

**Mt. Pleasant Planning Commission
Minutes of the Work Session Meeting
September 7, 2023**

I. Hoenig called the meeting to order at 7:29 p.m.

Present: Devenney, Friedrich, Hoenig, Kingsworthy, Liesch, Nicholas, Ortman
Absent: Haveles, Irwin

Staff: Manuela Powidayko, Laura Delamater

II. Building standard requirements:

Powidayko presented the topic of building standard requirements in commercial districts and the (5) five categories that she wanted to discuss:

1. Front setback rules
2. Off-street parking location
3. Minimum frontage buildout rules
4. Regulations governing the interior of buildings
5. CD-5 district designation along south of Mission

Powidayko discussed Front Setback Rules and the different regulations for a Corner Lot and a Mid-Block Lot. Powidayko provided some examples and presented a diagram and the Proposed Text Amendment:

Allow corner lots in CD-5 districts (except in Downtown) to have buildings setback up to 15 feet from the front lot line consistently with how mid-block lot rules work today.

Discussion took place.

Powidayko noted that Staff also flagged that Mission's right-of-way (ROW) varies greatly, therefore building placement is currently inconsistent along the corridor since front setbacks are currently being measured from the front lot line. The text also does not clarify how setbacks are measured in the case of mapped easements. Powidayko presented the following Proposed Text Amendment:

Require a minimum front setback where the ROW is narrower than 100 feet (all sections of Mission, except below Preston) so MDOT can more easily accommodate Mission Street's reconstruction as a multimodal route.

Staff can also propose to map sidewalk easements when projects come forward to facilitate such process in the future.

Discussion took place. The consensus of the commissioners was in favor of the proposed changes.

Powidayko presented the next topic of Off-street parking location, showing a diagram and explaining that parking cannot be located in front of buildings (1st lot layer) or along the side of buildings, within 20 feet from the façade (2nd lot layer), but only towards the back of the property (3rd lot layer).

Powidayko provided photos and explained that parking lots in front of buildings is still a common condition. However, zoning requires at least 39 feet for one row of parking, therefore allowing parking in front of buildings would only be possible if the City allowed buildings to setback 40 or more feet from the front lot line (which would be in consistent with the Master Plan, which is as it is trying to bring buildings closer to the street with parking being placed behind it, to create a more walkable environment).

Powidayko provided the Proposed Text Amendment:

Allow off-street parking within the 2nd lot layer to accommodate parking along the side of buildings (but not in front of buildings). This change provides a middle-ground solution to have a portion of the parking areas/lots being visible from the street while not pushing buildings far from the street and sidewalk. Parking screening would still be required and would ensure a high-quality pedestrian environment.

Discussion took place. The majority of the commissioners were not in favor of the change.

Powidayko introduced the next topic of Minimum frontage buildout rules and setback. The building's façade must occupy at least 60% of the Principal Frontage to ensure that buildings are the prominent feature of a development.

A Streetscreen (evergreen hedge or brick wall that is placed along the same plane as the Façade) may substitute up to 20% of the applicable Frontage Buildout requirement.

Aside from such frontage control, CD-5 districts also set a maximum side setback requirement (24 feet).

Powidayko provided photos of the issue and noted that stakeholders noted that these rules often pose conflicts with parking and driveway entrances, while requiring footprints that are larger than what the market wants (e.g. bank/restaurant drive-throughs or chain restaurants) or a building orientation that is different than what developers would like to propose.

Powidayko provided information of how the 60% frontage buildout and 24-foot maximum side setback requirements impact the 170 properties along Mission Street differently, depending upon the lot width: in ¼ of cases, such rules hinder the ability to fit two-way driveways, and in most cases (65%) rules require building footprints to even exceed the 60% buildout requirement.

Discussion took place.

Powidayko discussed another issue where the ordinance is also unclear about how the buildout rule impacts corner lots and if it applies only along the Principal Frontage or along all Frontages (which would hinder the ability to provide parking along corners).

Discussion took place.

