



**CITY OF NEWPORT
SPECIAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
NEWPORT CITY HALL
April 6, 2021**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Leyde called the Special Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. on April 6, 2021.

2. ROLL CALL

Present (4): Commissioner Brandon Leyde, Commissioner Maria Bonilla, Commissioner Tami Fuelling, and Commissioner Michael Kermes.

Not Present (1): Chair Anthony Mahmood.

3. MEETING MINUTES

A. March 9, 2021

Commissioner Kermes motioned to approve the Planning Commission Meeting Minutes from March 9, 2021. Seconded by Commissioner Fuelling. Approved 3-0-1 (Bonilla).

4. TREE ORDINANCE

City Planner Sherri Buss stated there were several questions that arose during the initial discussion for updating our tree ordinance. Matt Yokiell, Assistant Superintendent of Public Works, and Susan Lindoo, a former Planning Commission member and active volunteer in Newport, are here to answer questions regarding diseased trees.

Ms. Lindoo stated that many City ordinances were written prior to the emerald ash borer (EAB), which is an invasive insect pest in ash trees. One issue with EAB is that the ash trees within a year lose most of their strength, become very brittle, and therefore you want to get these trees down quickly. Some bigger cities are going through and cutting down ash trees before they are dead. When emerald ash borer hits, it can go fast. Thankfully, it is not moving as fast in Minnesota because we are a colder climate. In Newport, our ash trees are scattered throughout the City. Susan and her husband volunteered their time to take inventory and found approximately 100 ash trees on the east side of Hwy 61 on rights-of-way and private areas. This does not include the public land such as the parks or the Bailey School Forest.

Planner Buss inquired if the City forester is actively looking for EAB on public or private properties. Assistant Yokiell stated they surveyed a couple years ago and found EAB is present in Newport. They have done some removals but have mainly focused on planting new trees of different varieties in the parks and at the library.

Planner Buss inquired if the City actively goes onto private properties to look for EAB. Assistant Yokiell stated they have not gone onto private properties. To identify EAB you can see big white or light-colored patches where there should be dark bark. Assistant Yokiell stated he feels it would be best to work with the homeowner to confirm EAB or leave a door hanger asking them to call if the City forester suspects EAB.

Planner Buss stated the definitions can be updated to make it clear we are most concerned about severe tree diseases. Assistant Yokiell stated for most of these trees, it would not be an emergency, so we could identify severe diseased trees once or twice a year.

Commissioner Leyde stated that trees are very expensive to take down. Ideally the process would be a face-to-face meeting with the homeowner and make sure we are very transparent. If the forester makes an honest and earnest effort to contact an unresponsive homeowner then there should be a timeline for getting the Council involved.

Ms. Lindoo stated we should be educating the public about EAB. Another option is to inject your ash tree with a chemical pesticide which would cost a lot less than having to cut the tree down. Ms. Lindoo stated she is a tree advocate and having trees near your home saves you money in terms of heating and cooling.

Commissioner Bonilla inquired if the City would help subsidize the cost for taking down a diseased tree? City Administrator Deb Hill stated the City has tried to get grants, but so far been denied. Assistant Yokiell stated if the tree is in the right-of-way, then it is the City's responsibility.

Planner Buss stated she will make some changes to the draft ordinance based on this discussion and bring it back to the next meeting. Commissioner Leyde inquired if we can get educational information about EAB on our Facebook page or City Website. Ms. Lindoo will look for some educational materials and stated you should always plant a variety of trees.

Commissioner Leyde stated he is turning this meeting over to Commissioner Bonilla as he needs to leave soon.

5. SEWER SERVICE ORDINANCE IN THE RE DISTRICT

Planner Buss stated there are inconsistencies in our City ordinances related to when sewer service is required to be provided. Particularly in new subdivisions in the Residential Estates (RE) district. The Council would like the Planning Commission to investigate and see if this can be clarified. Planner Buss stated we have a set of ordinances that say if a new house is within 100 feet of a City sewer line, they must connect. One reason for this is so the City can pay for extending the sewer lines. Another reason is environmental due to older septic systems. When the Bailey Meadows development came, the properties on Catherine Drive had to connect. In the subdivision ordinance and the zoning ordinance we say that if the parcel is adjacent, then the whole parcel or subdivision must connect. In some areas a lift station would be required because the system would not operate by gravity. A public lift station would be very expensive, but an alternative would be a smaller/private lift station on each property.

Planner Buss inquired if the Commission wants to require connections for the immediate buildings within 100 feet or if they feel the entire subdivision should connect. Administrator Hill stated the City invested a large amount of money for the water and sewer lines.

The Commission discussed and felt it would be more reasonable for the smaller/private lift stations. Commissioner Bonilla inquired what is required for this area based on our current ordinance. Planner Buss stated that staff has told them the two units within 100 feet must connect.

The Special Planning Commission Meeting experienced technical difficulties at 6:29 p.m. on April 6, 2021.

The Special Planning Commission Meeting resumed at 6:32 p.m. on April 6, 2021.

Roll Call:

Present (3): Commissioner Maria Bonilla, Commissioner Tami Fuelling, and Commissioner Michael Kermes.

Not Present (2): Chair Anthony Mahmood, and Commissioner Brandon Leyde.

The Commission agreed that due to environmental concerns, it makes sense to have units connect and give them the option for private lift stations. Planner Buss will amend the ordinances and bring back to the next meeting.

6. MEETING DATES

No action was taken.

7. COMMISSION REPORTS

None.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Fuelling motioned to adjourn the Planning Commission Meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Kermes. Approved 3-0.

The Planning Commission Meeting was adjourned at 6:38 p.m. on April 6, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted:
Jill Thiesfeld,
Administrative Assistant II

Signed: _____
Anthony Mahmood, Chairman