

Planning Commission - Regular Meeting
October 23, 2024
6:00 pm
Minutes of the Meeting

This special meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order on October 23, 2024 at 6:05 pm. by Chairman Mark Manzanares. Present were the following members: Mark Manzanares, John Adams, Sandra Ortega, and Ralph Symbleme, with Commissioner Reyna Martinez excused. Staff Present: Deacon Aspinwall, Erich Schwiesow, and Rachel James.

Agenda Approval: M/S/C. Adams/Ortega-Motion to approve agenda as presented. All in favor, none opposed.

Public Comments: None

Regular Business: Request by the Alamosa School District allow a secondary and online school by Conditional Use in the Central Business District (CBD) at 700 Main St

- Staff report: Explained that the Ordinance that allows this use in the code is still under review from Council but this request was expedited to accommodate the school district's timelines. Staff explained that the background of this request is already well known and would not be discussed at length. Staff did explain the gravity of allowing a non-profit building in the CBD and that they were unlikely to ever leave. Staff explained the nature of conditional use requests and how conditions must be reasonable and enforceable. Explained that educational uses are recommended in the downtown plan. Staff recognizes the parallels between high-school aged or older students and office uses. Explained the district's proposal of a Mean Moose store and how it tied in with Councilor Carson's recommendation from their October 9th work session to lease retail space on the first floor of the building. Community need for a school at this location is self-evident and there is a need to house the alternative school. Explained that school districts answers to the questions posed by the Planning Commission at the special September 10th meeting (*attached in applicant narrative*). Staff recommends approval of the conditional use permit and after presentation from the school district and questions from the planning commission, would be willing to give recommendations on conditions.
- Presentation from School District: Joe Aldrich is the project manager and one of the representatives for the District. Mr. Aldrich stated that the conditions from the staff report seem reasonable but had not heard of the student cap and would defer to other District leadership. His primary concern with Councilor Carson's recommendation for 1,500 sq.ft. of retail space would be the redesign/remodel costs. He has reached out to Kathy Woods and she said there is some funding available. Would like to see the District and the City partner to find funding to make the retail space possible. He believes that adding the storefront back would cost between \$250,000-\$400,000k. Argued that the space needs to make sense for both the city and the district and be profitable. He repeatedly stressed that the retail space would only be possible if the city was willing to partner to find grants to fund it.

- Request for Public Comment: none
- Questions from PC:
 - Symbleme: What type of retail establishment was recommended? Staff responded that anything allowed by right would be ideal. Tutoring and education services are Retail Type 1 and would be a good fit. Staff does not think food service would be feasible because of the cost of remodeling.
 - Adams: Is the building historical? Mr. Aldrich explained it is not on the registry but will look into it for funding. Designation would not affect any of the proposed uses for the building.
 - Manzanares: Would like clarification on the number of students and would like to see a cap on 70 and with limitation on middle school students only allowed on site for tutoring but not as alt ed students. If the school district would like to grow or expand to middle school students, they can come back before the Planning Commission. As far as retail space, 1,500 square feet is not very much room but it does give the opportunity for the retail industry and storage. Would like the District to see it through. When the school district built the stadium it took much longer than promised to take care of the road and does not want to see that happen with this project. Asked staff if the open house/public meeting option was possible to enforce. Staff responded that although it could not be a requirement of the conditional use, it would be an important thing for the District to do as a good neighbor. Mr. Manzanares commended the District for the amount of public outreach it did in advance of the four day week transition and how smoothly it went when it took effect. Asked staff if parking and nuisance behavior conditions could be enforced, staff responded that the nuisance behavior was not allowed but specific requirements for parking are allowed. The nuisance behavior would have to be dealt with the onsite school security and the District should handle as good neighbors in the CBD. Mr. Aldrich responded that the District is looking into buying the courtyard adjacent to the old Oscar's building as well as the Sixth Street parking lot. Acknowledged that the District has the best leverage to acquire the lot. Mr. Manzanares recommended a Sylvan learning center and dyslexia testing based on the need in the community and stated that the District would hear it first hand if they were to do public outreach. Mr. Aldrich explained that if grants are secured, it gives the District a lot of flexibility on who to rent to and what to set the rent as.
 - Symbleme: Can the City have first refusal for the Sixth Street parking lot? Staff said the parking lot should be discussed at another time.
 - Adams: would like to define when retail space would happen. City Attorney Schwiesow explained that conditions should include a trigger and a deadline for the first floor retail space. He also cautioned that the City partnering on grants should not be included as one of the conditions. Mr. Aldrich requested a reasonable timeline and said that the price tag would make it very difficult. Mr. Schweisow asked what "reasonable" would mean? Mr. Aldrich suggested five years.

- Symbleme: should we further restrict the retail space to focus on education. Staff said that would make the space more difficult to fill and discouraged it.
- Ortega: Asked what the timeline for occupancy would be. Mr. Aldrich explained that they would concentrate on the educational and office uses first and then the retail use later. Asked what the incubator space plan would be and staff explained what it is and that it was recommended by Councilor Hensley at the UDC work session.
- Dr. Jones spoke about the condition that would cap the number of students at 70. She asked why they would cap the number of students. Chairman Manzanares said that there are requirements for 35 square feet per student and that without plans at this point, it is impossible to know what the plan to grow will be. Allows the District to come back to request an increase and get necessary public feedback. Dr. Jones would not like to have a limit that prevents them from helping students. The Chair of the School Board requested the cap be moved up to 100. Chairman Manzanares said they support education completely but feel like having them come back before the Planning Commission if they want to increase it and allow comments from the public.
- Symbleme: Does the cap of 70 students affect how the building will be remodeled? Mr. Aldrich said that does not hurt the remodel of the building and even if you subtract the space for retail, you still have room for 270 students.
- Chairman Manzanares asked staff to help write the two conditions. Polled each member what cap number they are comfortable with. Answers ranged from 70-75. Agreed on 75. Mr. Aldrich asked for online students to be specifically exempted from the cap. Staff asked if there was a square footage consensus. 1,500 feet was supported. Staff confirmed 5 years was the trigger for the retail space.
- While staff worked on condition recommendation wording, staff explained how Council ratification works.
- Motion: The request for a conditional use for a high-school aged school in the CBD meets the standards for which a condition may be granted. I move to approve the request with the following conditions. 1) A maximum alt-ed student enrollment cap of 75 students, which does not include the online educational components and students. 2) A minimum of 1500 sf of dedicated and leasable space for retail sales & services, or similar use permitted by right or limited use by right. Said space must be occupiable within 5 years of the issuance of a certificate of occupancy for the educational use.
 - **M/S/C:** Adams/Symbleme, 3 in favor, one opposed (Ortega).
- Staff updates: Captain Maestas has taken the Chief position at ASU, Sergeant Squires will be replacing him for Code Enforcement. We have both plans for downtown hotels. Approved site plan for ENT bank. Old Courthouse moving forward, groundbreaking is on November 1st. Dark Skies went before Council for first reading and was positively received. May not meet the necessary standards to establish the reserve. Alley activation RFP is out. Update on Council's deviation from Planning Commission's recommendations on mushrooms. Reminded that Chairman Manzanares will do his annual update at the November 6th meeting.

Adjourned at 7:37 p.m. **M/S** Ortega/Symbleme

Respectfully Submitted,

Rachel James
Development Services Director