

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COMMISSION  
CITY OF EAST GRAND RAPIDS

**Regular Meeting Held April 19, 2021**

Mayor Favale called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at the East Grand Rapids Community Center and led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance. She announced the meeting was also being held electronically as allowed by the recent amendment to the Michigan Open Meetings Act and a local declaration of emergency in response to the COVID-19 crisis. She invited any citizen attending by computer or phone to ask questions or offer comments during the public comment times.

Present in Person: Commissioners Hamrick, Walters and Mayor Favale

Present Virtually: Commissioners Arendshorst, Hecksel and Pachla

Absent: Commissioner Duncan

Also Present: City Attorney Huff; City Manager Charles; Deputy City Manager LaFave; City Clerk Brower; Finance Director Seath; Zoning Administrator Gianotti; Captain Buikema

2021-66. The agenda was approved as published.

2021-67. No public comment was received.

2021-68. Commissioner Pachla announced he was attending the meeting virtually from his home in East Grand Rapids. He noted construction projects have begun and urged everyone to drive carefully and pay attention in construction zones.

Commissioner Arendshorst stated he was attending virtually from his home.

Commissioner Hecksel reported he was attending the meeting virtually from his home in East Grand Rapids.

City Manager Charles noted the Mobility Bike Action Plan would be on the City Commission agenda on May 17 and the first quarter data from the public safety department would be reviewed on May 3. He also noted the Public Safety Department has been working with the City of Grand Rapids to coordinate staffing in the event of marches or protests later this month.

2021-69. KDL Board Representative Chuck Myers, KDL Fund Development Director Christine Mwangi and KDL Branch Manager Dawn Lewis presented the Kent District Library 2020 Annual Report.

2021-70. Sign variance hearing on the request of Rite Aid Pharmacy of 2130 Wealthy to allow new signage for the building using alternate calculation methods of signage area or to allow the sign to measure 40 square feet instead of the 25 square feet allowed.

Zoning Administrator Gianotti explained Rite Aid wished to replace the existing 49 square foot non-conforming sign with a new logo and coloring scheme. The sign ordinance provides different methods of measurement and limitations on size. Rite Aid is requesting to use an alternate method to measure only the lettering without using the proposed backing board in the calculation or to allow a larger square footage if required to include the backing board. Mr. Gianotti did not feel the sign ordinance variance standards were met by this application.

Brad Rhodes of Sign Art, representing Rite Aid, explained the backing board was being used to avoid and cover multiple wires and holes in the façade when wiring individual letter. He did not feel the backing board should be counted in the calculation because it would be painted to match the building and hardly noticeable. He stated the backing board or overall lettering could be reduced if necessary.

Mayor Favale opened a public hearing. No other public comment was received. Mayor Favale closed the public hearing.

Commissioners questioned if the backing board was necessary and whether it could be made smaller. Mr. Rhodes stated the signs are individually custom-built for each store, so the sizes and use of backing boards vary.

- 2021-070-A. Walters-Hecksel. That the request of Rite Aid Pharmacy of 2130 Wealthy to allow the alternate method of calculating signage for the building as provided in Section 8.15(D.2) be approved as outlined in the Zoning Administrator memo contained in the agenda materials.

Commissioner Walters stated he would be voting no on this request as he felt the Zoning Administrator's interpretation was correct and if the commission wanted to allow a larger sign, it should be done with a variance and not a different method of measurement. Commissioner Pachla and Mayor Favale agreed.

Yeas: - 0 -

Nays: Arendshorst, Hamrick, Hecksel, Pachla, Walters and Favale – 6

- 2021-070-B. Walters-Hamrick. That the request of Rite Aid Pharmacy of 2130 Wealthy to allow new signage for the building to measure 40 square feet instead of the 25 square feet allowed be approved as outlined in the Zoning Administrator memo contained in the agenda materials.

Commissioner Walters spoke against allowing the larger sign since Mr. Rhodes admitted the signs would be custom made and could easily meet the sign ordinance requirements.

Commissioners Arendshorst and Pachla also noted the sign could be made to fit the requirement or done without the backing board to keep the proposed lettering size.

Yeas: - 0 -

Nays: Arendshorst, Hamrick, Hecksel, Pachla, Walters and Favale – 6

- 2021-71. Zoning variance hearing on the request of Katie Stein, owner of 815 Plymouth, to allow the construction of an addition to the home creating a side yard setback of 14'4" instead of the required 24.'

Zoning Administrator Gianotti explained the property had frontage on two streets and the proposed 25'x29' garage would encroach into the side yard setback on the Pontiac Road frontage.

Commissioners Walters and Arendshorst announced they would be abstaining from the discussion and vote on this issue because their law firm does significant legal work for the applicant's family.

Katie Stein, 55 Park Hills SE, explained she bought the house to renovate instead of having it torn down. The goal of the project is to remodel the outdated home and add ADA compliance for those needing a home on one level. She reviewed the other options considered that will not work well for this home.

Mayor Favale opened a public hearing. The following people were present to express their opinions:

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| - Dru Chapman, project architect   | Garage size is to allow two vehicles with room to open doors.  |
| - Bob Kirchgessner, 1900 El Dorado | Stated his support as a lot of work had gone into the plans.   |
| - Steve Wilson, 1734 Pontiac       | Opposed because it will change his view dramatically and there are other options for a garage on the property. |

The following communications were received at City Hall concerning this variance request:

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|--------------------------------|---|
| - Scott Brundage, 835 Plymouth | No objection if privacy wall or landscaping is installed around new deck. |
| - Steve Wilson, 1734 Pontiac   | Oppose two-car garage 14' from the sidewalk.                              |

No other public comment was received. Mayor Favale closed the public hearing.

