

CITY OF LEWISTON
PLANNING BOARD MEETING
MINUTES for December 12, 2011

I. **ROLL CALL:** The meeting was held in the City Council Chambers on the first floor of City Hall and was called to order at 5:30 p.m. Chairperson, Lucy Bisson, chaired the meeting.

II. **Members in Attendance:** Lucy Bisson, Bruce Damon, Denis Fortier, Kevin Morissette, Eric Potvin, Trinh Burpee and Paul Robinson

Associate Member Present: Michael Marcotte

Associate Member Absent: Sandra Marquis

Staff Present: David Hediger, City Planner, Gil Arsenault, Director of Planning & Code and Cathy Lekberg, Administrative Assistant, Economic & Community Development

III. **ADJUSTMENT TO THE AGENDA:** None

IV. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None

V. **PUBLIC HEARINGS:** None

VI. **OTHER BUSINESS:**

- a) Request for a recommendation to acquire the Knights of Columbus (KOC) located at 150 East Avenue.

Ed Barrett stated he has given the members some information in their packet but he would like to give some background on this.

He stated this all started in September when the School Department came to the City Council to present its Facilities Plan. The School Department for the last several years has not participated in the capital improvement process and a new superintendent came in and took a look at the situation. He realized that the School Department was at capacity and he put together a facilities group to work with him. Ed stated that Bruce Damon, one of your Planning Board members is in this group. He stated the School Department is experiencing a 2% per year growth rate in students and this is far out pacing the rate projected at the time the two new elementary schools were constructed. The Superintendent is projecting there will be about 100 new students entering the school system per year and over the next ten years is looking at potentially adding 45 new classrooms and this will extend throughout the system. He stated it is concentrated in the younger grades right now and as those students move through the school system it will be exhibited elsewhere. Ed stated that the new superintendent came forward with a whole outline on how he wanted to address these things. He stated they are doing an architectural and engineering audit of the middle school so *they can try to do something at that school in 2012-2013 to add additional

classrooms and improvements to that building. He stated they would eventually be building a new elementary school that would add about 20 classrooms and that would replace the Martel School. They are also looking at improving the high school.

Ed stated that one of the proposals was to take over the City space in the Multi-Purpose Center (MPC) and basically add four classrooms which would allow him to relocate the Pre-K Program from some of the other schools into Longley freeing up space in the other schools where he needs it. Ed stated this impacts our City programs both for our Seniors Programs, Recreation Programs and also some other groups that the City provides space for at the MPC. The City Council asked the City staff and the School Department to look at alternatives. He stated this was done and they presented these options to the City Council at the November 29, 2011 workshop.

Ed stated that option one was renovating the Pettingill School. Option two was to lease private space. Option three was to make improvements at the Armory. These improvements would include: parking lot expansion; addition of an elevator, stairway, and other ADA improvements and other minor improvements. He stated that this option was the lowest cost alternative for relocating the senior program, but this option was strongly resisted by the program participants. Ed stated option four would only serve as a temporary solution for school programs and that would be to add modular classrooms at Montello School. At some point the modular would have to be replaced by permanent facilities. He stated this option would allow city programs to continue at the Multi-Purpose Center

Ed stated that one of the options that came up as they were looking at these alternatives was that they were approached by a representative from the Knights of Columbus (KOC) who asked if there was any interest by the City in acquiring their property. As they talked to their membership, it became apparent that their members were interested in seeing some type of upfront payment for the building. He stated they either wanted to deal with the City or put it on the market and try to sell the property. In looking at the building there are some issues with it for our use. One thing is it is not ADA compliant. Ed stated it would need to add an elevator and upgrade the bathrooms to ADA standards. Also, five year out we may need to replace the roof. We would like to convert to natural gas for the boiler although the heating system is relatively modern it would only be running a gas line. We are looking at roughly \$300,000 - \$325,000 upfront cost and \$69,000-70,000 in operating costs.

Ed stated this is not a done deal, but it is something the City Council would like to take an action on. He stated that since they are still in discussion and negotiations with the KOC, he thought it would be appropriate ask the Planning Board for a recommendation both in terms of whether it would be appropriate for the City to own this property and recognizing that it would be an unbudgeted expense in excess of the \$100,000 in the ordinance.

Lucy asked if the Knights of Columbus would retain the downstairs and Ed stated they would retain half of the downstairs. The senior program would use the right side of the building basically for the seniors program and small meetings in the evening. Upstairs would become the City's with space available for community groups and the KOC.

Bruce asked how big is the building and Ed stated it is roughly 10,000 SF and it has a lot of parking space.

Denis asked if we do something with the MPC, would that mean building a brand new school or building off the back of MPC. Ed stated that we will be building a new school at some point but Bruce would be able to explain more about that.

