



City of La Porte Plan Commission Meeting Minutes	
Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 6:00 PM	
City Hall Council Chambers, 801 Michigan Ave.	
www.cityoflaporte.com	(219) 362-8260

A meeting of the City of La Porte Plan Commission was held at City Hall on Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at the hour of 6:00 PM, (“local time”) immediately upon conclusion of the City of La Porte Board of Zoning Appeals, pursuant to notice duly given in accordance with the rules of the Commission and the Indiana Open Door Law.

ITEM 1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order by Jerry Jackson, President, at 6:23 PM.

ITEM 2. Roll Call & Determination of Quorum

On a call of the roll, the members of the Plan Commission were shown to be present or absent as follows:

Members Present:	Members Absent:	Staff Present:
Jerry Jackson, President	Pete Saunders, Vice President	Mark Worthley, BZA Attorney
Vickie Gushrowski	Miles Fettingner	David Heinold, City Planner
Councilwoman Julie West		Craig Phillips, CDP Director
Dr. David Porter		
Councilman Drew Buchanan		

ITEM 3. Election of Officers for 2024 (Chair and Vice Chair)

Jerry Jackson called for nominations for the 2024 Election of Officers. Vickie Gushrowski made a motion to **nominate Jerry Jackson as Chair and Pete Saunders as Vice Chair** and the motion was seconded by Councilwoman Julie West. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed 5-0.

ITEM 4. Approval of Minutes: December 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Jerry Jackson called for any changes or corrections to the December 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes. There being no changes or corrections to the meeting minutes, Councilwoman Julie West made a motion to **approve the December 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes** and the motion was seconded by Dr. David Porter. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed 5-0.

ITEM 5. Findings of Fact Letter: December 12, 2023 Findings of Fact Letter

Jerry Jackson called for any changes or corrections to the December 12, 2023 Findings of Fact Letter. There being no changes or corrections to the Findings of Fact Letter, Vickie Gushrowski made a motion to **approve the December 12, 2023 Findings of Fact Letter** and the motion was seconded by Dr. David Porter. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed 5-0.

ITEM 6. **ZONE MAP CHANGE PETITION #24-01 TO RE-ZONE FROM THE R1B SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT TO THE R1C, R2B, and R3A DISTRICTS AS LISTED IN THE ATTACHED LEGAL DESCRIPTION FOR EACH PARCEL**

Petitioner: Duneland Group and Sloan Avenue Group

Property Owner: Hester J.W. Muller Trustee Trust

Location: Approximately located on the 1700 Block Park Street

Staff Report: David Heinold

Applicant Presentation

Jerry Jackson called for the petitioner.

Nicholas Lau, Duneland Group Engineering and Surveying, identified himself as the applicant's representative and explained the request for the zone map change on the subject property.

John Kavchak, Sloan Avenue Group, explained the development request to allow a mix of single family, townhomes, and multifamily apartment dwellings as part of the zone map change petition. He mentioned that the intention of the proposed development will provide a good mix

Staff Presentation

Jerry Jackson called for staff to explain the request.

David Heinold, City Planning, presented a brief summary of the staff report and recommendation for the zone map change petition.

Jerry Jackson asked what types of uses are allowed in the proposed zoning districts.

Mr. Heinold explained that R1C allows only single family dwellings, R2B allows duplex-style townhomes, and R3A allows low-rise multifamily apartment dwellings.

Craig Phillips, Community Development & Planning Director for the City of La Porte, explained the criteria for zone map change petitions that the board members consider with these types of requests. Mr. Phillips further explained that the City is looking at making additional infrastructure investments to the area beyond the scope of this proposed development. Craig further mentioned that the board should make reference to the standards for evaluation when making a recommendation on the zone map change petition. Mr. Phillips explained that the proposed development will need to be reviewed before the Plan Commission in accordance with the Subdivision Ordinance for the City of La Porte after the zone map change would become effective.

Councilwoman Julie West asked about the location of the wetland area on the subject property. Mr. Phillips explained that the wetland area has been delineated on the northeast part of the subject property east of Park Street.

Councilman Drew Buchanan questioned if the rental units would only be on the east side of Park Street. Mr. Phillips mentioned that the multifamily rental units would be located only on the east side of Park Street. He further explained the approximate number of 175 dwelling units for the proposed development.

Public Testimony

Jerry Jackson opened the meeting to public comment and called for public comments either for or against the zone map change petition.

