MINUTES OF THE CITY OF OKOBOJI PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2025 – 1:00 PM

The Planning and Zoning Commission met on the above date and time at the Okoboji City Hall. Commission members present were Matt Lanfear, John McMahon, Barb Mendenhall, Barry Nadler and Dorris Welle. Others present were City Administrator Michael Meyers, John Stevens, Steve Nelson, Mat Hanson, Jake Schoelerman, Rod Simonson, Les Paul, Doug Strock, and Rich Arndorfer.

NEW BUSINESS

Due to the lack of an appointed Chairperson, City Administrator Michael Meyers lead the meeting.

Motion made by Commissioner Welle and a second by Commissioner Mendenhall to approve the meeting minutes from the October 2, 2024 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting. The following Commissions voted "YEA": McMahon, Mendenhall, Welle. Commissions Lanfear and Nadler abstained. Motion passed 3-0.

City Administrator Michael Meyers opened a public hearing to consider a recommendation on an application for lakeshore landscaping at 5307 Lake Shore Drive, Okoboji, Iowa 51355.

Mat Hanson, Blue Water Prairie Landscape and Design representing the property owner, provided an overview of the proposed project. Hanson described in detail the lakeshore to be retained with natural limestone and discussed the boat house on the lakeshore currently. Hanson advised that the intention is to eliminate approximately 75% of the boathouse and reconstruct the lowest portion of the boathouse. Hanson described the property owner would eliminate the boathouse structure sitting on top of the lakeshore improving everyone's view and replace with ground level decking. Hanson advised that portions of the currently existing structure and deck hangs over the property line and that they were proposing to shift everything to be contained within the property lines. Hanson noted that portions of the lower deck overhang the ordinary high water mark and that those portions would be scaled back as well to be compliant with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Commissioner Mendenhall inquired about the back of the boathouse commenting that it was taller than 4 feet. Hanson explained that that wall is buried and there to reduce the pressure on the new boathouse wall. Mendenhall expressed concern with the amount of stone and concrete. Hanson advised that the retaining wall was natural cut limestone.

Commissioner Welle asked if a boat could physically go into the boathouse, and was told its simply storage.

Jake Schoelerman, Schoelerman Contracting representing the property owner, advised that the boathouse wall was part of the engineering on retaining the bank.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented on the lack of erosion on the property and expressed more concern about the design's lack of natural appearance.

Commissioner Lanfear asked about the shortening of the lower deck to meeting Iowa DNR regulations. Schoelerman advised that the location of the boathouse was not proposed to change but the decking that overhung the ordinary high water mark would be shortened by four feet.

Commissioner Mendenhall asked about the City's regulations on replacing decks. Meyers commented that the ordinance states that patios, decks, stairs and similar can be replaced so long as they are not expanded upon.

Hanson again advised that in this instance the structures would be squared up to ensure everything is on the subject property and not protruding over the lot lines as it currently does.

Commissioner Lanfear asked if the material being utilized was compliant with the City's code. Meyers advised that what the ordinance requires is native plantings and stone resembling native block whether that be natural or manufactured. Meyers commented on the subjectivity of aesthetic portions of the ordinance.

Commissioner Mendenhall advised that her opinion was that the intent of the ordinance is to make the landscape look natural with native plantings.

Commissioner Nadler asked if the plan meets all of the ordinance requirements. Meyers commented that the City has their engineering firm review these applications for compliance with the ordinance. Meyers directed the Commission to the provided review letter commenting on any deficiencies with a specific project. Meyers advised that typically the City and the contractor will go back-and-forth if deficiencies are identified. If City Staff is unable to get the application entirely complaint, then the notation remains on the letter and the Planning and Zoning Commission can make recommendation. Meyers discussed that the only notation on this project is the retaining wall behind the boathouse is greater than 4'.

More discussion took place on the retaining wall behind the boathouse pertaining to the purpose of this wall and the fact that a substantial portion of this wall will not be exposed.

Hanson again advised that the property owner wishes to minimize everything and open up views for the neighborhood.

