

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
CITY OF RAMSEY  
ANOKA COUNTY  
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey Planning Commission conducted a worksession meeting on Thursday, July 9, 2020, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present:                   Chairperson Randy Bauer  
  Commissioner Bruce Anderson  
  Commissioner Cheri Gengler  
  Commissioner Torrey Johnson  
  Commissioner Gary VanScoy  
  Commissioner Matt Woestehoff

Members Absent:                   Commissioner Eric Peters

Also Present:                       Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill  
  Senior Planner Chloe McGuire Brigl  
  City Council Liaison Debra Musgrove

**1.     CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Bauer called the regular meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**2.     TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

None.

**2.01:   Discuss Trott Brook North Small Area Planning Framework**

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated that the purpose of this case is to provide very high-level policy direction pertaining to a potential development project north of Trott Brook, west of Nowthen Boulevard, and east of Variolite Street on the Makowsky property. This is not a formal application nor official development review. The intent is to provide staff with direction on key policy points to assist staff in reviewing concepts with the Excelsior Group, the potential developer. As is commonplace, there will be significant opportunities for ongoing public engagement throughout this process moving forward.

Councilmember Musgrove summarized the Council consensus, noting that the Council respected the Comprehensive Plan process and the identification of 80-foot-wide lots for that property.

Chairperson Bauer stated that the Commission discussed a proposal at the May meeting which included three different size lots, noting that the Commission was not comfortable with that mix of lot sizes and directed the developer to work with staff on 65 foot wide lots on the interior of the

development and 80 foot wide lots around the exterior. He stated that there has been interest and a desire for smaller lots within the City. He commented that the Riverstone development he lives in has smaller lots and there is a high demand for those smaller lots. He noted that the Riverstone development, however, is bordered by other uses that fit better with that type of use. He stated that the subject property is bordered by developments with 80-foot-wide lots or lots of over one acre and therefore the City Council was not open to development of lots any smaller than 80 feet wide.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he supports the direction of the City Council and does not see a reason the zoning should be changed. He noted that there are other areas of the City zoned for smaller lots. He stated that many residents spoke in opposition of this request and he believes that the Planning Commission should support those voices of the community.

Commissioner Anderson also agreed and commented that 80-foot-wide lots should be considered the minimum lot size because of the larger lot sizes in this area.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that he would not disagree that the lots should be 80 feet wide but was a little disappointed that the Council did not want to compromise at all. He noted that given that information though, he would support the decision of the Council to require, at minimum, 80-foot-wide lots.

Commissioner Gengler stated that she would like to advocate for some flexibility. She understood that this is designated as a single-family residential area, but as time and consumer demands evolve and change, it would be wise to have the best mix of housing for current and potential Ramsey residents. She stated that she does not have an issue with having a small mix of 65 foot lots in the interior of the development but also understood that she is in the minority and that the Council has provided its direction.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that he supported requiring 80-foot lots to begin with as there was a lot of thought put into the transition between the urban and rural areas. He stated that it is his understanding that the City Council considered all three options and chose to require 80-foot-wide lots. He stated that he is concerned that something went to the City Council, a decision was made, and yet this is back before the Commission for consideration again. He stated that from a process perspective it seems odd to have this discussion again. He stated that he supports the City Council decision and is not interested in rezoning in this area.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she has heard the comment before that the market does not have demand for 80-foot lots but noted that the lots continue to sell. She stated that people are looking at Ramsey because of the rural character and will want the larger lots in this community.

Chairperson Bauer invited the developer to provide any comments.

Ben Schmidt, Excelsior Group, stated that he does not have much to add to the discussion tonight. He stated that they did listen to the comments of the Planning Commission and City Council but heard a little bit of a mixed message. He stated that the Commission seemed to be willing to look at a mix of lots and therefore thought it would be appropriate to come back and see if there would

be interest in that mix. He stated that from the comments tonight, it is clear that there is not support for a mix of lots sizes.

Commissioner Woestehoff asked the developer if they are going to entertain a development with 80-foot-wide lots on the site.

Mr. Schmidt stated that he is unsure if they will attempt to proceed with 80-foot-wide lots on the site as he is unsure that they would gain the velocity in Ramsey with larger, more expensive lots in Ramsey.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that one of his concerns is that there are probably few developers that would take on a project this size with 80 foot lots and therefore the potential would be that the parcel could be split into two and developed by different developers.

Commissioner Johnson stated that Brookfield has 80-foot lots or larger and sold quickly and was unsure why there would be any issues.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that Brookfield started in 2005 and had eight subdivisions over ten to 15 years with more than one developer. He stated that another example would be Woodlands, which continues to sell but not at the same pace as Riverstone.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated that staff has heard from the developer and property owner have stated that 65 foot lots are becoming more popular in the market. She stated that for Brookfield, the 80 foot lots were created because that is what was popular at the time. She displayed the potential compromise from the developer and property owner that show the 65 foot lots in the middle and the larger lots on the exterior of the development.

Chairperson Bauer invited members of the public to provide input.

