

CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting

Wednesday, August 2, 2023 at 6:30 P.M.

Washington Fire Department Training Room - 200 N. Wilmor Road, Washington

Call to Order Chairman Mike Burdette called the regular meeting of the City of Washington Planning and Zoning Commission to order at 6:30 p.m. A quorum was established.

Roll Call *Present:* Commissioners Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott, Shelton, Williams
Absent: None
Also present: Planning and Development Director Oliphant and City Clerk Brod

Approve Minutes Commissioner Scott motioned, and Commissioner Reeder seconded to approve the meeting minutes from the July 5, 2023, as presented. Motion carried by voice vote.

Public Comments None provided.

Public Hearing
Item A: Variance Request by St. Mark's Lutheran Church to Allow an Electronic Message Board in a Residential District at 200 S. Main St.

At 6:32 p.m., Commissioner Burdette opened the public hearing to consider the variance request by St. Mark's Lutheran Church for a variance to allow an electronic message board in a residential zoning district at 200 S. Main Street. Planning and Zoning Director Oliphant explained that the church would like to install a message board below its current sign which was installed in 1986. He noted that the code does not allow this in a residential district. He also noted that the current sign is slightly bigger than the proposed sign and regulations cap the size at 40% of the sign area and this is slightly bigger. Mr. Oliphant shared that we have had one other variance similar to this, at the church on Walnut Street. Perry Denker from the St. Mark's Church shared that they have been exploring this for just over two years and they would like to use this to welcome everyone to their church. He feels this would provide good messages, weather, and an invitation. Cindy Calvert from St. Mark's said they see it as an opportunity to let the community know about the church activities. She shared that the daycare housed in the church would also be able to use the sign, as well as their grief-share group and they would like to have it help grow their church. Mr. Denker stated that they see this as being a part of the community and they are mindful of the historic area in which they are located in. Ms. Calvert stated that they do not want to disrupt their current presence, so they want to keep this very tasteful.

Mark DuBois clarified that this is on Main Street and asked if this is just one sign. Mr. Oliphant confirmed that it is only one sign in this request. He also clarified that this will be under the current sign and any other signs would need a separate variance. Mr. DuBois asked if he needed a variance for a sign in his yard and Mr. Oliphant responded, yes. Mr. DuBois asked if this would affect property values. He stated that he is concerned because he pays a lot of property taxes, and he would not want them going down after this.

Walter Ruppman asked about the value to the community. Ms. Calvert stated that the value is to allow the community to see what is happening at the church and provide a welcoming presence. She stated it would only be turned on during the daytime, maybe 7am-10pm. Mr. Ruppman and Ms. Calvert discussed the messages that could be displayed on the sign.

Tom Gross, who lives across the church expressed his support for the variance request because it will help the community. He feels this may be the most beautiful church in Illinois and he supports this church as a neighbor.

At 6:40p.m., Commissioner Burdett closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Scott motioned to approve the request; Commissioner Ritter seconded.

Commissioner Scott shared that it makes sense to make the digital sign a little smaller than the sign that is there.

Commissioner Ritter clarified that the sign will be two-sided and there are no time restrictions on a digital sign.

Ms. Calvert stated that they don't want it to be a nuisance. It will have a time frame for the display.

Commissioner Scott noted that it is not a large sign.

Commissioner Reeder clarified that there is a sign underneath it and noted that the older sign is in disrepair.

Commissioner Burdett feels the precedent was set with Methodist Church sign.

Commissioner Shelton clarified that the current top part of the sign will stay, and this will replace the older message board.

Commissioner Scott stated that this fits visually, and this doesn't seem too large. He feels this is tactfully done.

Commissioner Milot and Mr. Oliphant clarified that this is at least 20 feet from Main Street and the speed limit is 25 mph, in that area.

On roll call the vote was:

7 Ayes: Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott, Shelton, Williams

0 Nays:

Motion carried.

