

City of St. Helens Planning Commission

Approved Minutes

March 12, 2019

Members Present: Commissioner Cohen
Commissioner Lawrence
Commissioner Semling
Commissioner Stenberg
Commissioner Webster
Vice Chair Cary
Chair Hubbard

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Planner Graichen
Associate Planner Dimsho
Councilor Carlson

Others: Lesley Everett
Peter Frank
Wayne Weigandt
Jennifer Pugsley
Kelly Taga
Andrew Stamp
Al Petersen

- 1) **7:17 p.m. Call to Order and Flag Salute**
- 2) **Consent Agenda: Approval of Minutes**
 - 2.A **Housing Needs Analysis Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes Dated February 12, 2019**

Motion: Upon Commissioner Cohen's motion and Commissioner Webster's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Housing Needs Analysis Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes dated February 12, 2019 as written. Vice Chair Cary and Commissioner Stenberg did not vote due to their absences from that meeting. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Webster; Nays: None]

2.B Planning Commission Minutes Dated February 12, 2019

Motion: Upon Commissioner Cohen's motion and Commissioner Webster's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Planning Commission Minutes dated February 12, 2019. Vice Chair Cary and Commissioner Stenberg did not vote due to their absences from that meeting. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Webster; Nays: None]

3) **Topics from the Floor: Limited to 5 minutes per topic (not on public hearing agenda)**

There were no topics from the floor.

4) **Public Hearings (times reflect earliest start time)**

4.A 7:00 p.m. - Variance at 1160 & 1170 Deer Island Road - Frank

Chair Hubbard opened the Public Hearing at 7:19 p.m. There were no ex-parte contacts, conflicts of interests, or bias in this matter. City Planner Graichen entered the staff report dated March 5, 2019 into the record. Graichen said this variance is for the separation standards of windows from walkways and parking lots/driveways in multi-dwelling developments. Graichen introduced the proposal to the Commission and discussed the criteria for approving the variance, as detailed in the staff report.

Commissioner Cohen asked if approving this variance would create a negative precedence for future multi-family developments. Graichen said there is enough uniqueness on this property that it would likely be difficult to replicate the same circumstances. Commissioner Cohen asked if the windows in question were along Deer Island Road. Graichen said no, the windows in question are along the parking lot and walkway.

In Favor

Frank, Peter. Applicant. Frank said the variance is for only three feet of separation. He said there is no way to change the orientation of the development to meet the standard fully. Adding a second floor to the building would be too costly. Commissioner Cohen asked when they learned they would not meet the standards for the windows. Frank said it was during the Site Development Review process. Frank said the site is too small to fit the parking and walkway anywhere else. They are building a triplex to get the most residential units on the site.

Petersen, Al. Petersen is the architect for the project. Petersen said this is a very tight property. There is just as much square footage dedicated to the driveway and parking as there is dedicated to the building footprint. This is an example where the parking requirements almost make the development impossible to fit. Petersen feels the multi-family design standards are meant for larger sites. On smaller scale developments, they are very constraining. Petersen also noted there is a power pole that limits where the driveway can be located. He also referred to an email he previously sent to the Commission regarding duplexes that he feels warrants a code change. Petersen said one window was eliminated to reduce exceptions to the standard. He said there are no bedroom or living room windows that face the parking lot. The windows with the separation exception are windows in the kitchens and the dining rooms facing the parking lot. Councilor Carlson asked how big each unit is. Petersen said they are two bedroom units at approximately 900 square feet each.

In Opposition

No one spoke in opposition to the proposal.

End of Oral Testimony

There were no requests to continue the hearing or leave the record open.

Close of Public Hearing & Record

The applicant waived opportunity to submit final written argument after the close of the record.

