

**Special Plan Commission  
of the City of Onalaska**  
Wednesday, November 13, 2019  
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1 The Special Meeting of the Plan Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 5:30  
2 p.m. on Wednesday, November 13, 2019. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and  
3 a notice posted at City Hall.

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5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Tom Smith, Assistant City  
6 Engineer Kevin Schubert (for City Engineer Jarrod Holter), Jan Brock, Skip Temte, Craig  
7 Breitsprecher. Mayor Joe Chilsen arrived with the meeting in progress.

8  
9 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Deputy City Clerk JoAnn Marcon, City  
10 Attorney Amanda Jackson, Planning Technician Zach Peterson, Ald. Diane Wulf, Ald. Boondi  
11 Iyer

12  
13 Excused Absences: City Engineer Jarrod Holter, Steven Nott

14  
15 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

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17 Motion by Craig, second by Skip, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed  
18 and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

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20 On voice vote, motion carried.

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22 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes per individual)**

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24 Ald. T. Smith explained that this is the general public input and individuals are allowed to speak  
25 for up to three minutes, and anyone who wishes to provide input pertaining to Item No. 4 will be  
26 allowed up to four minutes to speak. Ald. T. Smith then called for anyone wishing to provide  
27 public input.

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29 **Bill Schulz**  
30 **638 Winter Street**  
31 **Onalaska**

32  
33 “I would like to know the reason behind this, the rezoning, for the simple reason we have empty  
34 buildings sitting out there right now that aren’t even being used. We have two restaurants that  
35 are empty now. We have Shopko empty, and everybody knows [Valley View] Mall is going  
36 down the tubes. There’s going to be plenty of space there, so I’d like to know the reasoning  
37 behind this. Thank you.”

38  
39 Ald. T. Smith called three times for anyone else wishing to provide public input and closed that  
40 portion of the meeting.

41  
42 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

Reviewed 11/15/19 by Zach Peterson

43

44 **Item 4 – Public comment period for proposed 2020 zoning map**

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46 Ald. T. Smith reiterated that individuals will be allowed to speak for up to four minutes, and he  
47 also noted this is a public hearing so the Plan Commission may gather input regarding the  
48 proposed 2020 zoning map. Ald. T. Smith said there will be future meetings, including another  
49 public input session in January, before everything is finalized either in January or February 2020.  
50 Ald. T. Smith then called for anyone wishing to provide public comment regarding the proposed  
51 2020 zoning map.

52

53 **Mike Gargaro**  
54 **451 R. Stephen Place**  
55 **Onalaska**

56

57 “I’m going to speak specifically to the rezoning of Mason Street and its designation as more  
58 Retail than Light Industrial/Manufacturing. I’ve had multiple conversations with city staff, and  
59 [gotten input] from businessowners in that area in regards to this space. I don’t always enjoy  
60 coming to a different committee of the city knowing I’m a chair of the CDA [Community  
61 Development Authority], which is why they reached out to me first, thinking it was something  
62 coming from us. I am aware that when we went through our redevelopment study that there was  
63 going to be rezoning coming forward. However, I think in this area whoever has made the  
64 designation to this didn’t really know what the businesses were in that area. I think  
65 consideration very easily should be made to determine what the businesses are that are there and  
66 should be rezoned appropriately or left as-is or the designation of a new letter or number as long  
67 as it’s maintaining the integrity of what’s already been there. Thank you.”

68

69 **Jim Finch**  
70 **1930 Pine Ridge Drive**  
71 **Onalaska**

72

73 “I wanted to speak on the rezoning on Mason Street, in particular the Mason Street complexes  
74 where we have all our offices. We have 20 offices that we treat as condominiums in that area,  
75 and I currently still own 10 of them. Under the proposed change, half of my renters couldn’t run  
76 their businesses that they currently have. Typically the areas I have are like business incubators,  
77 I would say. A lot of businesses come in. They’re industrial. They have distribution. They  
78 have production facilities. But if you do change it, I wouldn’t lose my current renters, but you  
79 would prohibit me when I change renters, I wouldn’t be able to rent to these people again. When  
80 you come and look at the facilities, they’re all very industrial. They’re 14-foot doors. They’re  
81 not a window shop where people come to buy things. They’re very production-oriented. Of  
82 course, need-being, I have the history on this property. I’m the original developer on it from  
83 Mason Street. It was a farm when I bought it. We put the roads in and ran everything back to  
84 the ‘Y’ [YMCA]. I’ve sold every piece there with the intention of it all being industrial. I guess

85 the change is surprising because it's a good thing. They're very easy to rent, and it's a great little  
86 community in there. I'm not seeing it change to the storefronts like the proposal. I would ask  
87 that everybody take a good look at what they're trying to do to it and keep the current M-1  
88 [zoning] if we can."

