

CITY OF MARINE ON ST. CROIX
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday May 29 2018- 7:30pm
121 Judd Street – Village Hall

1. Call to Order
2. Public Hearing – Comprehensive Plan Update
3. Old/New Business
4. Approval of March Minutes
5. Adjournment

The City of Marine on St. Croix Planning Commission regular meeting of May 29, 2018 was called to order by Chairman Mrosla at 7:33pm. Brenner, Roden, Smitten, Spisak, and Warren present. Hagstrom absent.

Citizens Present: Bill Miller, Glen Mills, Lon Pardun, Larry Roden, Larry Whitaker, Curt Moe, Linda Tibbetts, Christine Maefsky, Anne Reich, Peter Reich, Sue Logan, Wendy Ward, Hank Fischer, Dorothy Deetz, Rudi Hagesheimer, Judy Stern, Fizzie Heimdahl, Tod Drescher, Jaci Christenson, Ann Kirn, Andy Kirn, Tom Omdahl, Karen Kramer, Andy Kramer, Larry Martin, Michael Tibbetts, Erik Henry, Jennifer Henry, Mary Vogel

Public Hearing – Comprehensive Plan Update

Chairman Mrosla opened the Public Hearing at 7:34pm. Mrosla stated that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to public comments about the current draft of the Comprehensive Plan. He further explained that the Plan consists of four major areas: 1) land use and housing, 2) parks, trails, and transportation, 3) water resources, and 4) economic resiliency and competitiveness, which is how the discussion will be ordered at this meeting. Mrosla stated that the goal for completion of the Plan is the end of June, after recommendation and approval by the City Council. Mrosla then introduced Jane Kansier from Bolton & Menk, who was present to answer any questions. Kansier explained that the requirement to update the Comprehensive Plan every 10 years comes from state statute, with specific criteria being outlined by the Met Council. She shared that the current process has been going for over a year, with two pop-up meetings at Mill Stream Day and the Street Dance, two open houses in July of 2017 and April of 2018, a survey distributed to every household, and numerous public meetings of the review committees consisting of Planning Commission and City Council members. Kansier emphasized that there is a 6-month review period once the Plan is completed before it can be submitted to the Met Council, and the City has already requested an extension from the due date of December 2018.

Resident Larry Whitaker raised the issue of short-term rentals, reading a letter written by Kirsten Vadheim. The letter expressed that short-term rentals are commercial in nature and do not fit within the essential character of the community. It also said they could cause many issues down the road if it is not addressed properly at this time. Mrosla responded that it is a challenging situation because the City wants to encourage tourism, but that requires places for people to stay. He further stated that many cities are handling it differently, and it could be something a Homeowners Association might have the ability to control. Resident Christine Maefsky added that in her experience, meeting the renters personally prevents problems, and short-term rentals are convenient since there are currently no public accommodations here or in Scandia.

Resident Peter Reich stated that the discussion of short-term rentals is about what kind of community the City wants now and in the future. He emphasized that the word community is referenced multiple times in the existing Plan's vision statement, as well as in the Guiding Principles. He said that while there are benefits to short-term rentals, such as economic growth and tourism, there are also many negatives, such as effects on property values, quality of life with noise and traffic, and when unregulated, health and safety issues. He noted that neighboring May Township has recently prohibited them. There is also the option of allowing them with regulation. Reich said his opinion was that transient occupancy is not consistent with the City's historic vision. He then argued that the current ordinance prohibits short-term rentals, since regardless of the name used, they fit the definition of pre-arranged lodging for definite periods, for three or more people. This use is neither specifically permitted or denied in the code, which Reich believes is support for it being prohibited. Reich concluded by asking the Commission and Council to 1) enforce the current zoning ordinance until a new policy is developed, and 2) begin the discussion on the issue. He also listed various ways to limit the adverse effects of it, such as making sure all short-term rental properties are licensed, insured, and inspected, limit them to the Village Center, require the owner be present on site, and prohibit weddings, reunions, and similar events. Resident Mike Tibbetts brought up the Asa Parker house previously being used as a rental, to which Reich answered that a Conditional Use Permit like that could be a possibility. Mroska stated that the City Attorney disagreed with Reich's interpretation of the code but appreciated his input and the issue could definitely be explored at a later meeting.