Deliberations

Commissioner Cohen said when the constraints of the lot are considered, aside from building up (which is cost prohibitive), this variance is the best option. Vice Chair Cary asked if they are setting a precedence. Graichen said the Commission is looking at special and unique circumstances. Some of these unique circumstances include the power pole, the need to share access because of the classification of Deer Island Road, the vision clearance area, and the existing duplex on the other lot. Graichen feels there are enough existing unique circumstances that will not create a precedence. Chair Hubbard said he thinks it is a good project. He feels the development will be appealing as a one-story building.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Semling's motion and Commissioner Lawrence's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the variance as written by staff. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Stenberg, Commissioner Webster, Vice Chair Cary; Nays: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Cohen's motion and Commissioner Webster's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings & Conclusions once prepared. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Stenberg, Commissioner Webster, Vice Chair Cary; Nays: None]

4.B 7:30 p.m. - Variances (12) at Various Lots on Fairfield Court - Stamp

Chair Hubbard opened the Public Hearing at 7:49 p.m. There were no ex-parte contacts, conflicts of interests, or bias in this matter. Graichen entered the staff report dated March 5, 2019 into the record. Graichen described the proposal and recommended conditions of approval, as presented in the staff report. He provided four letters to the Commission that were submitted in support of the variances after the staff report was already prepared.

Graichen explained that Richmond American Homes applied for 12 lot coverage variances, each for a specific lot, that will utilize one of two single-story models (Amethyst or Onyx) in the Emerald Meadows Subdivision. These models are around 20 feet in height, which is one of the reasons why this variance makes sense. Graichen said in a sense, they are trading a reduced height for a larger footprint. Graichen said variances to the 35 percent lot coverage maximum range from one percent to seven percent. One of the conditions of approval is that the variances are specific to the two single-story models (Amethyst and Onyx). This is to ensure that Richmond does not sell the lots to someone else who will build a two-story home using the variance for greater coverage. Graichen said there are arguments in the applicant's narrative and in the letters provided about the high demand for single-story homes in St. Helens.

Commissioner Cohen asked if the variances have any impacts to setback requirements. Graichen said no. Commissioner Webster asked if the lot coverage includes a patio. Graichen said no, unless they are covered. Commissioner Semling asked if they are approving all of them at once or individually. Graichen said the Commission is reviewing them all at once, but they are broken down into individual files if there are concerns about any individual lot.

In Favor

Stamp, Andrew. Applicant. Stamp is representing Richmond American Homes. Stamp is seeking lot coverage flexibility because they perceive a market demand for single-level units. They are asking for this variance for 12 of the 44 lots in the subdivision (roughly 25 percent). Richmond American builds spec homes that have options. They are not custom homes, so they can be built very quickly and efficiently. This is how they can keep costs lower. Single-story homes appeal to baby boomers and families with young children who do not want to have stairs. The Amethyst and Onyx are also two of the most affordable models, which also appeals to younger, first-time home buyers. Stamp showed two exhibits that demonstrate less activity for the single-story homes, indicating a lack of supply. Stamp said they will still comply with building height and setback standards, so the view from the street will be identical between the lots with the lot coverage variance and without. He said the trade-off is a lower height for a smaller backyard, while still meeting setbacks. Stamp said lot coverage standards make developments feel more spacious, provide more open space and recreation space, and limit impervious surface. Lot coverage standards prevent too large of a house on too small of a lot. Stamp feels they are meeting the intent of lot coverage standards, based on street appearance. He also pointed out that 50 percent lot coverage is allowed for duplexes and attached single-family dwellings in the same zoning district [*Secretary's note: Duplexes have a 35 percent lot coverage standard too*]. Stamp said for a 5,000 square foot lot, after a two car garage is built, only 1,300 square feet is left for the home. Stamp said there is not as much demand for this small of a home. Stamp said that these hearings are quasi-judicial land use hearings that will not set precedence for future hearings. The topography and L-shaped subdivision also make this a unique circumstance warranting a variance. Stamp feels the City does not need to worry about setting precedence. Commissioner Webster noted they would not be here if the zone change from R7 to R5 granted by City Council had been denied, as was recommended by the Planning Commission. Stamp noted the case before the City Council for the R5 zone change hearing was different than the one that the Planning Commission saw. Stamp said the market data pointed toward the need for smaller lots to accommodate affordable housing.

Taga, Kelly. Applicant. He works for Richmond American Homes of Oregon. The Onyx and Amethyst are about \$18,000 cheaper than the other models. They have a lot personalization for each model type. The floor plans may be similar, but the finishes, faucets, etc. are all chosen by the buyer. About one third of the homes sold in the last three years have been single-story. For new development, about half of the homes are single-story, which indicates a larger demand. Over 80 percent of the demand is for two-car homes at over 1,400 square feet. The streetscape view is not going to change. If the purpose of lot coverage standards is to give a good feel with ample yard space, they are still accomplishing this. Richmond is not doing this to make more money. Taga said their profit margin is actually better on the two-story homes. They want to build single-story homes because that is where the demand is. Single-story homes meet the needs of the community.

