



City of Presque Isle, Maine

Planning Board & City Council Minutes

City of Presque Isle, 12 Second Street, Presque Isle, Maine 04769
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Sargent Family Community Center

January 16, 2022 @ 6:00 PM

Planning Board Members Present: Bruce Roope, Chairman; Ward Gerow, Vice-Chairman; Jayne Farrin, Sean Nordenhold, Travis Ouellette, & David Perry

Planning Board Members Absent: Brandon McDonald

City Councilors Present: Kevin Freeman, Chairman; Jacob Shaw, Vice Chairman; Mike Chasse, Doug Cyr, & Gary Nelson

City Councilors Absent: Jeff Willette, Craig Green

Others Present: Galen Weibley, Director of Economic & Community Development; Tim St. Peter, Code Enforcement Officer; Chad Graham, Jeff Legasse, Jason Parent & Teresa Dow with ACAP; Martin Puckett, City Manager; Dana Fowler, City Public Works; Tom Powers, Presque Isle Industrial Council; Lewis Cousins, City Assessor; Jayne Towle, Troy Haney, Jennifer Sweetser, Presque Isle Housing Authority; & David DiMinno, Reporter for the Star Herald

1. Call to Order of Joint Session with City Council

Chairman Roope called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

2. Minutes Approval: Review and approve draft minutes from December 16, 2021.

Galen Weibley provided revised minutes from the December Planning Board Meeting to include recommendations from Jayne Farrin. Chairman Roope requested that the December meeting minutes also reflect the boards displeasure in NMDC during the comprehensive plan process.

A motion by *Jayne Farrin*, second by *Ward Gerow* to approve the December 16, 2021 Planning Board Meeting Minutes with the Farrin & Roope revisions. **Vote – unanimous 6-0**

3. **Review Subdivision Plans for The Loft @ Downtown Presque Isle 477 Main Street:** Review subdivision plans before acting.

Mr. Legasse provided an overview of the subdivision plan proposal located at 477 Main Street. The proposal calls for the creation of six new efficiency units: four on first floor, two in basement. Public water and sewer are currently available for the units with trash collection. Only item outstanding was regarding parking. The City's Land Use Code requires two parking spaces per unit and the applicant does not own any parking area behind the building. The Code therefore requires approval of parking spaces that are owned by the City at 300 feet or alternative parking at 500 feet away by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Chairman Roope stated that it would be wise for the Planning Board to table the subdivision application until the Zoning Board Appeals reaches a decision on the parking criteria. Jayne Farrin inquired if the size of the units is big enough space and that none of the units have windows for natural lighting. Tim St. Peter confirmed that the size of the units is in compliance with the codes and that there are no requirements for natural lighting.

A motion by *Ward Gerow*, second by *Jayne Farrin* to table the subdivision application for 477 Main Street until the Zoning Board of Appeals reaches a decision regarding parking.

Vote – 4 support (Roope, Gerow, Farrin, & Ouellette) -1 oppose (Perry) -1 abstention (Nordenhold)

4. **Election of Officers:** Discuss who should be the Chair & Vice Chair for 2022

There was a brief discussion regarding the officer slate for 2022.

A motion by *Jayne Farrin*, second by *David Perry* to nominate Bruce Roope as Chairman and Ward Gerow as Vice Chairman. **Vote – unanimous 6-0.**

5. **Call of Roll for Joint Session with the City Council:**

Chairman Roope and Freeman requested a roll call by Mr. Weibley for the joint session between the Planning Board and City Council to discuss housing. Mr. Weibley went through roll and determined five city councilors and six planning board members are present.

6. **Joint Session on Housing**

Mr. Weibley took the opportunity to brief the City Councilors and Planning Board members regarding the format for the evening's meeting. At the request of the Planning Board and Council, Mr. Weibley was able to bring Jane Towle with RE/MAX and Troy Haney a residential developer in the area to offer insight into the real estate market for Aroostook County and development challenges facing new development opportunities in Presque Isle.

Ms. Towle began the conversation with an overview of latest housing sale numbers and agreed to share the data she has with all committee members afterwards. In 2021 4th quarter, Aroostook County saw a 7.9% increase in number of units sold for Aroostook County. There was a price increase of 18% as well. In comparing these figures with Cumberland County which saw

housing sales decline by 11%, Aroostook County is still experiences a hot market. The absorption rate for Aroostook County used to be 16 months, now it is 2 months. Ms. Towle proceeded to share stats specific for Presque Isle stating the average high was 90 homes on the market with an average of 60 in any given year. Now there are only 12 houses on the market many having criteria not sought after in the market.

Ms. Towle shared insight into the out of state calls received by her office since the pandemic to aid into what out of state buyers are looking for when locating to the County. To date, Ms. Towle shared out-of-state inquires and buyers are from every state except for North Dakota.