Bruce stated that one of the concerns is the growth in the school population; it takes four to five years to build a school. Right now replacing Martel School only amounts to replacing Martel and does not add any new classrooms. He stated this will post a lot of challenges and a lot of the work will have to be funded locally because it will not happen at a State level. He stated there is an addition being scheduled at McMahan. They have already added additions onto it twice in recent years and they will be building additional eight classrooms and a gym. One of the downsides of the growth is adding modulars to the Geiger and Farwell School. Farwell School does not lend itself to modular because of space. They put two modulars at Martel this year and that site is a disaster. He stated if we could get State funding to replace the 20 classrooms at Martel and keep it in the downtown area somehow we might be able to combine it with local funding to maximize the gain and do it at Longley or around Franklin Pasture. He stated that the City owns that land which reduces the cost.

He stated that the MPC is being considered because the City already owns it was the quickest, safest and cheapest way for the school to add some classrooms space and get better control from a security standpoint. Bruce asked Ed, if the deal with the KOC does not work out, has there been any discussion about talking to the people at the YWCA. Ed stated there is no space at the YWCA that meet our seniors needs but we could follow up on that if the KOC does not work out.

Ed stated that the Seniors Program has 350 members but they are not all active. He stated they need to have a place for social activities and to serve lunch through the Meals on Wheels Program.

Denis stated the issue he has of modular being added to the schools is that they tend to become permanent. He also asked where people would park at the Armory. Ed stated they have some plans that would basically add some parking on the street side away from the middle school on Vale Street.

Paul asked Ed, how much it would cost to maintain the building and Ed stated \$69,000 - \$70,000 a year. Paul stated that he would support the

purchasing of the KOC property outright. He stated that he also agreed with Denis about modular classrooms and that they tend to become permanent.

Denis stated he agreed with Paul about purchasing the building and Eric also stated that he agreed with the purchase.

Michael asked what was the original purpose of the Multi-Purpose Center and Ed stated it was originally built as a school and a community center. Michael asked if he could get something in writing stating this.

Kevin stated that in these economic times, he thinks an investment in something we already own is better than going out and purchasing something or getting into some kind of lease agreement. He stated if he had to pick he would pick the MPC or the Armory or a combination of the two. Kevin stated he has a hard time voting for the City spending more money purchasing a building when we are getting rid of plow routes and other things that the people of Lewiston need.

Lucy opened the discussion up to the public.

Pauline Gudas stated she lives at 6 Raymond Avenue in Lewiston. She does not think the seniors should be booted out on the street. She thinks they should be removed from the MPC for a variety of reasons. The School Department needs more space. The question is where you put the seniors. The senior citizens group is not part of City government and she thought they were. She stated the City Recreation Department gives the seniors a part time clerical support person and they are a non-profit organization. It would be like YPLAA coming to the City and saying they need a meeting place, give us a building, and give us space. The City should not be buying buildings and building spaces for non-profit organizations to come in and have their functions; however the City cannot throw seniors out of the MPC without having some idea where they can put them in an economic situation. She stated the KOC hall is probably going to cost a lot on money the City over the next five years just in capital outlay. She stated that including the renovations, and the potential purchase price of \$100,000 or \$150,000 it would cost the City approximately \$600,000. She stated we talked about the Armory but the Armory needs an elevator to make it handicapped accessible. At the last Council meeting, they made it perfectly clear they want to purchase the building and to go ahead with the KOC on December 20th. She thinks it is a major reaction to jump to buy the building and that is what happened with the Colisee. . She stated even though people say that the City will buy the building, do the renovations and could recoup the money that has not been the history in Lewiston when we buy buildings and renovate them.

Pauline stated if you go to the Armory, there is an elevator and it is a relatively new elevator. The problem is that it would impact the Recreation Department staff. The original idea when they were looking at moving the seniors to the Armory was to put them on the second floor which is a

challenge but the later idea was to put the seniors on the first floor, same level but on the opposite side so they would need an elevator on that side and would be more convenient to them as well as less disruptive to Recreation Department staff. Why don't we move the offices of the Recreation Department to the opposite side, therefore, the seniors would have the elevator, the stairs and potentially if parking was changed around, it would be convenient for them. She stated the City would not have to put a second elevator at the Armory. She stated let's take a breath and think of practical things we can do. She knows the seniors do not want to go to the armory but she is sorry. The City is not rolling in money and she knows that her taxes are going up and the State reimbursing the City for education is going down. The City has cut plow routes the day before Thanksgiving. She stated she has lived in Lewiston for 17 years and has never seen the roads as bad as they are. She stated before we spend \$600,000 on a building that the City may or may not get money out of, we need to take a hard look as to who is utilizing the senior center. There are 369 paid members that are not all active members. Seniors do not have to be a resident of Lewiston to become a member. The City needs to take a look at the numbers. She stated there are 192 members that reside in Lewiston.

Ed stated about 60 percent of the recent programs have been Lewiston residents. He stated it varies by programs.