- 2021-071-A. Hamrick-Hecksel. That the request of Katie Stein of 815 Plymouth to allow the construction of an addition to the home creating a side yard setback of 14'4" instead of the required 24' be approved as outlined in the Zoning Administrator memo contained in the agenda materials.

Commissioner Hamrick felt this modest size home would provide character and desirable housing options. She noted the unique shape of the lot created the side yard situation and it would not have a negative impact on the neighborhood.

Commissioner Hecksel agreed the variance standards are met and noted the angle of the lot line meant only a triangular portion of the garage encroached into the setback.

Commissioner Pachla also stated the required standards are met with this proposal and the impact on the neighbors was minimized by only having a portion of the garage in the setback.

Yeas: Hamrick, Hecksel, Pachla and Favale – 4

Nays: -0-

Abstain: Arendshorst and Walters – 2

- 2021-72. Discussion of treatment options for gypsy moths.

Deputy City Manager LaFave stated the city's forestry consultant, Lee Mueller, had conducted a survey of the egg masses in the areas of city affected by gypsy moths and reported that while the population will be somewhat elevated this year, it should not substantially impact tree health. The report included several options for homeowners to use to mitigate the nuisance effects of the feeding caterpillars, including relying on nature to control the moths, adding tree bands or aerial spraying of a bacteria to kill the caterpillars. Mr. LaFave noted that while some residents are very supportive of aerial spraying to alleviate the unpleasant droppings, others are very opposed to such spraying due to safety concerns. Mr. LaFave further noted that spraying can have limited effects based on the growing season, weather conditions, and whether surrounding municipalities spray their affected areas.

Lee Mueller of Davey Resource Group stated that healthy trees can withstand 1-2 years of defoliation without lasting effects, and he did not feel tree health was in danger with the projected levels this year. He noted that aerial spraying, while somewhat effective in the short term, can artificially prolong the outbreak of gypsy moths and was not generally recommended unless the health of the trees was jeopardized. The DNR and the MSU are also recommending letting nature control most outbreaks.

Mayor Favale opened a public hearing. The following communications were received at City Hall concerning this variance request:

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| - Taylor Allen, 2023 Hall     | Disagrees with recommendation. Requested spraying. |
| - Jeanne DeRouseau, 2029 Hall | Disagrees with recommendation. Requested spraying. |

No other public comment was received. Mayor Favale closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Arendshorst stated he lived in the affected area and felt aerial spraying should be considered because of the number of people affected by the nuisance considerations of the infestation.

Commissioner Walters agreed the cost of spraying would be minimal but may not be entirely effective and may actually prolong the outbreak.

Commissioner Hamrick expressed concern about the affects on other wildlife in the area.

Commissioner Pachla suggested expanding the public education about the options available, including hiring contractors to spray individual properties with truck-mounted equipment. He also suggested increasing the accessibility of the products to homeowners.

Mayor Favale agreed the situation could be unpleasant for several weeks, but felt spraying had limited effectiveness and could prolong the overall outbreak.

2021-072-A. Walters-Hamrick. To accept the recommendation of the city's forestry consultant to rely on natural fungus and tree band barriers to control any remaining gypsy moth pockets for the next year without aerial spraying and to encourage staff to expand the public communication and access to tree bands and products.

Yeas: Arendshorst, Hamrick, Hecksel, Pachla, Walters and Favale – 6

Nays: -0-

Deputy City Manager LaFave stated the city will communicate the decision to residents and make sure everyone is given information and access to mitigation efforts.

2021-73. Designated Assessor Agreement with Kent County.

City Manager Charles explained a recent state law added options for municipalities who could not perform assessing operations by using a county designated assessor to complete the assessment duties. There is no cost if a municipality does not use the services available.

Commissioner Walters suggested waiting to see what other communities are doing and what other options there may be. Everyone concurred with this approach. City Manager Charles will monitor the situation and bring this matter back the commission when appropriate.

2021-74. Report on refinancing of the Community Center bonds.

Finance Director Seath reported the refinancing was completed in early April and will save taxpayers about \$46,000 collectively each year. The lower interest rates will mean the city can reduce the millage amount levied each year to make the payments on the bonds.

2021-75. Arendshorst-Pachla. To approve the consent agenda as follows:

2021-075-A. Minutes of the rescheduled meeting held March 29, 2021.

2021-075-B. Payroll disbursements of \$217,558.19; county and school disbursements of \$-0-, and total remaining disbursements of \$170,905.19.

2021-075-C. Quarterly neighborhood communications report from Blodgett Hospital.

2021-075-D. Proclamation designating April 30, 2021 as Arbor Day for the City of East Grand Rapids as attached in Exhibit "A."

Yeas: Arendshorst, Hamrick, Hecksel, Pachla, Walters and Favale – 6

Nays: -0-

2021-76. Mayor Favale reopened the meeting for public comment. No public comment was received.

2021-77. City Manager Charles and Finance Director Seath presented an overview of the upcoming budget approval process. Mr. Charles complimented the staff for their work over the last year minimizing the effects of COVID-19 on the City's programs, services and financial position. He reviewed the overall projected revenues and expenses and noted that water/sewer rates would remain the same for this fiscal year. The City is monitoring the federal COVID funding for local governments and will bring this issue to the commission when more information is received.

Commissioner Pachla requested more information on the cumulative effects of Proposal A on the city's property tax revenues.

Commissioner Walters suggested looking at ways to tie all of the goals, capital and budget matters together for both the commission and for communications to residents.

The city commission will review the capital requests at their next meeting on May 3.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m., subject to the call of the Mayor until April 19, 2021.

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Karen K. Brower, City Clerk

Attachments: A – Arbor Day Proclamation

Attachments listed above are available for inspection at the office of the City Clerk.