These are the top criteria for moving into Aroostook County:

- ✓ Safety & Security
- ✓ Privacy available
- ✓ Water Rights
- ✓ Sense of Freedom/Lifestyle

A councilor asked Ms. Towle if many of the buyers are retired or near retirement age. Ms. Towle stated the majority of the buyers she is seeing in working aged families wanting to move to the area for a sense of safety. Another question was asked what the ideal house people are looking for on the market. Generally speaking, most are searching for 3-bedroom 2-bath ranch style housing. Another member asked if realtors are receiving calls for houses to rent. Ms. Towle shared that her office has not experienced many individuals looking to rent, in the past individuals contacting a realtor for rentals are moving to the area and using for short term transition.

After Ms. Towle's presentation and answering questions, Troy Haney presented to the Planning Board and City Council regarding his perspective as a developer of residential condominiums in Aroostook County. Mr. Haney share an overview into the creation and sustainable practices of a condominium development including his example of creating 11 units within Presque Isle. Mr. Haney also shared that contractors are currently 9-12 months out in building given the increased construction demand and shortage of labor in the County.

Mr. Haney shared that there is great potential for condominium developments in Presque Isle explaining that the ideal development is 3-bedroom and 2-bath that is 1,400 -1,500 sq. ft. with a cost of \$300,000.00 or \$200/sq. ft for all material, sewer, water, road, sidewalk, foundations, etc. When selling units for \$150,000.00 it is not cost effective to build new. It took Mr. Haney six years to sell the first unit as it was a new concept but sold the rest of the units fast.

Mr. Haney identified the hurdles facing development including:

- Time frame (municipal approvals being too long outside PI)
- Identifying the right property with infrastructure
- Required 6-8 units for development
- Paying taxes while developing

Mr. Haney provided insight regarding new development is that during slow times is when he builds residential developments to keep his employees employed. He also shared because of the costs and challenges, that the profit margin is not so high. A councilor inquired what incentives

would be needed to develop in Presque Isle. Mr. Haney stated a tax break during development or help covering infrastructure would make it attractive to build. In addition, Mr. Haney stated finding a 2-acre lot that is centrally located to city services or amenities would make building attractive in PI.

Next, Jennifer Sweetser, Director for Presque Isle Housing thanked the City for bringing this meeting together and addressed the board and council shared the current state of emergency and low-income housing in Presque Isle. PI Housing Authority has 25 Section 8 vouchers and 20 new vouchers schedule for availability in 2022. In addition, Ms. Sweetser mentioned we need to make changes to identify funds to develop 25-unit apartment building for the demand needed by low to moderate income families in Aroostook County. A board member inquired what is the make up on PI Housing rental stock. Ms. Sweetser stated most units are 2 or 3-bedroom units that cost \$35,000-\$60,000 per unit.

Jason Parent with ACAP thanked the City for hosting this meeting. He shared with the joint session that ACAP is assisting 60 people with supported housing in hotel rooms in Presque Isle. In addition, there is no housing for single people to aid in avoiding homelessness. Mr. Parent shared the plans for 14-unit supportive housing on 1 Edgemont Drive, however this is only a drop in the bucket for the demand needed. The members asked Mr. Parent and Ms. Sweetser what the current vouchers pay for. Both stated that vouchers pay \$1,000/month for 3-bedroom units or \$737/month for 2-bedroom units that include heat and water. There is also a flat rate of \$850/month ACAP pays for housing.

Chairmen Freeman and Roope thanked all speakers for taking the time to address the City and to share information to aid in planning efforts for the future. Mr. Weibley also thanked the guest speakers, department heads and all other housing partners for beginning this process together.

7. Adjournment of the Planning Board

A motion by *Dave Perry*, second by *Ward Gerow* to adjourn the Planning Board at 8:24 PM.

Vote – unanimous 6-0.

8. City Council Special Allocation Request- Special funding request for Snowfest

The City Council discussed purchasing a tent for \$4,000 for the upcoming Snowfest event from Reuben Caron. After discussion, **Councilor Freeman** made a motion to purchase the tent, second by **Councilor Nelson**. Vote: 3 approve (Freeman, Nelson, & Shaw) - 2 oppose (Chasse & Cyr).

9. Adjournment of City Council

Councilor Freeman declared the Council adjourned at 8:36 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Galen Weibley

Planning Board Members

**Bruce Roope, Chair, Ward Gerow, Vice-Chair
Jayne Farrin, Dave Perry, Brandon McDonald,
Sean Nordenhold & Travis Ouellette**

City Council Members

**Kevin Freeman, Chair, Jacob Shaw, Vice-Chair
Mike Chasse, Doug, Cyr, Craig Green,
Gary Nelson, & Jeff Willette**