

**ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY BOARD
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

On Monday, October 17, 2022, the Environmental Policy Board (EPB) met in the Council Chambers at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive N.W., Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Laura Moore
 Board Member Todd Arts
 Board Member Reid Bernard
 Board Member Melissa Fetterley
 Board Member Michael Hiatt
 Board Member Jared Little

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Senior Planner Chris Anderson
 City Council Liaison Chelsee Howell

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Moore called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Board Member Little and seconded by Board Member Bernard to approve the agenda as submitted.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Moore, Board Member Little, Bernard, Arts, Fetterley, and Hiatt. Voting No: None. Absent: None.

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve Meeting Minutes Dated September 19, 2022

Motion by Board Member Hiatt and seconded by Board Member Fetterley to approve the regular meeting minutes dated September 19, 2022.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Moore, Board Member Hiatt, Fetterley, Arts, Bernard, and Little. Voting No: None. Absent: None.

5. POLICY BOARD BUSINESS

5.01: Consider Natural Resources Aspects Related to a Proposed Major Plat Known as Cedar Acres (Project No. 22-136): Case of Tom Dehn

Senior Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that the City has received an application from Tom Dehn for a proposed three lot subdivision known as Cedar Acres. The proposal is to split the property located at 15060 Armstrong Boulevard into three parcels. The existing home would retain its access from Armstrong Boulevard while the two new lots would gain access from the extension of the existing 151st Lane cul-de-sac. Due to the extension of a public road, this application is being processed as a Major Plat (it otherwise would have been processed as a Minor Plat, which would have only been received by City staff and City Council).

Board Member Hiatt asked if this development is within the MUSA or would use well/septic.

Senior Planner Anderson replied that this property would be served by private well and septic systems as it is not within the MUSA service area. He identified the primary and secondary locations for septic for the lots as proposed within the plat.

Board Member Hiatt asked if the lot sizes require a variance.

Senior Planner Anderson confirmed that part of the application is a variance request from the minimum lot size. He noted that all of the lots to the west are similar in size and therefore these lots would fit within the existing character of the neighborhood. He stated that the Planning Commission would review these requests at its October meeting.

Board Member Little asked for details on the elm trees mentioned.

Senior Planner Anderson replied that generally speaking any of the elms would be Siberian elm.

Motion by Board Member Little and seconded by Board Member Hiatt to recommend approval of the Tree Inventory and Preservation Plan.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Moore, Board Member Little, Hiatt, Arts, Bernard, and Fetterley. Voting No: None. Absent: None.

5.02: Discussion Item: Density Transitioning Standards

Senior Planner Anderson presented the staff report. He stated that over the coming months, Planning staff will be bringing forth various discussion topics to the Planning Commission to consider potential updates to the Zoning Code (needed to ensure that the Zoning Code successfully achieves the intended outcomes of the Comprehensive Plan). One such topic is density transitioning, which is required when a higher density development is proposed adjacent to an existing lower density neighborhood. While there are multiple options to satisfy density transitioning, landscaping (or preservation of existing trees) is almost always the tool utilized. However, there are challenges with the current density transitioning standards and ideally, the standards could be modified to alleviate some of the more common issues.

Chairperson Moore commented that the photos within the case help to provide a comparison between what happens in person versus what it looks like on paper. She commented that there

would be merit in reviewing on a case-by-case basis. She recognized that when properties are mass graded, most of the trees are removed in order to grade the property and add the minimal number of trees. She stated that she would prioritize keeping existing vegetation. She referenced a case where an HOA dissolves after a set period of time and asked what would occur to the HOA owned/maintained property.

Senior Planner Anderson commented that in the scenario in the case, there was not an abundance of tree removal that occurred prior to development. He commented that while there was some tree removal, most were not high-quality trees and there was not an abundance of vegetation on the site. He explained that if an HOA were to go defunct and does not pay the property taxes on the HOA owned properties it would go the route of tax forfeit and then could end up in anyone's hands. He stated that situation has occurred in the past and the adjacent homeowner purchased the HOA owned lot, which created an odd shaped lot. He commented that while the City and/or County would have the option to acquire a tax forfeit lot, most HOA lots are unusable and therefore it would not be an asset to the City.

Board Member Hiatt commented that it seems when natural transitions are proposed, such as trees and berms, that occurs more over time. He stated that perhaps that transition should be required to provide that screen within a set period of time. He noted that a fence or wall provides instant transition, whereas vegetation takes years to accomplish that goal. He was unsure that they would want to go on a case-by-case basis but agreed that there should be flexibility to work with what exists on the site. He asked if there are other examples from cities in terms of regulation to use as an example.

