

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

DATE: January 25, 2021

TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Chairman Buelow, Commissioners Ballard, Hahn, Hall, Olson, Marks, Shortridge, Boettcher, and Paddock

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: City Planner Carlos Espinosa, Assistant City Planner Luke Sims, Natural Resources Sustainability Coordinator John Howard

The meeting was called to order at 4:38 p.m. by Chairman Buelow.

Approval of Minutes – December 14, 2020

The minutes from the Planning Commission December 14, 2020 meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Olson moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Hahn seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously via roll call vote (roll call vote sheet attached as Appendix A).

Postponed: Public Hearing – IUP for Short Term Rental at 2255 Garvin Heights Road

Mr. Espinosa informed the Planning Commission that the IUP application for 2255 Garvin Heights Road would be reviewed on February 8, 2021.

Public Hearing – City of Winona Sugarloaf/East Garvin Heights Land Disturbance Activity Permit

Mr. Espinosa provided an overview of the land disturbance activity permit being proposed by the City of Winona.

Mr. Howard informed the Commission that the proposal is to restore the prairie along the south sides of the bluffs between Sugar Loaf and East Garvin Heights. The proposed work would be done at the end of winter or the start of spring with the removal of invasive species and potentially partial regenerative prairie burns. This project would be similar to the project from 2020 around Sugarloaf. Mr. Howard clarified that the permit will have a limited land disturbance effect and is more focused on the removal and regeneration of plant species.

Commissioner Hahn asked whether the potential re-seeded areas were originally prairie or if it was something else and, if the latter, whether the primary goal is to remove invasive species. Mr. Howard mentioned that some of the land was used as pasture land in the post-settlement era and had different grasses in the area. Mr. Howard clarified that there was some prairie in the area but he said he was less confident about what may return following the controlled burn than he was for the Sugarloaf project.

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Commissioner Paddock mentioned he has helped with burns and other restoration and asked to clarify that it is a south facing hill. Mr. Howard confirmed this was the case.

Commissioner Paddock mentioned that south facing with shallow soils, prairie will be the likely outcome. He mentioned that this would be a fantastic opportunity for native species to come back and that it is a terrific proposal and wishes it could be bigger. Commissioner Boettcher expressed agreement and said he looks forward to returning it to a normal area that will be easier to walk in.

Commissioner Shortridge asked if Mr. Howard could speak to the archeological nature of the site and any impacts to heritage sites. Mr. Howard said he can't speak directly to an archeological study but that the work will be done above ground and he would not expect an impact.

Commissioner Hahn mentioned that this is a critical habitat for the region and there is less than one percent of prairie habitat remaining and the restoration work is extremely important. Chairman Buelow expressed agreement.

Commissioner Paddock asked if there was a plan to do a species inventory before the restoration as he did not see it included in the documentation. Mr. Howard agreed that a species inventory would be interesting but he did not include it in the documentation because the grant application process occurred during the winter and the documentation would be more difficult in the winter. He mentioned that some identification could be done during the spring and was hopeful about involving Winona State University students to help. Mr. Howard reiterated that the timeline did not match up well which is why it was not included in the documentation.

Chairman Buelow opened the public hearing.

John Meier, 144 Glendale, mentioned there was a bluffs traverse management plan from the previous year and asked to see whether the documentation from that report meshed with the project being proposed. Mr. Howard responded that the areas presented for the land disturbance activity permit are some of the "medium" areas found in sections 3.3 and 3.4 of the Bluffs Traverse Plan. The recommendation for this project was to seek grant funding rather than using only City funds.

Paul Double, 104 Glen Mary Road, asked if the project would deal with the blufftop around Glen Mary. Chairman Buelow mentioned there was a map in the agenda packet. Mr. Howard pointed out that the pink areas on that map are the bluff area and the project area is mostly north of that location and possibly 300 feet (300') away.

Mr. Meier commented that it would be good for the Commission to go back through the Bluffs Traverse Plan. He also mentioned that there have been a number of trees removed in that area. Mr. Howard asked to clarify if Mr. Meier was referring to the rectangular portion of the project to the northwest. Mr. Meier confirmed this was the

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case. Mr. Howard mentioned that the main purpose of the burn is to regenerate the areas that are not covered by trees and the goal would be to not incorporate the woody material. Mr. Meier asked to clarify who owned the property. Mr. Howard confirmed it is city-owned land.

Commissioner Shortridge moved to approve the permit. Commissioner Hahn seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously via roll call vote (roll call vote sheet attached to these minutes as Appendix A).

Discussion – 2022 Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Espinosa introduced the Comprehensive Plan agenda item asking for preliminary input from the Planning Commission before working on the request for proposals for the plan. He clarified that the RFP process would occur over the coming six months and the whole plan would take place over the next year and a half to two years, with the aim of adoption at the end 2022. He mentioned that this is a core document for the City of Winona and may be the “rudder of the ship” to help guide the City and focus efforts for the long-term. The key question to answer is “what will the City look like in 2045?” and the plan should reflect the values, principles, and desires of those who live, work, and play in Winona. Mr. Espinosa mentioned that part of the consideration of the Comprehensive Plan process is the engagement plan, which the Commission should provide input on as well. Mr. Espinosa provided an overview of the sections of the plan and draft document for review and included that equity, technology, and accessibility would be incorporated throughout the plan.

