



CITY OF  
**TOPEKA**

## TOPEKA PLANNING COMMISSION

**Monday, August 17, 2020**

**6:00PM – VIDEO CONFERENCE**

### **CASE MINUTES**

**Members present:** Brian Armstrong (Chair), Marc Fried, Corey Dehn, Wiley Kannarr, Jim Kaup, Katrina Ringler, Matt Werner (7)

**Members Absent:** Corliss Lawson, Ariane Messina (2)

**Staff Present:** Bill Fiander, Planning & Development Director; Mike Hall, Current Planning Manager; Annie Driver, Planner; Kris Wagers, Administrative Officer; Mary Feighny, Legal

#### **Declaration of conflict of interest/ex parte communications by members of the commission or staff –**

Mr. Dehn stated he has been working with the applicant on Z20/02 so he would mute as the case is considered and abstain from voting.

#### **Action Item**

**Z20/02 by Flywheel Fairlawn, LLC**, requesting to amend the district zoning map on property located at 605 SW Fairlawn Road from C-4 Commercial District to M-3 Multiple Family Dwelling District to allow for use of the existing hotel property as residential apartments.

As the case was called by Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Dehn muted his audio and video feed.

Ms. Driver presented the staff report and staff recommendation of approval.

Greg Schwerdt of Schwerdt Design Group spoke representing the applicant. Mr. Schwerdt stated that the “workforce” housing concept is new and catching on quickly across the country. Flywheel is also looking at four other properties, as well the building behind the one in question, to potentially expand the current project if it is successful. He stated he would stand for questions.

Mr. Kaup asked what landscaping is proposed and Mr. Schwerdt stated they would meet any requirements of the City of Topeka landscaping ordinance. They intend to put up a decorative fence and if they have room, soften the area in the parking lot with more green space. He also noted that there is a large green space between this property and the property behind, which they currently have under contract.

With no additional questions from commissioners, Mr. Armstrong **declared the floor open for public comment.**

Councilperson Michael Lesser spoke in favor of the project, stating that he’s excited to see investment in the area and transformation of the property, especially as it fits into the recently completed housing study. Affordable housing, which has been a Council initiative for the past few years, will be a positive outcome of the project.

David Davis spoke, asking if there had been studies done on the net effect of housing projects such as

this one. As a property owner he is concerned about property values. He later asked if there had been a traffic study done.

Mr. Schwerdt explained that the applicant is completing a similar project in Branson, Missouri. He stated it was welcomed by the city. It is a relatively new concept that helps meet a housing need in great demand. Other projects similar to this are in progress in Alabama, Ohio and Michigan and in each instance he believes that enhancements being made and needs being met are preferable to a property being left vacant to deteriorate. Mr. Hall later noted that a vacant building will deteriorate and have a negative impact on the area.

Regarding the question about a traffic study, Ms. Driver explained that the project was reviewed by the City's traffic engineer and no study was required by her. Mr. Hall added that the property is currently zoned C-4, which allows a much higher level of intensity than the requested zoning. Mr. Fiander stated that the proposed use have less traffic than a hotel or other commercial use that would be allowed. Further, is anticipated that a number of the residents will rely on public transportation and there is a TMTA transit route at 6<sup>th</sup> & Fairlawn, adequate sidewalks, pedestrian-ways, and bike routes already in place in the area.

Mr. Armstrong stated that he received comments earlier in the day from a former councilperson who expressed reservations about the project. He is concerned that the project will "hasten the already existing decline" of the 600-700 blocks of Fairlawn. He recognizes that allowing the building to remain empty has its own set of problems, but using it for a low-income residential housing facility isn't the answer.

Mary Lou Weidenbach spoke representing the Gage Park West Neighborhood Watch. Ms. Weidenbach expressed concern about a series of crimes the neighborhood experienced earlier in the year. Neighbors were under the impression they were committed by some men who had broken into the hotel. Neighbors are concerned about who will be running the facility and the qualifications of those applying to live there.

Mr. Schwerdt explained that the property owners have for the past 3 years employed an on-site caretaker and in that time there have been no break-ins or criminal property damage. The owners have, he said, done everything they can to maintain the quality of the property. He added that they cannot do this forever and once the caretaker leaves the property, if un-used, it will deteriorate.

Mr. Schwerdt noted that this is not subsidized housing but rather market-rate apartments and background checks will be run on applicants. One of the Flywheel Fairlawn, LLC partners has a large property management company that manages apartments all over the country. It will be professionally managed with a manager on site, maintenance people, etc.

With nobody else logged in to speak, Mr. Armstrong declared the **public comment period closed**.

Mr. Armstrong asked Ms. Driver to explain the term "workforce housing" and Ms. Driver explained that this is a term introduced in the recently completed housing study. She stated that it is geared toward those with an income range from 60% to 120% of the area's median income. It differs from "affordable housing" which is defined as being for those with an income of less than 60% of the median income. Mr. Fiander noted that in this neighborhood, it would be an income of between \$33,000 & \$66,000/year for a typical 2-person household.

**Motion** by Mr. Kaup to recommend to the Governing Body approval of the reclassification of the property from "C-4" Commercial District to "M-3" Multiple Family Dwelling District; **second** by Mr. Kannarr.

**APPROVED** 6-0-1 with Mr. Dehn abstaining.