variance must be requested.

The Commission recommended that multifamily parking requirements each be upped by half a space per bedroom over the recommendation. The Commission feels that it is important to require enough parking to serve these uses.

Commissioner Woods asked about the recommendation for auto repair and recommended that the parking requirement be increased. The Commission agreed. City Planner Rybak will address and present an increased recommendation.

The Planning Commission reviewed all parking requirements presented and was happy with the table overall and recommended the above changes.

#### Landscaping

In review of other cities' landscape requirements, we found that they vary greatly. We have included two examples; Norwood Young America's zoning code contains very basic landscape requirements. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Mahtomedi has

extensive landscape requirements. Landscape requirements has been something that the Planning Commission has looked at extensively in recent site plan reviews. This indicates that it is a priority to place solid landscape requirements in the Litchfield Zoning Code. However, we must consider that builders in Litchfield are not used to seeing extensive landscaping requirements, because the current Zoning Code does not contain any. Staff recommends careful review of this issue to ensure that the landscaping requirements that are adopted meet the goals of the City of Litchfield, but also do not cause an unreasonable burden on builders who are going to see these requirements within the City for the first time. Staff envisions that we will start with something similar to Norwood Young America's code, and add additional requirements where necessary.

*Planning Commission Input*

The Commission engaged in an extensive discussion regarding landscape requirements. It is a priority of the Commission to ensure that trees are planted along with any new development or redevelopment. They provided the following recommendations:

For uses other than single and two-family residential, one tree shall be planted for each 750 square feet of gross floor area. For single and two-family residential, two trees shall be required per dwelling unit. They recommended that deciduous trees be required to be at least 1.5 caliper inches at planting, and coniferous trees shall be at least three feet in height at the time of planting. The Commission recommends that boulevard trees not be the focus as they can become problematic in terms of leaves and roots interfering with streets and utilities.

**VII. SET HEARING DATES AND TIMES**

The next scheduled meeting is Monday, June 13, 2022, at 5:30 p.m.

**VIII. REVIEW OF COUNCIL ACTIONS**

- A. VARIANCE REQUEST GRANTED** – by *Overland Engineering, LLC, dba Dollar General at 701 Sibley Ave N. Variance would allow a reduction in required parking spaces. Site plan review has also been requested.*

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Asmus adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:27 p.m.

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Hannah Rybak  
City Planner