Vice Chair Cary asked how they selected the specific lots for the variances. Taga said they requested approximately every other lot to avoid having too many of the same floor plan in a row. It also adds some variation to the streetscape with the height variations. Commissioner Cohen asked how they select the model elevation type. Taga said the homebuyer selects their elevation type, but they will not let the same type be placed next to another of the exact elevation. Taga said their motivation is to appeal to a wider audience of homebuyers and see their homes sell faster. Their first sale was for an Onyx home.

Pugsley, Jennifer. Pugsley is a real estate broker with Keller Williams. She is not involved with the project at all, but felt someone in the real estate world should provide testimony about the high demand for single-story homes. She has been selling real estate here for 25 years and has a good handle on the market. The baby boomers are aging which means there is a huge population who cannot do stairs and she needs something to sell them. She feels like this argument is almost stronger than the affordability argument. She also submitted written testimony.

In Opposition

No one spoke in opposition.

End of Oral Testimony

There were no requests to continue the hearing or leave the record open.

Close of Public Hearing & Record

The applicant waived opportunity to submit final written argument after the close of the record.

Deliberations

Vice Chair Cary said when he searched for a single-level home in this community, it was very difficult to find. Chair Hubbard said the Commission has thought about this property a lot in previous proposals. Commissioner Cohen noted that page four has three different options for the Commission to decide. Vice Chair Cary said he is not inclined to do the option that caps the number of Onyx models. He does not want to cut out the single-story, three-bedroom market. Commissioner Lawrence and Commissioner Stenberg agreed.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Semling's motion and Commissioner Stenberg's second, the Planning Commission approved the 12 variances as recommended by staff. [Ayes: Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Stenberg, Vice Chair Cary; Nays: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Webster]

Motion: Upon Vice Chair Cary's motion and Commissioner Cohen's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Chair to sign the Findings & Conclusions once prepared. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Stenberg, Commissioner Webster, Vice Chair Cary; Nays: None]

5) Discussion Items

5.A Riverfront District Architectural Guidelines Recommendation - New Sign at 298 S. 1st Street

Commissioner Cohen said he loved the sign when he first reviewed it. Commissioner Webster loved it too. Commissioner Cohen said this would be the first sign that is hanging (projecting). It would be the only hanging sign on South 1st Street, which mostly has window signage. Chair Hubbard noted the Big River Bistro has a sign that hangs out from the building. Vice Chair Cary likes it.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Cohen's motion and Commissioner Webster's second, the Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of the Sign Permit at 298 S. 1st Street as presented. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Stenberg, Commissioner Webster, Vice Chair Cary; Nays: None]

5.B CLG Historic Preservation Grant Selection Criteria

Associate Planner Dimsho explained that at the last meeting, the Commission discussed the upcoming grant cycle for the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program. The City anticipates one \$11,500 award and the Commission will use the selection criteria included in the packet in June 2019 to decide who should receive the grant. Graichen said two new criterion were added: financial capacity to match the grant and ability to complete the project on time. He said we also recalibrated the points to add to 30 points total. The Commission likes the additions and had no additional criteria to add.

6) Acceptance Agenda: Planning Administrator Site Design Review

Motion: Upon Commissioner Cohen's motion and Commissioner Webster's second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Acceptance Agenda: Planning Administrator Site Design Review. [AYES: Commissioner Cohen, Commissioner Lawrence, Commissioner Semling, Commissioner Stenberg, Commissioner Webster, Vice Chair Cary; Nays: None]

7) Planning Director Decisions

Vice Chair Cary asked Graichen for clarification on the Final Plat for Elk Ridge Estates Phase 6.

8) Planning Department Activity Report **8.A February Planning Department Report**

There were no comments.

9) For Your Information Items

Commissioner Stenberg asked about the project near the DMV. Graichen said they are working through enforcement issues with the DEQ now. Chair Hubbard asked about the status of the Sand Island lease with the St. Helens Marina. Councilor Carlson said that edits were made to a draft lease at the last City Council meeting. They are close to final approval.

10) Next Regular Meeting - April 9, 2019

11) Adjournment

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jennifer Dimsho
Associate Planner*