

Cedar Falls Planning and Zoning Commission Work Session

**February 24, 2021
City Hall with Videoconference
Cedar Falls, Iowa**

The Cedar Falls Planning and Zoning Commission met in special work session on February 24, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in person and by videoconference. The following Commission members were present: Hartley, Holst, Larson, Leeper, Lynch, Saul, Schrad, and Sears. Prideaux was absent. Stephanie Houk Sheetz, Director of Community Development, Karen Howard, Community Services Manager, and Michelle Pezley, Planner III were also present.

Mr. Leeper opened the work session. Ms. Howard noted that a hard copy of proposed new code was provided to each Commissioner and explained that the staff broke down the review of code into four work sessions for the next four weeks. She asked the Commission for questions and what topics they want to focus on.

Mr. Leeper asked what the process timeframe for this to be adopted. Ms. Howard said that they are giving the public a month to review the code amendments. Staff is also meeting to go over the code with Community Main Street and have also offered work sessions for development professionals in the community to discuss and ask any questions. Staff has allotted three dates for the Planning and Zoning Commission to hold a series of public hearings beginning on March 24. She said that timeframe is adjustable based on how quickly the Commission would like to move forward. Once the Planning and Zoning Commission makes the recommendation to the City Council, there will be a presentation of the Commission's recommended draft to the City Council at a Committee of the Whole meeting. City Council will have the opportunity to hold work sessions, as needed. The code amendments and rezoning will take three separate votes at City Council; staff is anticipating mid to late summer before the code is adopted.

Mr. Leeper asked for a general rundown of the impact to the general public once the code is adopted. Ms. Howard stated that the code is intended to implement the provisions of the *Imagine Downtown! Vision Plan*. The code update will provide specific standards to make a clear and objective code so that it is clear to both the developers and to the public what is expected. This will also allow most projects to be approved administratively. The process time will be reduced as not every application will go before the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council.

Mr. Leeper asked when the last code updated in this area was done. Ms. Howard pointed out the original code was adopted in the 1970's and there has been layers of amendments making the code a patchwork of amendments over the years. Consequently, the code is ambiguous in places, with conflicting provisions in others, making it difficult to use and understand.

Geoff Ferrell, with Ferrell Madden joined the meeting by videoconference. Mr. Ferrell went over the three parts to the proposed form based code: Regulating Plan (organize by frontages), building forms standards, and architectural standards. The Regulating Plan and form-based code provides more clear and objectives standards, but also more flexibility to fine tune the zoning to the different character areas identified in the vision plan.

Ms. Saul asked how this code looks at uses. Mr. Ferrell pointed out that the use definitions are more general and there are more uses under those definitions. There are some building frontages that have more prescriptive or limited uses, such on Main Street where retail is allowed along the front façade and other uses are allowed in other floors or the back of building. Ms. Saul pointed out that she found the uses listed on page 92 and Mr. Ferrell also pointed to page 31.

Mr. Leeper asked if there are variations of the form based code around the country and how do they differ. Mr. Ferrell said there are many examples of form based codes in the country and they vary based on who is drafting the code. There are some form based codes that are very detailed and little flexibility while others provide more flexibility.

Ms. Saul asked how other cities or developers receive the form based codes. Mr. Ferrell thought that the form based codes are well received. There maybe a few people that don't like it at first but once they go through the process once, they find that they like the code. The code provides a path to move forward with a project with clear standards. If you meet the standards, the project is approved.

Mr. Hartley asked if form based codes stimulate development. Mr. Ferrell had seen where the form base codes, once adopted, stimulated development; as most form based codes provide more flexibility than standard codes. Ms. Howard pointed out when the City was working on the Vision Plan; the consultant team had an economist as part of the team to look at the market in Cedar Falls. That person looked at what needed recalibrating to encourage development and to make sure that vision was attainable.

Ms. Saul stated that the new code requires hiding the utilities. Have the utility company been contacted with this code provision? Mr. Ferrell said that the utilities were consulted and he stated that they will be consulted again before this process is over. Ms. Howard pointed out that Cedar Falls Utilities have been great to work with.

Mr. Leeper asked what the Commission should be mindful of in their review. Mr. Ferrell thought it was important to walk through the code and want to make sure the public sees how it all fits together; how design is different; and it is a different way of thinking. Ms. Howard pointed out that there is a lot a little details that could become overwhelming topics. Mr. Ferrell said that asking questions are the key. Ms. Howard added that the City is working with Community Main Street and developers with their own work sessions to make sure that the code fits Cedar Falls. She also noted that once we see how the code works in action, tweaks can always be made in the future.