Senior Planner Anderson commented that he had not yet done that research but has been contacted by staff working for another community that is in the process of doing that research and will be sharing that information. He stated that while case by case review might sound like a good idea, there still needs to be minimum standards within City Code.

Board Member Hiatt asked if it would make sense to have a target date for the screening to be provided, recognizing that will not occur in six months to one year.

Senior Planner Anderson replied that could be part of the discussion. He stated that it would be hard to expect immediate screening, but if it takes ten years it would seem that protection of the existing neighborhood has not happened.

Board Member Hiatt commented that as the discussion continues, he believes that target date should be kept in mind. He noted that most of the problems included in the presentation occurred over time or were a result of the length of time needed for the vegetation to grow.

Senior Planner Anderson agreed that could be addressed in the purpose and intent. He stated that the transition area is meant to exist in perpetuity and perhaps there should potentially be a sunset clause in the situation a tree dies years later or is damaged by a tornado so that the eventual homeowner is not liable for replacement.

Chairperson Moore referenced the scenario where the transition plan looked good on paper but 15 years later, the pines are still not established. She used the example of a developer that did a great

job filling in the gaps between the trees with long grasses. She noted that the grass grows quickly, while the trees are still growing.

Senior Planner Anderson referenced the previous case which proposes a native seed mix. He noted that if that is planted near trees, that might not be the best environment as some of those mixes require full sun. He noted that there would also be caution that the planted area can be overrun with invasives but agreed that other plantings can provide transitioning.

Board Member Little agreed that he would be in favor of a sunset for the transitioning requirement so that a homeowner is not liable 30 years later. He stated that there is a development behind his home and there is no way he could plant things that would provide immediate screening and therefore he would be interested in seeing a fence as part of the transitioning. He noted that many people would prefer a fence compared to waiting decades for a barrier to grow in.

Board Member Arts asked if there is a minimum height requirement for plantings.

Senior Planner Anderson confirmed that there are requirements and provided those details.

Board Member Arts asked if there would be significant cost difference in requiring taller trees, such as eight feet rather than six feet.

Senior Planner Anderson replied that taller trees can be purchased to somewhat provide more immediate screening, but more damage can be done to the roots in the transition process and therefore there is often more dieback in the canopy of the tree while its attempting to regrow its roots. He stated that the general rule is for every inch of caliper there is one year of shock before its root system has been replenished to the point there is noticeable above ground growth.

Chairperson Moore asked if the full-sized trees are shown on landscaping plans.

Senior Planner Anderson confirmed that generally speaking the plan would show the full-sized canopy of the tree. He recognized that it is difficult to imagine what landscaping would look like once completed compared to what is shown on the plan, which is why he provided the photos for assistance.

Board Member Arts asked if the photos with the large pine trees were from the development on the south side of Alpine and asked the height of that berm. He noted that the Board could use that for context when driving by the site.

Senior Planner Anderson confirmed that is one of the developments on the south side of Alpine. He noted that berm fluctuates in height from three to four feet in some areas to other areas where there is not an increase in height because of the existing conditions of the site (drainage patterns, existing vegetation, etc.).

Board Member Fetterley commented that berms can be done very nicely and provide immediate transition because plantings take time. She stated that while she does not love the idea of fencing, she would wonder if there was a reason that was not included as an option for transitioning.

Senior Planner Anderson was unsure why fencing was not included in the density transitioning options, as it can be used for commercial properties.

Board Member Fetterley stated that she would agree with fencing as an option but noted that if an existing homeowner does not like the view being created, they would most likely install their own fence.

Board Member Hiatt stated that he would be concerned with the upkeep of a fence over time. He noted that there are some composite fences that he has noticed more recently that would provide immediate screening.

Chairperson Moore recognized that while no one on the Board would choose fencing as the first option, perhaps that could be used in combination with another element or could be the best choice in some scenarios.

Senior Planner Anderson agreed that a fence alone should not be allowed for density transitioning but could be part of an overall plan with trees and vegetation. He noted that as this moves forward, he would work with this Board on the vegetation portions while also working with other groups, such as the Planning Commission, on other potential ideas.

Board Member Hiatt stated that perhaps it would be helpful to have input from developers as they would have experience on what worked well in other developments and communities they have worked in.

6. BOARD / STAFF INPUT

No comments.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Board Member Little and seconded by Board Member Bernard to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Anderson
Senior Planner

ATTEST:

Dana Verbeek
Planning Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.