Public Hearing
*Item B: Proposed
Amendment to the
Zoning Code Section
154.727 "Ground-
mount and Roof Mount
Solar Energy Systems*

At 6:38 Commissioner Burdette opened the public hearing to provide details regarding a proposed amendment to the zoning code regarding ground-mount solar systems. Mr. Oliphant stated that our current solar regulations do not allow ground-mount solar within the city limits. He shared that a contractor approached Council regarding ground-mount solar and it was discussed. Council gave direction for this change but mostly for nonresidential uses. He noted we are the only jurisdiction that does not allow ground-mounts in some capacity. Mr. Oliphant explained that this would allow for the arrays to be a permitted use only, if there is a primary structure on the property and there would be restrictions for distance and height.

A resident from Tazewell County resident, stated that they support ground-mount solar. He noted that some properties can't accommodate solar on the roof. He feels this provides more freedom for residents and stated that Council could provide other restrictions such as allowing wild flowers underneath or fencing.

Mr. Oliphant pointed out that first of the two cases that will be presented at future meetings, is for a ground-mount system on a 2.8-acre property south of town.

Bob Montgomery, a township resident, stated that they have a ground-mount system and suggested that the code could be tightened up, so that if they produce more energy than only the occupant would use, it could be addressed. He expressed concern regarding the lot coverage and the size limits in relation to the principal structure or multiple structures. He noted that these could be built to provide energy to more than the principal structure. Mr. Montgomery's wife, Allison stated that they design the systems larger in case you want to provide energy for cars. Mr. Oliphant shared that our regulations for roof-mount systems are similar to other communities. Ms. Montgomery expressed concern for the amount of overage that is designed in case someone puts in acreages of solar to put in an electric fleet. She expressed their favor for ground-mount systems.

Commissioner Burdette noted that the proposed language indicates the system has to be at the back of the property, but you can still be visible from the sides of the property.

Ms. Montgomery shared her concern about shading a neighbor or causing glare. She noted the farther it is from the house, the more expensive it will be due to the length of copper. She is using her solar as a type of fence. Ms. Montgomery suggested a change under the category of "visibility" relating to notifying homes next to a commercial property putting in solar because they can get taller than 10 feet.

Commissioner Scott said commercial properties can have 10-foot fence and a commercial property next to a residential property would need consideration for blockage. Commissioner Scott noted that large properties are restricted to smaller arrays if the structure is small even though the property is large. Commissioner Reeder suggested the term "principal structure" should be clarified. Commissioner Scott said there needs to be consideration of the whole sight and likes this idea but wants to clarify the language. He asked if a commercial property next to a residential property would have different rules.

Mr. Oliphant noted that there may not be much demand for ground-mounts and shared that we have only had about a half dozen interested parties over the past years.

Commissioner Scott suggested requiring a 10-foot fence next to residential properties for taller arrays.

Ms. Montgomery stated that Morton's code has the phrases "collective," "community" and "residential" defined. She stated that she is in favor as it helps the cost of power.

Mr. Oliphant noted these recommended changes can be taken to council.

Commissioner Reeder stated that most of the commercial places will want to do roof mounted solar because they don't want to give up space.

Commissioner Milot asked if the visibility is already part of the ordinance and Mr. Oliphant shared that it is already in the city code.

Commissioner Ritter noted that the application could always be denied if it does not meet requirements.

At 7:07 p.m., Commissioner Burdette called for a vote.

On roll call the vote was:

7 Ayes: Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott, Shelton, and Williams

0 Nays:

Motion carried.

New Business Mr. Oliphant stated that there will be an August meeting.

Adjournment At 7:09 p.m. Commissioner move Milot; Commissioner Ritter seconded to adjourn.
Motion carried by voice vote.

Commissioner Williams left the meeting room.

Meeting Reconvened At 7:10 p.m., Commissioner Milot motioned to reconvene the meeting, noting that there was not a motion and second prior to the vote regarding the Solar Code Change; Commissioner Ritter seconded.

Commissioner Milot motioned to accept the code amendment change regarding ground-mount solar arrays; Commissioner Scott seconded.

On roll call the vote was:

6 Ayes: Burdette, Milot, Reeder, Ritter, Scott, and Shelton

0 Nays:

1 Absent: Williams

Motion carried.

Adjournment At 7:11 p.m. Commissioner move Milot; Commissioner Ritter seconded to adjourn.
Motion carried by voice vote.

Valeri L. Brod, City Clerk