Discussion took place on the difference between natural, native and boulder stone. Meyers commented that when the ordinance was originally written it required boulder stones but was later revised in an effort to ensure that engineers would sign off on designs ensuring their integrity.

Discussion took place on the design with one Commissioner calling the design sterile. Hanson cautioned on using the provided renderings as the final product and advised that the walls would be almost entirely camouflaged by vegetation once established.

Commissioner Mendenhall asked if there was any opportunity to scale the project down to limit the use of stone. Hanson felt that they could not without creating even taller walls.

Commissioner Welle felt that a lot of the visual obstruction, structures and other elements of this currently existing lakeshore would be entirely reduced and cleaned up.

City Administrator Meyers explained that the City does not typically allow decks to be constructed in the manner proposed. However, he noted that the large existing boathouse on the property is scheduled for removal. The property owner is arguing that, by removing this nonconforming structure and leaving its base intact, they are eligible to replace it under the ordinance that permits the replacement of existing decks, steps, platforms, and similar structures.

Commissioner Nadler felt that the most important aspect here is that the lakeshore remains stable commenting on the lakeshore failures from last summer.

Schoelerman complimented the City of Okoboji on requiring specific engineering and requiring global stability measures prior to approval.

Commissioner McMahon discussed that he believes the application is compliant as presented but also inquired on the thought of scaling down the plan.

Hanson commented that the reason he believes it may look busy and complex is because they have moved things around to create shorter walls all the way around as opposed to creating a staircase look of 4' walls. Hanson advised that the tallest wall is the bottom wall at 4' but the remainder of the walls are largely 3' and 2' walls. Hanson stated that the goal was to camouflage the wall with vegetation and he believed that the right plants were in place.

Meyers commented that the boathouse is being minimized dramatically but rebuilding the lower portion and ensured that the Commission understood the intent.

Motion made by Commissioner Welle and a second by Commissioner Nadler to recommend the application for approval. The following Commissioners voted "YEA": McMahon, Nadler, Welle. The following Commissioners voted "NAY": Mendenhall. Commissioner Lanfear abstained. The motion was approved 3-1.

City Administrator Meyers opened the discussion regarding the Planning and Zoning Commission's recommendation to the Board of Adjustment concerning the property at 1320 Highway 71 N., Okoboji, Iowa, and the proposed amendment to a conditional use permit issued to Commons Holdings LLC for condominium development.

Meyers explained that in 2023, the former hotel on the site was sold. The new owners intended to convert the property into condominiums. Since condominiums are a conditional use within the property's commercial zoning district, the Planning and Zoning Commission held two meetings on the proposal—initially tabling the item and later recommending approval with conditions. The Board of Adjustment subsequently approved the conditional use permit, incorporating additional conditions following public input. The approved development was a 70-unit condominium complex to be built in three phases.

Meyers noted that Phase 1 is substantially complete, and the developer has now requested amendments to the original plan. He invited John Stevens, representing Commons Holdings LLC, to present the proposed changes. Stevens explained that instead of constructing the remaining two phases as originally planned, the developer now wishes to build three triplexes for a total of nine additional units in one new phase. He also noted a proposed modification to the existing south building, which they now plan to retain and convert into four units with attached garages. Stevens added that the proposed triplexes would be two-story walk-out units with four bedrooms and three bathrooms each.

Commissioner Nadler clarified that the proposed changes would result in a lower overall density, which Stevens confirmed.

Commissioner Mendenhall referenced previous concerns discussed during earlier meetings, particularly regarding hotel guests crossing onto the neighboring Village Oaks property. She stressed the importance

of a barrier or fencing along the eastern edge of the property to clearly mark the boundary and discourage trespassing. Mendenhall expressed support for the reduction in density.

Commissioner Welle commented that units without garages are less appealing to buyers and supported the inclusion of garages in the new design. Commissioner Mendenhall also voiced support for adding accessory buildings to provide storage for vehicles, boats, trailers, and similar items.

Meyers noted that the total number of dwelling units would decrease from 70 to 45. He also reported that the developer had indicated a willingness to accept all previously approved conditions as part of the amended permit. Meyers read the conditions aloud for the Commission. Steve Nelson, also representing Commons Holdings LLC, addressed the issue of the pedestrian barrier. He explained that under the revised plan, the new housing would be built along the eastern edge of the property, thereby creating a physical presence and limiting pedestrian access in that area.