Resident Jennifer Henry said she is a next-door neighbor of someone who rents their home on Second Street, and there have been no problems. Resident Karen Kramer said that every house in Marine could become an airBnB with there being no current rules, which would affect property values for houses along the river. Resident Andy Kirn advocated for a reasonable middle ground to the issue. Mroska then closed the comments regarding short-term rentals.

Resident Wendy Ward stated that she had many changes she would like to see with things such as the purpose and vision and wondered how to address those specific issues in this type of meeting. Resident Nancy Cosgriff asked how such suggestions should be made and how they would be included. Mayor Glen Mills recommended that anyone who wanted to submit comments on the Plan do so in writing. Mroska said that with the fast-approaching deadline, any comments would need to be submitted to City Clerk Lynette Peterson by June 6th, which would give time for the review committees to go through them, as well as Kansier to make any changes. Brenner asked if the Plan could be amended, and Kansier replied that it could. Ward stated that changes now are preferable to amendments, and that a group that included citizens from the community could be formed to work on the Plan to be more representative of the community. Councilmember Bill Miller questioned the sudden level of engagement, noting that there had been numerous open meetings throughout the past year and they had been lowly attended. This led to a discussion about notification of meetings, and many residents expressed that they were not aware of the Comprehensive Plan meetings that were taking place, compared to previous Plan updates, and other meetings such as the Village Center Task Force. Kansier said there is a risk of delaying the Plan's approval too long, such as budget considerations.

Tibbetts said that the current document is unclear and lengthy with unreasonable projections, such as job growth within our small Village Center. Resident Hank Fischer agreed, asking exactly what can be commented on since a large portion of the document is facts. Smitten responded that the beginning of each section has policies that can be commented on, and projections can be discussed with the Met Council. Miller added that a large amount has been accomplished since the last Comprehensive Plan 10 years ago. Resident Chuck Arnason asked if the school property was addressed in the Plan, and Kansier said it was mentioned in many sections. Peter Reich commented that the current draft is a state of the city with not enough forward thinking or plan.

The next topic was Parks, Trails and Transportation. Tibbetts expressed concern about the cost of road projects when the base is not in need of repair. There was discussion about the importance of the connection of the Gateway Trail. Miller said that a Joint Powers Agreement had been reached with the DNR to work together on the planning of the trail and would welcome anyone who is interested to get involved. Resident Larry Martin asked whether a commuter train to the cities had been considered. Smitten said the City does not have the numbers to accommodate it. Resident Judy Stern raised the issue of water drainage/ditch on Rose Street, and Mroska moved on to water resources.

Resident Mary Vogel said the chapter needs to include the City becoming better stewards of water. Resident Mike Tibbetts thought storm water was over addressed as well as the use of rain gardens. Smitten asked if the Local Surface Water Management Plan had been updated. Kansier stated that it had and what is in the Comprehensive Plan is a summary. Resident Tod Drescher asked about the omission of the Village Center Task Force storm water plans, which were an addendum on the last Comprehensive Plan. Tibbetts commented on the wastewater capacity of the current drain field and the need to explore other options. Mills said that the cost of such an improvement would be millions of dollars.

The final topic was resiliency and economic competitiveness. Anne Reich said the section needs to be more robust, as it is currently just a list from the Green Step Cities website. She would like more comments about the future and a strong statement about the commitment to continuing with Green Step Cities. Ward asked if this meeting and any comments submitted by June 6th would be the only opportunity for changes. Warren stated that there will be a review of the comments by the Commission and action by the Committees, which can be reviewed at the June Planning Commission meeting.

*Roden moved and Smitten seconded to close the public hearing at 9:30pm. **Motion passed unanimously.***

Old/New Business

None.

Approval of March Minutes

*Roden moved and Warren seconded to approve the March 27th Planning Commission minutes as drafted. Smitten abstained. **Motion passed unanimously.***

Adjournment

*Smitten moved and Roden seconded to adjourn at 9:45 pm. **Motion passed unanimously.***