Glenna Etchison, 2011 N. 100 W., questioned what will be done about the increased traffic at the intersection of North 100 West and Severs Road. Mrs. Etchison mentioned that they never received notification of the annexation request, but did receive the certified mail notice of the zone map change petition. She stated concern about the impact to property values with the proposed development. She also mentioned concern about the negative impact to the overall aesthetics with the addition of an excessive amount of buildings. She further mentioned that they are very unhappy about the proposed development.

Eric Wallenius, 1766 N. 100 W., mentioned that he moved to the country because there were no houses to look at. Mr. Wallenius explained that he was never contacted about drainage runoff going onto his property from the proposed development. He continued to mention concerns about impacts to property taxes because of the proposed development. He questioned how the townhomes will be maintained over the years. He further stated that he is unhappy with the proposed development.

Jessica Sheeler, 1866 N. 100 W., showed a previous plan from about two years ago for the subject property from when the property was outside the city that was too many homes and now there will be hundreds of homes. Mrs. Sheeler mentioned that there is a sex offender that lives in the area and questioned who is intended to live on this property. She further mentioned that they have lived here for 14 years and have established honey bee hives. She stated concern about any kind of spraying on the adjacent property.

Bert Cook, Executive Director of the La Porte Economic Advancement Partnership, explained that the subject property was annexed in 2023 by the City Council. Mr. Cook further described the need that was demonstrated by the City of La Porte Housing Initiative Study for residential of all types. He explained that the development of the site with the newer homes will result in appreciation of property values in the surrounding area. Mr. Cook explained that the City staff and the developer teams have worked diligently to come up with the most appropriate plan for residential development on the subject property in the City of La Porte.

Councilman Drew Buchanan asked if the property was a voluntary annexation. Mr. Cook mentioned that the property was involved in a super voluntary annexation and explained the process for annexation when a property owner requests to be within city limits.

Dr. David Porter questioned the housing costs for the proposed dwelling units. Mr. Cook explained that the developer is working on potential options to bring a more reasonable price for the proposed housing.

Jerry explained that he allowed more than three minutes because there were questions from the Plan Commission members.

Kaleena Marks, 791 W. 200 N., mentioned that she is directly across from the proposed multifamily apartment units and wetland area. Mrs. Marks questioned how much of the land would be used for the multifamily apartment units and the approximate rental prices for the apartments. She also questioned how the zoning change and utility extension affects her property. She also asked how the proposed development affect surrounding owners during tree removal and construction.

Brian Kajer, 406 Niesen St., mentioned that he has lived in the area for about 31 years. Mr. Kajer mentioned that he has mixed feelings about the proposed development, but can see the benefit in having additional residential housing choices in the City of La Porte. He asked everyone if they would rather have industrial or nice residential homes next to the them.

Jessica Sheeler, 1866 N. 100 W., mentioned that she has never received notice of the annexation or the zoning change request. Mrs. Sheeler questioned why Park Road is not plowed by the City if the property is annexed. She continued to mention that she would rather see semi-trucks than townhomes any day of the week and asked the board members to consider the negative impacts of urban sprawl on cities as well.

Dawn Blackman, 707 W. 200 N., mentioned that she was not notified of the zoning change, but did see the notice of public hearing sign that had the meeting information. Mrs. Blackman questioned what this will do to the school system with the addition of approximately 200 more people in the area. She mentioned concerns about the negative impacts of the proposed development on the quiet country lifestyle that they enjoy now. She asked what the price of the proposed housing is projected to be. She mentioned that people are moving towards the country to be away from other people in surrounding areas. She stated concerns about the impact of additional traffic with the proposed amount of homes and apartment dwelling units.

Glenna Etchison, 2011 N. 100 W., mentioned that this is not the kind of change the community wants to see. Mrs. Etchison explained that they do not think that the value of homes in the surrounding area will increase because people want to get away from other people when they move out into the county. She continued to

mention that the development will decrease the values because of the density of residential homes with too many neighbors in close proximity. She stated concerns with well over the increase in over 200 cars a day with the proposed development.

Jeff Plante, 2515 N. 50 W., mentioned that he lives near the proposed development site. Mr. Plante explained that the developers nor Bert Cook live here and that the people here that spoke about this item have already established their livelihoods in this area. He further explained that we need housing, but this is too close to a major industrial area that continues to expand. Mr. Plante mentioned that the land would be more appropriate for industrial development.

Dawn Blackman, 707 N. 200 W., stated that for the last four years she has felt under attack with the recent annexations, corridor, and this zoning change. She expressed opposition to the proposed development and asked the board members to do the right thing.

There being no further public comment, Jerry Jackson closed the floor to public comment.

Jerry Jackson reopened the floor to one more public comment.

