

**City of Alma
Planning Commission Minutes
April 5, 2021**

Chairman Ayers called the regular meeting of the Alma Planning Commission to order at 6:01 PM on April 5th, 2021 in the City of Alma Library Conference Room.

Present: Ayers, Mapes, Pitts, Schooley, Richter, Wheeler, and Therrien.

Absent: None

Others Present: Aeric Ripley, City of Alma Zoning Administrator
David Ringle, City of Alma Public Services Director
Dennis Maloney, Architect
Lorrie Rhynard, Business Owner

A motion was offered at 6:02 PM by Mapes and supported by Therrien to approve the minutes of the Regular Planning Commission meeting held on March 1st, 2021.

Yes: Ayers, Mapes, Pitts, Schooley, Richter, Wheeler, and Therrien
No: None

Site Plan Review 255 E Warwick – Prism Primary Care is proposing to construct a 5,123 sq. ft. medical office. The vacant parcel is located just north of MidMichigan Medical Center’s facility. The property is zoned OS, Offices Services. The proposed use is a permitted use in the OS District and requires a site plan approval by the planning commission.

A presentation was given by Ripley. The lot and building envelope remain unchanged from the previous public hearing with a lot coverage of 18%. The proposed building setbacks are 51 feet to the front, 67 feet to the West, 15 feet to the East, and 43 feet to the rear. The parking plan remains unchanged from the previous submission. A trash removal and dumpster enclosure has been included on the plan in the Northwest corner of the lot adjacent to the existing utility easement. The provided landscaping plan remains largely unchanged with the removal of one tree to accommodate the altered drainage retention area. The proposed lighting plan remains unchanged from the previous hearing. The drainage plan has been verbally approved by the County Drain Commission and is expected to be formally approved later this week.

It is requested that the developer move the proposed dumpster location further to the Northwest to allow for more room between it and the utility easement. Utility breaks within the easement have the potential for rapid erosion and there is concern that a utility break may un-necessarily damage the enclosure in such an event. The relocation would result in the enclosure having a smaller setback than the 5 ft required by ordinance requiring a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals. Alternatively, it was suggested that the developer could seek a variance from the same board to waive the requirement of an enclosure and allow the

proposed to dumpster to remain in its planned location adjacent to the easement. A stipulation for approval of the site plan as presented requires the owner to register the utility easement officially with the Gratiot County Register of Deeds prior to receiving a Certificate of Occupancy for the building. A sign permit is required for all signage on the property.

Ringle commented that the water connections and size are now noted on the site plan and are acceptable. The plan notes proper water retention and grading with the excess storm water draining to Warwick Dr. A 4-inch storm water reducer is required on the public side of the storm water system to prevent a rate of flow into the city system that would exceed its capacity.

Mapes inquired if the property owner is required to reconstruct the enclosure to its original state if easement work is required?

Ringle replied that the costs associated with the reconstruction of the enclosure due to damage from utility easement work would be the responsibility of the municipality in most cases. His recommendation is that the enclosure move 2-3 feet further from the easement with ZBA approval to reduce the likelihood of this occurring.

Mapes and Ayers suggested an agreement between the municipality and the property owner that the property owner be responsible for all costs associated with the restoration of the dumpster enclosure resulting from necessary work within the utility easement. Provided that this agreement is made, the dumpster could remain at its proposed location on the site plan adjacent to the utility easement.

It was suggested by Mapes that the Planning Commission discuss requiring all future projects to require the property owner to be responsible for restoration costs to structures and lot surfaces related to utility easement work within a property in a future meeting of the Planning Commission.

Mapes noted that the lighting plan notes wall pack lights on each face of the building. He expressed that this type of lighting tends to be very bright and visible from a great distance away and asked if the lights could be removed from the plan or modified to be downward facing.

Maloney commented that the North facing wall pack is necessary for security but the wall packs on the other building faces could be removed.

Mapes commented that this was an acceptable compromise, but that the Planning Commission consider modifying requirements of wall pack lights to either have a shade or be downward facing for future projects.

A motion was made by Schooley and supported by Wheeler at 6:51 PM to approve the site plan as presented with the proposed modifications to the lighting plan, the utility easement be recorded officially with the Register of Deeds, and the property owner sign an agreement with the city accepting all future costs of restoring the dumpster enclosure if damaged by future issues and repairs within the utility easement.

