

**CITY OF ST. FRANCIS  
ST. FRANCIS, MN  
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES  
June 17, 2015**

1. **Call to Order:** The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Steinke.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were Ray Steinke, Brittney Berndt, Todd Gardner, and William Murray.
3. **Adopt Agenda:** Motion by Murray, second by Gardner to approve the June 17, 2015 agenda. Motion carried 4-0.
4. **Approve Minutes:** Motion by Berndt, second by Murray to approve the April 15, 2015 minutes. Motion carried 4-0.
5. **Public Comment:** None
6. **Public Hearing – Jensen Family LP – Zoning Text Amendment – Permit Religious Institutions in the B-2, General Commercial District.**

Sparks stated that George Jensen of the Jensen Family Limited Partnership has made a zoning ordinance text amendment to permit religious institutions in the B-2, General Business District. The intent is to allow for rental of space in the St. Francis Mall to a religious institution.

Currently the City defines churches as religious institutions and they are allowed as a permitted use in the R-2 District and by a conditional use permit in the R-1, R-3, and R-4 Districts. Religious institutions are currently not permitted within the B-2, General Business District which intended to provide for commercial uses adjacent to frequently traveled corridors. The areas along Bridge Street east of the Rum River and most of the Highway 47 corridor north of Pederson Drive are zoned B-2. The Comprehensive Plan states that commercial uses are to be concentrated along Highway 47 and Bridge Street.

Steinke opened the public hearing at 7:17 pm.

James Graham from the Living Word Evangelical Free Church stated they wish to lease the space for three years as temporary location. Since there is a Montessori school and a pizza place which are also assembly uses in the mall they feel it would be a violation of federal law which require cities to allow churches where other assembly uses are located. The plan is to eventually build on County Road 9 in Oak Grove.

Berndt asked how many members are in the church. Graham said it was 60.

Gardner asked if they have activity outside of Sunday services. Graham said they have youth services on Mondays and it is sometimes conducted outside. On Wednesdays they have a program for children 12 and under.

Graham said the church has not caused problems in the community and this is being done all over the country. He said a church is better than an empty storefront.

Steinke said the floor plan shows that a business is currently located in the area to be leased to the church.

George Jensen of the Jensen Family Limited Partnership said he allows that tenant to stay but he would be leaving if this goes through and it is a complicated situation. The center has been there for 30 years and it is difficult to maintain and fill. It should be important to fill and would be an asset if it were full. Some cities do allow this and it would only be temporary.

Berndt asked if there were any other businesses interested in this space. Jensen said that a dollar store moved out and then the church contacted them. Businesses are leaving and it may be due to the County road project.

Janet Voss of That Other Thrift Store located in the St Francis Mall said the church would be bringing people to the town for weddings and funerals and they are willing to share the parking lot. It is a shame to have empty commercial spaces.

Steinke closed the public hearing at 7:35.

Murray asked if a church could be built in the B-2 District or could we just allow this one. Sparks stated that the text amendment would allow a church to be built in the B-2 District. The City would need to treat all religious institutions equally.

Steinke asked if it could be a conditional or interim use. Sparks said it could be if there were a compelling condition that would make it acceptable. Interim uses are intended to be for temporary or transitional uses.

Murray said he was concerned about a new building. Berndt stated there might not be that many. Gardner said he understand the property owners concerns but it concerned about the limited amount of commercial space in the City.

Berndt said she would like to have spaces filled and that churches bring people to town but she is also concerned about the limited amount of commercial space.

Steinke said there could be parking concerns if there were events like weeknight weddings.

Graham interjected that the City is compelled to approve their request because of federal law. Gardner stated that he disagreed.

Steinke asked about tax implications. Sparks stated that it is a land use consideration not related to taxes.

Motion by Murray, second by Gardner to recommend denial of the amendment request due to implications on city-wide commercial properties. Motion carried 4-0.

**7. Planning Commission Discussion**

Murray suggested the City put in advertising kiosks in City buildings for area businesses.

**8. Adjournment: Motion by Berndt, second by Gardner to adjourn. Motion carried 4-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:08 pm.**

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Nate Sparks, City Planner

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Date

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