Chairman Buelow suggested that the 2016 Housing Study should be incorporated as well.

Commissioner Paddock asked for clarification of the role of engagement versus the role of the consultant. Mr. Espinosa introduced Brian Voerding of Engage Winona to respond.

Commissioner Boettcher mentioned that he has been through this before and the previous people did well with the plan and that the Commission and City have to look to the future and move forward for the people, businesses, colleges, and schools.

Commissioner Olson said he has been a resident since 1956 and that the population then was about 24,000 and the population since then has been stable with growth to 28,000 only because of annexation of Winona Township. He said it is nice to have rose colored glasses but the lack of developable property has kept the development and growth of the City from happening and the growth has been outside the area in the townships and bordering areas of the City and would probably be where growth would have to occur going forward and to grow that area will have to be incorporated or the working relationships will have to improve.

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Chairman Buelow invited Mr. Voerding to speak. Mr. Voerding spoke about his past work with the community, highlighting the work on the ground that has been behind turning the energy and ideas from engagement processes into practical, realistic steps. Mr. Voerding noted that Engage Winona has been the non-technical, boots on the ground for these processes, which can be a key challenge or weak point for many plans, and that past partnerships with the City of Winona has led to successful efforts. He also noted that as the process evolves out of the COVID-19 pandemic shadow, working with technical consultants who may not be local is a benefit for the City. Mr. Voerding said there are visions of community-wide events as well as topic-specific focus groups. Mr. Voerding clarified that while he referred to Engage Winona as non-technical, they have a large repository of information and data from past efforts. Mr. Voerding expressed excitement to continue working with the City on another mutually-beneficial, complementary effort.

Commissioner Olson said he will support the next Comprehensive Plan just as he has supported the prior plan. He noted that Winona needs to grow and there are problems with developable land but they can be overcome in several ways. He mentioned he would love to see the City grow to 40,000 but there needs to be land to put 40,000 people on.

Commissioner Hahn mentioned that Engage Winona has done several projects on smaller scales with the public. He asked what kind of strategies he may employ and what his outlook would be to engage as many people as possible across the entire community. Mr. Voerding mentioned there are partnerships and training, the trainers approach and a lot of engagement can be facilitated by understanding how people are gathering and providing the tools to engage naturally. Mr. Espinosa added on that the goal is to not have this be a plan developed in City Hall conference rooms but to do broad, innovative research.

Commissioner Marks asked how the previous Comprehensive Plan would be considered and what improvements can be made. Mr. Espinosa mentioned that the previous plan plays a role and looking at what was accomplished and what is still left to be done will be part of the process.

Commissioner Paddock mentioned that what Mr. Olson said is very "Winona" and has been for a long time and won't change and the City needs to accept it and engage as a reality. He expressed appreciation for his comments. Mr. Shortridge followed up that density will be a part of the conversation as well and there is a lot more room to develop on the sandbar than may be considered initially. He said there needs to be creative solutions proposed and that the Planning Commission may need to push more in the future. Commissioner Hahn expressed agreement as well. He mentioned that the possibility exists to make changes, especially incremental changes, to meet some of the

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goals that aren't being met currently. He noted that there needs to be as many people at the table as possible to craft well-considered steps in the future.

Mr. Espinosa asked for feedback specifically related to the core areas/topics and whether there was anything missing or should be emphasized.

Commissioner Hahn mentioned that there is a need to look at what we tried in the past and how we could change them in the future. Mr. Espinosa responded that in the 2007 Comprehensive Plan there was a concerted focus on four blocks for a convention center and that the new plan will hopefully address some of the bigger projects such as this but not have such a focus on them that significant portions of the plan hinge on their completion.

Commissioner Boettcher mentioned that the times are changing and that the Commission is going to have to look forward to 2045 in this process.

Adjournment

On a motion from Commissioner Shorridge and second by Commissioner Hahn, the Commission unanimously voted in favor of adjournment at 5:35 pm.



Luke Sims
Assistant City Planner

**APPENDIX A
Roll Call Vote Sheet**

Name	Approval of Minutes from December 14, 2020	Approval of Land Disturbance Activity Permit	Adjournment
Brad Ballard	Not Present	Aye	Aye
Dale Boettcher	Not Present	Aye	Aye
Brian Buelow	Aye	Aye	Aye
Ed Hahn	Aye	Aye	Aye
Dan Hall	Aye	Aye	Aye
Amy Jo Marks	Aye	Aye	Aye
Lavern Olson	Aye	Aye	Aye
Todd Paddock	Aye	Aye	Aye
Peter Shortridge	Abstained	Aye	Aye