Yes: Ayers, Mapes, Pitts, Schooley, Richter, Wheeler and Therrien

No: None

Discussion of allowing car sales within the B1, Central Business District

Rhynard proposed a business plan for a furniture upholstery business and used car sales located at 322 W Center St within the B1, Central Business District. Car sales are not permitted within this district by permitted or special use. The business plan includes provision for the outdoor sales of 20-24 cars and customer parking for the business in a manner that would not interfere with the parking of adjacent businesses as the site is located within a strip mall configuration and is requesting the option of conditionally rezoning the property for this use.

Mapes inquired if the conditional rezoning process would give future control over land use on the property.

Ripley replied that the stipulations agreed upon through the conditional rezoning process are binding in the future and follow the use from owner to owner. Ripley added that conditional zoning allows for greater control of the use compared to a traditional special use permit.

Therrien inquired if the plan included automotive service along with sales?

Rhynard replied that the plan was for sales only without an automotive service component.

Ayers and Mapes commented that they would be in support of the project if the proper restrictions and guidelines were put into action through the conditional rezoning process.

Richter comment that she would not be in support of such a project on the grounds that car sales are no longer a good fit for the downtown business district and that such uses are better served in the B-2 business district. The increased automobile traffic conflicts with the concept of a walkable downtown district.

Wheeler commented that Boyne City has a dealership in its downtown district, and it has been a positive addition there. Boyne City's downtown district has recently been ranked as one of the best of its size in the nation.

Schooley commented that the dealership would be an acceptable fit for this location given its layout and proximity on the edge of the downtown district.

Therrien commented with concerns of the proposed use interfering with the neighboring businesses.

Ripley commented that a proper site plan would be required for customer parking and outdoor sales communicating how this would work with the neighboring uses.

Provided a proper site plan is submitted, Therrien feels this proposal is worth exploring further.

Ripley commented that the Building Official would need to investigate needed modifications to the building as this would constitute a change from its current use.

Sign Ordinance Draft Provided in the packet is a first draft of updated language to the sign ordinance to comply with the 2016 Supreme Court decision on the regulation of signs by municipalities.

A presentation was given by Hale. Proposed changes to the ordinance include the following:

- Modifying the definition of a Flag to require that flags may only be displayed when attached to a flagpole and setting the maximum size of flags to 3 feet by 5 feet in residential areas and 4 feet by 6 feet in commercial districts.
- Adding a definition of a Flagpole and limiting the maximum height of flagpoles to 20 feet with a lot line setback equal to the height of the Flagpole. Flagpoles attached to structures must not exceed the maximum structure height for the district. Flagpoles greater than 10 ft in height would require a footing for installation and require a building permit.
- Changing the definition of an abandoned sign to a sign that shows deterioration or wear due to lack of maintenance.
- Modifying the definition of a billboard in such a way that it is not defined by the sign's content.
- Removing definitions for numerous sign which could only be defined by their content.
- Removing numerous sign types that are currently exempted from the sign ordinance based solely on their content.
- Setting the number of signs allowed in residential districts to a maximum number of six in number with each sign face being no larger than 8 square feet and 5 feet in height. Signs would have a lot line setback of 5 feet.
- Limiting the number of flags displayed on a property to three.
- Allowing for four additional signs to be erected in residential districts with the same size and setback restrictions for a period of 60 days prior and 6 days after a scheduled federal, state, or local election.

No action was taken at this time.

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Additional Business

Commission Ayers inquired if Special Use Permits for Outdoor Fireworks be granted directly by staff rather than going through a formal process with the Planning Commission. Special Use Permits for these sales are granted by the commission on a regular basis and are almost always approved without issue.

Ripley replied that as a Special Use ordinance requires that the permit be reviewed by the Planning Commission, but discussion could be had towards ordinance modification.

A motion was made by Wheeler and supported by Schooley at 7:45 PM to adjourn.

Yes: Ayers, Mapes, Pitts, Schooley, Richter, Wheeler and Therrien

No: None

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aaron K. Hale". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Aaron K. Hale

Planning Commission Recording Secretary