Commissioner Lanfear asked about the reason behind the redesign. Nelson responded that one-bedroom units previously included in the plan were not in high demand and that buyers preferred units with garages. This led to internal discussions that resulted in the revised layout. Commissioner Mendenhall reiterated her support for garages, noting that they would help reduce parking congestion on the property. Additional discussion took place regarding market demand for the proposed units.

Les Paul, a neighboring property owner, raised questions about building setbacks and the potential dust created by a nearby gravel road. Nelson stated that the developers planned to comply with all applicable setback requirements. Paul expressed support for the lower unit count and stated that the revised development would likely attract more permanent, long-term residents. Meyers added that the setback would be at least 35 feet from the lot line, though the exact distance from the road was not immediately known.

Doug Stock, president of the East Oaks Village Homeowners Association, asked whether the new development would impact his association's ability to construct structures that might block the lake view from the proposed units. Meyers clarified that nothing in this development would affect what could be done on other private property. Stock also asked for more detail regarding the proposed barrier, specifically its height and materials. It was mentioned that the barrier would be four feet in height, though the specific design had not yet been determined. There was additional discussion on whether a barrier was still necessary in light of the revised layout, with some suggesting that a fence between the road and the houses might not be practical. The developer expressed willingness to follow the general consensus. Commissioner Mendenhall suggested a vegetative barrier using bushes or shrubs. Meyers noted that the original condition called for a "physical barrier" rather than specifying a fence, leaving room for flexibility in the type of barrier used.

Commissioner Lanfear commented on the removal of trees on the site and encouraged replanting.

Motion made by Commissioner Nadler and a second by Commissioner Lanfear to recommend the amended conditional use permit application to the Board of Adjustment for approval along with all of the previously approved conditions. The following Commissioners voted "YEA": Lanfear, McMahon, Mendenhall, Nadler, Welle. Motion was approved 5-0.

City Administrator Meyers opened discussion pertaining to the review and recommendation to the City of Okoboji City Council on the requested vacation of an unneeded utility easement and reestablishment

of said easement located at 3247-3249 Lake Shore Drive as required by Section 137.02 of the City of Okoboji Zoning Code.

Meyers provided an overview of the requested vacation, explaining that the property owner is seeking to expand the buildable area of their currently vacant lot. The lot is currently burdened by a City storm water easement, and the request involves relocating the storm sewer closer to the lot line to free up additional buildable space. Meyers clarified that the full cost of relocating the storm sewer and installing new pipe would be the responsibility of the property owner. However, he noted that if the City decides to upsize the infrastructure during this process, the additional cost associated with that upgrade would be covered by the City. Meyers also explained that in order to vacate and reestablish an easement, the Planning and Zoning Commission must first make a recommendation, after which the City Council will consider the request.

Motion made by Commissioner Welle and a second by Commissioner Mendenhall to recommend the easement vacation for approval. The following Commissioners voted "YEA": Lanfear, McMahon, Mendenhall, Nadler, Welle. Motion was approved 5-0.

City Administrator Meyers opened discussion pertaining to the City requiring a post-foundational survey for major construction projects. Meyers explained that the County recently adopted a similar ordinance in that once a foundation is poured that a survey crew must come back out and resurvey the foundation to ensure its compliance with submitted site plans. Meyers noted that the cost is minimal to the home owner but it would make a big difference in certifying that structures are being constructed as advertised.

Discussion took place on how to handle the situation when noncompliance is identified.

Meyers discussed as to whether or not to include additions greater than 500 square foot. Meyers advised that he did not think this was necessary for small accessory structures not on a permanent foundation.

No action taken.

City Administrator Meyers provided an update on a recent webinar he attended regarding the potential development of a unified lakeshore landscaping ordinance for Dickinson County. The webinar, hosted by Mike Hawkins of the Iowa DNR and John Wills of the Dickinson County Clean Water Alliance, focused on the idea of establishing consistent landscaping regulations across all governmental jurisdictions within the county.