Powidayko provided the following Proposed Text Amendment:

Remove the maximum (24-foot) side setback requirement while maintaining the 60% frontage buildout rule to give flexibility with building placement while still requiring a significant portion of the lot to be occupied by a building;

Consider allowing a reduction in the 60% buildout rule if the applicant can demonstrate that more space is needed to create access and if combining driveways with a neighboring property or providing cross access connection is not possible.

Discussion took place. It was the consensus that the commission was in support for the principal frontage clarification for the 60% buildout rule. The group requested more information on the 24-foot side setback in CD-5. It would be helpful to show examples of what it would look like if such requirement was deleted from the ordinance.

Powidayko introduced the topic of Regulations governing the interior of buildings, stating that a minimum of two stories are required within the 2nd lot layer (first 20' of the building) for properties located within CD-5 districts.

Ceiling heights are required to be at least 11 feet within both commercial districts (CD-4 and CD-5).

Powidayko stated that the participants noted that the current market has the majority of proposed uses not needing more than one story and/or high ceilings. Staff noted that several developers and real estate agents have called noting that the two-story requirement has been the main reason for businesses not wanting to come to Mt. Pleasant even though they see the market here (proximity to CMU and the student population, traffic volume along Mission, etc.).

Powidayko provided the following Proposed Text Amendment:

Replace CD-5's minimum two-story requirement to instead require building facades to be at least 24 feet in height along the street, as advised by the Congress for the New Urbanism, with buildings behind those facing a street having the flexibility to be shorter.

Discussion took place. The consensus was to allow the height requirement, but not have the floor requirement.

Powidayko introduced the topic of CD-5 district designation along South of Mission. Potential investors are under the impression that the City's plan is to recreate an environment that would compete with Downtown as opposed to complement it (due to the same zoning designation in Downtown and Mission St.) and that such modern boulevard plan will significantly reduce the traffic count along Mission, which has been the main selling point for those wanting to open businesses along the corridor.

Powidayko presented a Proposed Text Amendment:

Considering the future of retail (increasing on-line shopping while offsetting the focus of physical shopping experience) and its additional needs (fulfillment centers), a new zoning district designation could be created to better serve the current context and needs along Mission Street while setting it up for the future.

Powidayko noted that before proceeding with such zoning changes, staff suggests that the Planning Commission consider updates to the Mast Plan.

Discussion took place. It was the consensus of the commission wait awhile longer to see how the current ordinance works out.

Powidayko introduced the next issue regarding Right of Ways (ROW). Property owners are concerned that the section showing Mission's modern boulevard plan cannot fit within the ROW, which ranges from 70 to 150 feet, and believe that the State would need to acquire private property to proceed with the reconstruction. Powidayko noted that the minimum needed is 103 feet. Powidayko noted that MDOT committed to do a study on Mission this year to figure out the current traffic patterns.

Powidayko noted that the ultimate goal is to turn Mission into a multimodal route with enhanced streetscape that adds value to the corridor and to private property and not to deter future private investment or have traffic being rerouted to other north-south streets (such as Isabella Road). Therefore, staff agrees that the modern boulevard concept as laid out in the master plan may reduce traffic counts and the City must discuss this consequence with the public to get everyone's input. Commission requested information from MDOT of what the minimum threshold vehicle count per day to be a business route/loop.

Discussion took place.

Powidayko presented the next issue. Engineering and Planning share the concern that the Master Plan vision will be very hard (if not impossible) to implement due to the limitations of the ROW and potential negative affects to the city’s economic development. Alternative designs could include (1) a shared ped/bike path to achieve the goal of a complete street and (2) the removal of on-street parking to reduce the required ROW. Minimum needed would be 86 feet (instead of 103 feet).

Discussed took place about the remaining two items on the agenda (“Floating overlay district to permit departures from the form-based code for certain auto-oriented or large format uses such as drive-through businesses, gas stations, or big box retailers”, and “required stacking for drive through establishments”). It was the consensus of the group to table those topics at this time.

III. Adjournment

Motion by Friedrich, support by Devenney to adjourn.

Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

lkd