

HLU Minutes
September 22, 2021

In attendance

Cathy Plessner, Meg Arnosti, Kathy McGuire, Marc Manderscheid, Art Punyko, Mike Moore, Dave Pasuik, Jack Fei, Tom Dietsche, Elizabeth Wefel, Kate Baxter-Kauf, Tim Schmidt, Nora Ptacek, Ross Gregerson, Gary Huffman, Saura Jost, Zak Yudhishthu, Kensey Lipstreuer, Regina Purins. Emma Siegworth, Josh Williams (St. Paul PED), Heather Huffman.

Minutes from July 2021. Kate moves approval, Zak seconds. Minutes pass.

1931 James Avenue Front Yard Setback withdrew their variance request.

Emma Siegworth, Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee, gave an overview of the 1-4 Unit Infill Housing Zoning Study Phase 1.

This study is to tweak existing code to encourage additional housing.

St. Paul has low rental vacancy rates (5%). Question is how to accommodate growth and increased demand for housing. Another goal is to implement the 2040 comp plan to explore more multi-family housing. There is outreach to the community as well as to technical experts, urban design and financial consultants.

Public comments on Phase 1 will be welcomed on October 15. Emma presented highlights of the Phase 1 amendments. Some include:

Allowing smaller houses on smaller lots.

Allowing additional buildings on lots of a certain size.

Allowing ADUs on lots smaller than 5000 sf. Note: 16000 lots are smaller than 5000 square feet.

Allowing size of ADUs to be 75% of the principal unit and 35% of rear yard.

Allowing increase in lot area for accessory buildings from 1000 sf to 1200 sf.

Questions and Discussion:

Jack Fei worries whether this might encourage teardowns. Josh Williams does not think this would affect teardowns, which are usually larger than other homes in the area. These changes are about ADUs primarily.

Mike Moore: Question about deleting the minimum distance of 12 feet between lots. Emma: Building code of 10 feet will prevail.

Heather Huffman: Concerned about Urban farming. A Chicken coop currently has to be 50 feet from the nearest neighbor. Will this distance be maintained despite these changes? Emma: The rule would still apply.

Art Punyko: Is the idea that investors would take more advantage of these ADU options? Does the City have a model of how this would affect affordable housing? Emma: Planners are just trying to increase supply of housing.

Heather Huffman: TIFF financing is given to large developers. That same help should go to individual homeowners. Josh: Intent is to encourage equality and not exacerbate income inequality.

Jack Fei: What is the approval process? Emma: Phase 1 and 2 will happen separately. Phase 2 will be ongoing while waiting for approval on Phase 1.

Marc Manderscheid: Could someone more easily build 2 houses on a lot that currently has 1? Josh: yes, that could happen.

Regina Purins: likes smaller changes because there are always unintended consequences. This seems to be too large of a change. Developers will always find a way to move things in their direction.

Mike Moore: how easy would it be to make changes if there are unwanted unintended consequences? Josh: If adopted, changes will depend on the desire of the policy makers. It always takes time.

Zak Yudhishtu: This seems incremental, especially in comparison with Minneapolis or Portland (where you can build a 4-plex on a lot.) Do you have a projection of how this would impact housing? Emma: I wish we had a crystal ball.

Elizabeth Wefel: It is important to have more housing. Realistically because of cost it probably will be developers. If we want non-developers to do this, we should address that in other areas of St. Paul law.

Josh: Minnesota has one of the worst housing imbalances in the country.

Tom Dietsche: In favor, because it seems reasonable and incremental. Have you looked at other cities with similar zoning for a number of years? What undesirable outcomes did they report?

Emma: are looking at other cities. We have not been able to study the impact because changes have been made recently. E.g. In California there can be an ADU on any lot, but the decision was implemented just last year.

Tom Dietsche: Rules do make a difference. For example, Ward 3 changes caused teardowns to drop dramatically.

Art Punyko: When should we submit comments to the City? Emma: by noon October 14.

Kathy: What is the September 28 presentation? Emma: A webinar similar to this presentation. Kathy: How can we access the webinar? Emma: it is on the project web site. Kathy: Some people have trouble accessing Teams? Emma and Josh: have not heard of problems. It is the tool the City has. Kathy: can Emma and Josh provide a link to this presentation? Emma: yes, and she will also send the link to Alexa.

Tom Dietsche: HLU recommends moving forward with the changes outlined in this presentation. Kate Baxter-Kauf seconds.

Art makes a motion to table this. Mike recommends tabling and discussing at October meeting. Alexa says we can discuss at October meeting, but our comments would not get to the Planning Commission before their meeting. Question: would the Planning commission postpone their meeting? Alexa says this is doubtful. Kathy: Could we have a special meeting? Alexa: it is up to the committee. Vote on Art's motion: Motion fails.

Tom's motion passes: 12 aye, 3 nay, 2 abstentions.

Alexa: MGCC is organizing an educational panel on rent stabilization ordinance. We will take an impartial, educational stance. There will be a facilitator and 4 panelists on zoom. Community members will submit questions ahead of time. It will be recorded and available until voting day. Partners: Summit Hill, Union Park, Highland District Council. Email Alexa with questions.