Pauline stated that there are other places these people can meet at i.e. the library for instance and also churches. She stated why don't churches open their parish halls for these programs. She stated making changes to the Armory would be less costly. Even though the seniors are on the City website and have a schedule, the membership fees are not collected and given to the Recreation Department and they have a Board of Directors. She stated she attempted to find out what their last filing of their 990 with the IRS and she stated it looks like they have not filed in a while. Pauline stated if the City is going to provide housing for the Lewiston senior citizens that perhaps the Administrator and the Recreation Director should sit down and talk to the Board of Directors of the Senior Center. If they want a place to meet, perhaps the membership dues should be paid to the City, because we do furnish a staff person 12 – 15 hours a week, part time to the seniors as some sort of coordination and getting the newsletter ready, etc. and that is an expense that taxpayers of Lewiston are paying and 40% of the members are not Lewiston taxpayers and are getting the same benefit. She stated the City should charge an additional service fee for people who are not residents of Lewiston. She asked that the City not rush into buying this property. She asked what is the City going to do next year and where the \$600,000 is coming from. She stated Ed is saying it will cost \$306,000 to get in the building and this is not even buying it. She stated the building is only half taxed and the City is going to lose \$6,852.66 a year from taxes. The total acquisition is about \$600,000 and \$60,000 annual operating expense.

Ed stated there is a cash allowance in our numbers for a cash payment for the purchase. Our cost is probably in the range of \$450,000 to \$500,000

depending on what our final numbers on the improvements. He stated it is not insignificant.

Pauline stated she is asking the City not to rush to judgment and that maybe staff needs to take a good look and consider some rearranging of the Armory.

Ed stated he was only looking for a recommendation and that there was a lot of uncertainty with this purchase.

Paul asked if the building was free and clear and Ed stated yes. Paul asked why it is on the market and Ed stated that the Knights of Columbus membership has been declining and they cannot carry the cost of the building.

Trinh asked about the Petingill School and could they move the seniors in there temporarily. Ed stated the building was abandoned four years ago and there are mold issues and the systems are not operating properly. He stated it would take one million dollars to fix. Trinh asked about the churches that were empty and Ed stated they are all on the market right now. He stated they are huge facilities and operating costs would be too expensive.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Denis Fortier** pursuant to Article VII, Sections 4(f) and (h) of the Zoning and Land Use Code to send a favorable recommendation to the City Council to acquire 150 East Avenue. Second by **Paul Robinson**.

VOTED: 1-5-1 (Failed) Bruce Damon Abstained

- b) Request to initiate an amendment to Article XII, Section 16 to clarify language in the sign ordinance

David stated that it has come to staff's attention that the language in the Article XII, Section 16 (c)(2)(c)(2) of the Zoning and Land Use Code needs clarification as to when regulated signs may be erected above the level of a flat roof or the eaves of any other type of roof. The proposed amendment attempts to clarify that wall and projecting signs may extend above the roofs of vestibules, canopies, porticos, loading docks and similar single-story, attached structures.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Bruce Damon** pursuant to Article XVII, Section 5(b)(1)(c) of the Zoning and Land Use Code for staff to schedule a public hearing to consider a proposed amendment to clarify language in Article XII, Section 16 (c)(2)(c) of the Zoning and Land Use Code. Second by **Kevin Morissette**.

VOTED: 7-0 (Passed)

- c) Review of use matrix-nothing to report

- d) Executive Session to discuss real estate negotiations, of which the premature disclosure of the information would prejudice the competitive bargaining position of the City.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Denis Fortier** to go into Executive Session in the Executive Conference Room. Second by **Paul Robinson**.

VOTED: 7-0 (Passed)

The Board reentered the Council Chamber and the following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Denis Fortier** pursuant to Article VII, Section 4(h) of the Zoning and Land Use Code to send a favorable recommendation for the City Council's consideration the disposition of said 39 Lincoln Street as discussed during the Planning Board's executive session held on December 12, 2011. Second by **Paul Robinson**.

VOTED: 7-0 (Passed)

- e) Any other business Planning Board Members may have relating to the duties of the Lewiston Planning Board.

Discussion of Planning Board representation on the Community Development Block Grant Committee:

MOTION: by **Denis Fortier** that Paul Robinson continues to represent the Community Development Block Grant for the FY12-13 year. Second by **Bruce Damon**.

VOTED: 7-0 (Passed)

VII. READING OF MINUTES: Adoption of the November 28, 2011 Planning Board Minutes.

The following motion was made:

MOTION: by **Denis Fortier** to accept the November 28, 2011 Planning Board Minutes as presented. Second by **Kevin Morissette**.

VOTED: 6-0-1 (Passed) Trinh Abstained

VIII. ADJOURNMENT: The following motion was made to adjourn.

MOTION: by **Kevin Morissette** that this meeting adjourns at 7:35 p.m. Second by **Eric Potvin**.

VOTED: 7-0 (Passed).

The next regularly scheduled meeting is for Monday, January 9, 2012 at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lucy Bisson" followed by a stylized flourish.

Lucy Bisson, Chairperson