Ken Etchison, 2011 N. 100 W., explained that he believes that he may have made a mistake to allow this type of thing to occur in our lives, but he thought he made the right decision by going to where they decided to live in the county. Mr. Etchison mentioned that this feels less like development and positivity and more and more like encroachment. He continued to mention that the proposed development will be located in such a poor area for residential due to the amount of traffic and infrastructure conditions. He stated concerns about the density of the proposed residential mix of housing types.

There being no further public comment, Jerry Jackson closed the floor to public comment.

Applicant Response

Nicholas Lau identified himself as a representative for Duneland Group. Mr. Lau explained that the drainage engineers have thoroughly reviewed the site and do not foresee any issues after development. He described that the engineers have designed a buffer area to collect stormwater runoff from the single family residential along Severs Road. He further explained the drainage analysis on the site and mentioned that the surveyors will locate the wetland accurately prior to development during the subdivision process.

John Kavchak identified himself as the developer for the project. Mr. Kavchak explained to the public this is just a concept for development layout and that this request is only to approve the proposed zoning to allow the types of housing described in the request. He continued to mention that it is hard to see property values in the area going down with construction costs that have doubled in recent years. Mr. Kavchak explained that the project is market rate housing, not low income housing. He further explained that the dwelling units will consist of two and three bedrooms. Mr. Kavchak explained that the proposed development will not be built all overnight and may take up to seven years for completion.

Craig Phillips, Community Development & Planning Director for the City of La Porte, explained the process for notice of zone map change petitions. Mr. Phillips explained that the voluntary annexation did not require certified mail notification to surrounding property owners because it did not include rezoning.

Councilwoman Julie West questioned how the neighbors feel after hearing the applicant and City staff responses.

There was discussion amongst the members of the public and the board members about how they feel about the zone map change petition.

Jerry Jackson stated that he will allow three more individuals to provide public testimony on the petition.

Public Testimony

Jerry Jackson reopened the meeting to public comment and called for public comments either for or against the zone map change petition.

Jeff Plante, 2551 N. 50 W., stated concerns that the neighbors don't want this property rezoned to allow this type of development. Mr. Plante mentioned that the money will leave the county with construction and an outside contractor except for the people that live in the homes. He continued to mention that the developer did not provide a traffic impact study for the proposed development on roads with an already high amount of traffic.

Glenna Etchison, 2011 N. 100 W., stated concerns about the amount of traffic now and the impact on their ability to enjoy being outside. Mrs. Etchison encouraged the board to see the amount of traffic there now.

Kaleena Marks, 791 W. 200 N., mentioned that they have not addressed the traffic issue with the proposed multifamily apartment units. She continued to mention concerns about the density of development, school enrollment, and the appropriateness of the total number of dwelling units in the proposed zoning districts. She asked the board members to consider how to accommodate all of these concerns with the rezoning.

There being no further public comment, Jerry Jackson closed the floor to public comment.

Board Discussion/Action

Councilwoman Julie West mentioned that she understands the concerns presented by everyone on what the best decision will be for this item. She also explained that she does not know all the answers to their questions. She explained that is why the board may ask City staff and the applicants questions to determine the best course of action on the concerns presented before the board.

Councilman Drew Buchanan made a motion for **favorable recommendation** to approve the staff recommendation and findings of fact for Zone Map Change #23-03 Petition to re-zone from the R1B Single Family Residential to the R1C Single Family Residential District, R2B Townhouse Residential District, and R3A Low-Rise Multifamily Residential District as listed in the attached legal descriptions for each parcel and the motion was seconded by Vickie Gushrowski. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed with 4 yeas, 1 nay, and 2 abstentions.

Yea Jerry Jackson

Yea Vickie Gushrowski

Yea Drew Buchanan

Yea Julie West

Nay David Porter

Absent Pete Saunders

Absent Miles Fettinger

Zone Map Change #24-01 Petition – Favorable Recommendation

ITEM 7. Old Business

There was no old business.

ITEM 8. New Business

A. Appoint Member to Downtown Design Review Committee – Councilman Drew Buchanan made a motion to appoint Vickie Gushrowski to the Downtown Design Review Committee and the motion was seconded by Dr. David Porter. A roll call vote was taken, the motion passed 5-0.

ITEM 9. Other Business

A. Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

There was no public comment on non-agenda items.

ITEM 10. Adjournment

Vickie Gushrowski made a motion to **adjourn** and the motion was seconded by Councilman Drew Buchanan. A roll call vote was taken and the motion to **adjourn** passed 5-0. The meeting was **adjourned** at 7:38 pm.

Jerry Jackson, President

David Heinold, Secretary