Ms. Saul asked why a garage door is not allowed on the storefront on Main Street. Mr. Ferrell said it is about quality that the City wants within Main Street and there are better ways to connect the interior space with the outside.

Ms. Saul stated that she has been able to travel internationally and did not understand the requirement to have a one to three feet wall from the ground to limit foot traffic into a Main Street retail space. Ms. Howard noted that that the restriction on using garage doors was limited to the designated storefront frontages along the parkade to ensure that the traditional storefronts and historic character is maintained. Community Main Street and other indicated the importance of preserving the historic character of downtown. This restriction is intended to further that goal of the vision plan. She noted that most traditional storefront configurations include a short knee wall below the large display windows. Ms. Saul stated that she was also

interested on how this plan will help protect the historic character of downtown and that answered that question.

Mr. Larson asked if the property owner would like to make improvements to an existing building or change the use of the building, what triggers the review process and how does grandfathering fit in. Ms. Howard stated that the last work session will review a “trigger” chart that will answer this question. She said the main point is it will depend on what the property owner is proposing to do. Generally, the goal is as properties are improved over time they are brought closer into compliance with the new code requirements.

Larson asked how it was decided where the different frontage designations were placed on the regulating plan. Howard explained how the adopted Vision Plan has a lot of detail regarding the existing character of each area and where the transition between different frontages would be located. The code is intended to implement the plan. She continued and highlighted that the code provides the neighborhood manners section for those transition spaces and provide protections for single family residences for new development does not loom over them. Mr. Larson thought the code should be mindful of existing commercial uses around Overman Park and along Clay Street.

Ms. Saul asked for clarification regarding the “civic buildings” shown on the regulating plan and how they were treated differently. Mr. Farrell stated that the team was careful to define and regulate civic buildings because these institutional buildings are different by design and function and should not be tied to the same rules as other uses. They are meant to stand out and be special buildings. Ms. Saul asked if there is room to build a new civic building at a new location. Mr. Ferrell stated that it is possible but they would need to go through the rezoning process to change the designation on the Regulating Plan map.

Mr. Larson asked about the changing the frontage types on the Regulating Plan. Ms. Howard pointed out that if there is someone that would like to change the Regulating Plan, they would have to go through a rezoning process. A subdivision would be required if new streets need to be created; the property owner will have to rezone the property as well. Mr. Ferrell added that the Vision Plan looked very carefully of the frontage types based on the existing uses and pointed out that at the transitional line between the two frontages; is flexible within 30 feet of that transition line. Larson asked that if someone wanted to move the transitional line more than 30 feet then the property owner would require a rezoning process. Mr. Ferrell agreed and he pointed out that the transitional line between small neighborhood frontage and urban frontage would be harder to change.

Mr. Larson asked about the special condition that is noted within the Regulating Plan key and asked for an explanation for how does that apply. Mr. Ferrell pointed out that there are only two scenarios in which the special condition applies. He showed on the map where there is a corner lot is along a street and alley within the commercial frontages. There is a special provision that the parking minimum line may be reduced if the parking is behind a building wall. The other special condition is in a neighborhood frontage type where a property is on the corner of the alley and the street. The property owner may move closer to the property line if the parking is within a garage.

Mr. Larson asked when it would be appropriate to bring up the boundary line between districts. Ms. Howard said at any time during their work sessions. Mr. Larson asked about the few houses along Franklin Street around Overman Park has businesses within the residences. Ms. Howard pointed out that the Vision Plan looked very closely at that area and the current regulations do not allow new residential uses in the existing zoning district, even though the

existing buildings were originally built as houses. The proposed code would allow these original structures to be re-used again as housing or be redeveloped as new housing. Ms. Sheetz pointed out that the City received public comment regarding that area to be able to build new single family residences in that area. Mr. Larson recommended looking closer at that area to allow the existing businesses to remain.

Ms. Howard asked the Commission if there is anything that they would like to focus during one of the work sessions to let her know. She also told the Commission that she would send all the remaining work session agendas to the Commissioners so they can see what is being proposed when. Ms. Saul mentioned that parking will be one topic in which they will focus.

As there were no further comments, Mr. Leeper asked for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Lynch made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Saul seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously with 8 ayes (Hartley, Holst, Larson, Leeper, Lynch, Saul, Schrad, and Sears), and 0 nays. The meeting was adjourned at 8:12PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Karen Howard
Planning & Community Services Manager



Joanne Goodrich Community
Administrative Assistant