Meyers noted that Commissioner Mendenhall and several other representatives from throughout Dickinson County were also in attendance. He explained that the concept involves the Cities and County entering into a 28E Agreement to form a new entity that would oversee shoreline management on all county lakes. Each participating jurisdiction would likely appoint representatives to a governing board, modeled after similar collaborative County efforts already in place (such as Dickinson County Trails). This board would then hire an administrator to assist property owners with lakeshore landscaping projects.

Meyers clarified that he was sharing this information for general awareness and to invite feedback. He emphasized that while a unified approach could bring consistency and the benefit of having a dedicated expert to guide and manage shoreline projects, it could also result in a reduction of local control. He pointed out that the City of Okoboji currently enforces one of the more restrictive lakeshore landscaping ordinances in the county, whereas other communities may have fewer regulations.

Commissioner Lanfear asked about the potential downsides of the proposal. In response, Commissioner Mendenhall acknowledged the concern that a countywide ordinance could pressure Okoboji to adopt less restrictive standards. However, he also pointed out that collaboration could reveal useful ideas from other communities that might benefit Okoboji. Mendenhall concluded that simply having these conversations is a positive and productive first step.

Meyers further explained that participation would likely come with a financial obligation, as the 28E Agreement would probably assess each member jurisdiction. He also voiced concern that a unified ordinance could eventually expand beyond lakeshore landscaping to include broader zoning issues. Meyers concluded by noting he would bring the matter before the City Council for further discussion.

City Administrator Michael Meyers opened a discussion regarding recently enacted state legislation concerning accessory dwelling units (ADUs). He explained that the new law mandates cities and counties to permit at least one ADU on properties zoned for single-family residences. Meyers shared that the initiative was largely supported by the AARP and promoted by legislators as a response to Iowa's housing shortage and affordability challenges.

While acknowledging those arguments may carry weight, Meyers emphasized that broad, statewide mandates impact communities differently—and that Okoboji often finds itself uniquely affected by such changes. He pointed out that, historically, the City has consistently denied requests for guest houses on large residential lots, citing a longstanding precedent, including a recent Board of Adjustment decision that upheld that stance. According to Meyers, that precedent is now effectively nullified by the new legislation.

He noted the mixed reactions that are likely to follow—some residents will view the change positively, while others may not. Regardless, the City is now required to allow one ADU per lot, and such units must comply with the same setback and height requirements as primary residences. Additionally, the law allows these secondary units to be as large as 50% of the main home—potentially allowing for quite substantial guest houses depending on the size of the principal structure.

Meyers stressed that the change is coming. He said he intends to consult the City Attorney to better understand the limits of local regulatory authority under the new law. He anticipates the need to incorporate an entirely new subsection into the zoning ordinance to address ADUs specifically. Meyers emphasized that these are not typical accessory structures and may need to be treated more like secondary principal dwellings.

He reiterated how significant a shift this represents for the City's zoning landscape and acknowledged that the extent of what the City can still regulate appears to be quite limited under the new rules.

Commissioner Lanfear asked about the general sentiment surrounding this type of housing. Meyers responded that, based on the volume of inquiries and past requests, support might outweigh opposition.

Commissioner Nadler commented on the potential scale and impact of these structures and noted the bipartisan backing the legislation received at the state level.

Meyers concluded by saying that once the first permit is issued under this new framework, it will be quite jarring.

Meyers opened discuss for other zoning matters from the Commission.

Commissioner Mendnehall asked about the Okoboji Boat Works property. Meyers noted that the property will get torn down and subdivided into single-family lots.

Meyers asked the Planning and Zoning Commission to consider a set schedule for 2025. The Commission agreed to meet the last Monday of every month at 5:30PM.

Meyers noted that the Planning and Zoning Commission needs to appoint a new chairperson.

Motion made by Commissioner Nadler and a second by Commissioner Lanfear to appoint Dorris Welle as the Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission. The following Commissioners voted "YEA": Lanfear, McMahon, Mendenhall, Nadler, Welle. Motion was approved 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:30PM.

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Michael Meyers

City Administrator