Lee Packer, relative of the property owner, stated that it seems the City has made its decision. He stated that he was hoping that there would be some room for negotiations. He stated that while at one time the property was successful for farming, it no longer is. He stated that his aunt and uncle, the property owners, are aging and would like to move on and sell the land. He stated that it has been their desire to sell the land for some time and his family was willing to donate land for a larger community park. He stated that he understands that there have been resident comments in opposition but noted that there was some misinformation related to the original petition. He stated that their goal is to have something developed that would be of value to the City and the residents that would live in the new homes. He reviewed language found within the Maxwell Study the City previously commissioned that mentioned formation of a task force to provide direction on the Trott Brook North area. He asked the City to reconsider the plan and work with the developer to compromise on a plan for the property. He referenced the barns on the property which were mentioned to possibly be included in the park and noted that the barns will continue to deteriorate over time and if this development proposal does not move forward, he is unsure when the next interested party will come.

Jake Packer, relative of property owner, stated that it seems the Commission has made up its mind as to the direction for the property. He stated that they submitted a letter to the Council and Commissions in order to articulate their concerns. He stated that they are sympathetic to the concerns expressed by residents but also believe that the concerns and rights of the landowner have merit. He stated that of the 200 acres within Trott Brook North area, the Makowsky family owns approximately 160 acres and has lived on the land for the past 106 years with over 40 family members that have an interest in the land today. He stated that they feel as landowners that they should be able to maximize the value of the land. He explained that the sale price of the land is directly tied to the ability to develop the land. He stated that without flexibility, they will not receive the same type of interest. He stated that the developers they have spoken with are not interested in all 80 foot lots for a property that large. He stated that buyers desire a variety of housing types and having a mix of lot sizes would give buyers different opportunities.

John Packer, relative of property owner, stated that this development would greatly expand the park and trail system. He stated that the initial plan proposed 77 acres of land along with the family barns on the property. He stated that if there is not a compromise on lot sizes, many of the community features may be lost. He stated that this land has been slated for development for years and the majority of concern expressed by residents was related to development in general and not the lot sizes. He stated that they have a hard time understanding how this is fair to the landowners. He asked that the Commission consider a compromise that would consider the landowner rights.

Commissioner Johnson stated that there are developments with 80-foot lots that have sold homes.

Mr. Packer commented that development was developed in the early 2000's and the market demands have changed since that time.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he does not support the statement that 80 foot lots are not sellable. He stated that he would need to see hard numbers in order to reconsider.

Mr. Packer stated that he is unsure if Excelsior will move forward with 80-foot lots and if that developer backs out, that takes away the option for the landowners. He stated that his family have paid the taxes on the property for 106 years and would like consideration of their rights as landowners.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that the Commission suggested a compromise which was denied by the City Council. He stated that the Commission provided the opportunity and the Council made a clear decision on requiring 80-foot lots.

Commissioner Johnson stated that he wants to be respectful to the landowner but also the neighbors that exist in that area.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that he appreciates the comments from the Packers. He stated that from a strategic element, the City is looking to maintain a mix of rural and urban development and the intent is to place the smaller lots closer to The COR and Highway 10 and maintain the larger more rural lots as you move away from that corridor.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the Packers have thought of using the barn to make revenue, such as renting it as a meeting or for weddings.

Mr. Packer commented that there are too many relatives in the mix to agree on something like that and therefore the decision was made to sell the property.

Commissioner Johnson thanked the Packers for coming tonight and providing input.

Brian Walker, 17289 Variolite St NW, stated that no one thinks that this property will not be developed. He stated that the residents in that area understand that the property will someday be developed. He explained that people that live in that area, purchased their homes because they wanted to be in an area with a rural character. He stated that he would support some kind of compromise but was unsure what that would look like. He stated that the residents in that area simply want to protect the rural feel.

Commissioner Woestehoff stated that Mr. Walker previous spoke against 55- and 65-foot lots but now has mentioned a compromise. He asked what that would look like to Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker stated that 55 foot lots would never be supported by the residents in that area and was unsure that 65 foot lots would be supported either. He stated that perhaps lots larger than 80 feet are around the exterior of the development with some smaller lots on the interior of the development. He stated that he does have sympathy for the landowners but also knows that the residents in that area want to protect the rural feel of that area.

Chairperson Bauer commented that when the Planning Commission discussed this in May, the group was split on whether to support the original proposal by the developer but ultimately expressed support for the developer to work with staff on a mix of lots. He stated that since that time, the City Council reviewed the rezoning request and did not support a rezoning, therefore lots of under 80 feet would not be supported on the property. He stated there is nothing the Planning Commission could do without that rezoning. He asked if the developer could ask the City Council to reconsider the rezoning request.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that the developer/property owner cannot make the same request. He stated that the request was simply the rezoning and therefore that request cannot be brought back for at least one year. He stated that something different could come forward, such as a proposal that includes only 80-foot-wide lots.

Commissioner Woestehoff asked if the Council had a good understanding of the options and lot sizes. He stated that he likes the idea of the outer ring having larger lots. He noted that the originally proposed density was lower than the allowed density for the property. He wanted to ensure that the details of the request did not get lost in the passion of the comments from the residents that spoke.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she believes that the Council did have an understanding of the various options within the case. She stated that the strongest point was the Comprehensive

Plan and the identification of that land within the plan, along with the desire to keep that area of Ramsey more rural.

Chairperson Bauer stated that with the action the City Council took, there is nothing the Planning Commission could do. He stated that the developer could work with the residents in the area to come to an agreement and could then go before the Council together to ask the Council to reconsider.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl suggested, and confirmed the consensus of the Commission, to remove this item from the regular agenda tonight given the consensus of the discussion tonight.

### **3. ADJOURNMENT**

The worksession meeting of the Planning Commission adjourned at 6:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tim Gladhill  
Community Development Director

ATTEST:

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JoAnn Shaw  
Community Development Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*