89  
90 **Marcia Horvath**  
91 **1205 County Road PH**  
92 **Onalaska**  
93

94 "I'm here to discussed the proposed rezoning of the south end of County Road PH. When we  
95 moved here, we chose this home with the expressed purpose that this was supposed to be our  
96 never move again retirement home. Rezoning would change all that. I've been told the reason  
97 for this proposed rezoning is a projection of patterns that could happen over the next 20 to 30  
98 years. I would argue that it would be very difficult to come up with an accurate prediction for  
99 the next 10 years, let alone 20 or 30. The area is currently well-established and filled with  
100 single-family homes. Proposing this zoning is like saying our neighborhood is no longer valid.  
101 This change would put us in limbo. It would make us question doing anything to improve our  
102 homes because with MU-C zoning we would never know what's going to happen with the  
103 properties around us. It could make our expenditures and efforts be of little or no value. It  
104 doesn't seem fair that you wouldn't be able to rebuild your home if it burned down, which would  
105 be the case with MU-C zoning. I hear that the city may be considering revising that rezoning to  
106 Mixed Use Neighborhood, which focuses more on residential, and which would allow the  
107 rebuilding of a home after a fire. However, most of the same commercial businesses could be  
108 built at any time and the surrounding properties wouldn't know they were coming or be able to  
109 voice their opinions about it. If you try to sell your home as a residential property, prospective  
110 buyers would be leery of it because of zoning. They could suddenly have a bar, a restaurant, a  
111 strip mall, a drive-through, or an exercise facility next door. All those, and more, are permitted  
112 with MU-C and MU-N zoning.

113  
114 I like the neighborhood as it is, and would really like it to remain under Residential Single-  
115 Family zoning. Two of the affected homes have sold within the last year and a half, the most  
116 recent one selling for \$16,000 over the asking price. To me, that says this is still a viable  
117 residential district. If zoning is changed from R-1, the people living here will no longer have any  
118 say about what's happening in their neighborhood. [There would be] no warning of changes to  
119 come, and no place to voice their concerns about those changes. That doesn't seem fair to  
120 citizens whose homes have been there for decades. I have also heard that since Act 67 passed in  
121 the [Wisconsin] State Legislature, Conditional Use Permits can no longer be denied. But I don't  
122 think the developers would be as likely to try to go into areas zoned R-1 as they would in areas  
123 zoned MU-C or MU-N. If this area is rezoned, I envision it going Commercial, bit by bit, in a  
124 scattershot fashion. And I really don't want to see that happen here. Please leave that R-1  
125 zoning in place for our neighborhood. Thank you."

126

127 **Dick McGarry**  
128 **1220 County Road PH**  
129 **Onalaska**  
130

131 “I have a question: Why are we doing this? That’s a serious question. I’ve been here numerous  
132 times in the past with related subjects, and it always seems to be our area that is in question.  
133 Why are we rezoning the 12 homes along the south leg of County Road PH, Mixed Use-  
134 Community or Mixed Use-Neighborhood, especially when you consider the history of these  
135 homes, which have been zoned R-1 since we were annexed to the city, I don’t know, 40 years  
136 ago or whatever it was? Little did we realize then that we would be looked upon as an area  
137 [where] something should be developed commercially. This city has supported our wishes to  
138 remain R-1 throughout the years of many zoning change requests, and we appreciate that  
139 support. Our homes are part of the entire neighborhood often referred to as the Mayfair Addition  
140 and the surrounding area that is accessed by County Road PH, and [they] have served as a buffer  
141 to encroaching commercial development. We have heard that County Road PH has been  
142 referred to as a Commercial corridor. Perhaps this is true from Braund Street and by what was  
143 the Shopko building east to [State Trunk] Highway 16 by Walgreens. Yeah, I could see that as a  
144 Commercial corridor. But in reality, from Braund Street west and then south to [State Trunk]  
145 Highway 157, it is a Residential corridor. There could be about 1,000 people who live out there  
146 in residential complexes and homes.  
147

148 These are the only two ways in and out of the neighborhood for the people who live there, east  
149 on PH or south on PH. This is also true for emergency vehicles. This is important when you  
150 consider that approximately 1,000 people live in this area. We know that if MU-C or MU-N is  
151 approved, there will be an increase in traffic. Any business that might be built there would not  
152 rely on neighborhood pedestrian traffic for their source of making money. They would need the  
153 customers or clients from Onalaska, La Crosse, and surrounding areas to make a go of their  
154 business, obviously [by] driving there. Though our homes could remain as single-family  
155 residences, we could be picked off, house by house, and end up with Commercial development  
156 next door. That’s an ugly thought to think that we don’t know from one month or week or year  
157 to year whether we have to pick up and move.”  
158

159 JoAnn informed Dick he had reached his four-minute speaking limit.  
160

161 Dick concluded, “What is there to gain from rezoning? What’s in it for the residents of the 12  
162 homes, and for the rest of the neighborhood – not to mention the impact it would have on the  
163 people living directly on PH and along the east section of PH? Thank you for your time.”  
164

165 **Julie McGarry**  
166 **1220 County Road PH**  
167 **Onalaska**  
168

169 “The purpose of Mixed Use-Community or Mixed Use-Neighborhood is to eventually  
170 commercialize the area and eliminate the residential homes that have been there for, in our case,  
171 over 70 years, and some of them a little newer than that. We go pretty deep living in that area.  
172 If either of these zonings are enacted in the area, it can be integrated with Commercial uses, bit  
173 by bit, in possibly a very unorganized and scattered manner, as Marcia mentioned. These uses  
174 include retail services and entertainment, apartments, restaurants, bars, brewpubs, strip malls,  
175 civic offices, institutional buildings, business offices, drive-throughs, and many, many others. I  
176 don’t know if you have a list of comparing these, but I’ll leave them here for you to take a look  
177 at. They compare the Residential, R-1 uses, and you can even see it’s pretty limited, and there  
178 are some more on the back of it. Then looking at Mixed Use-Community and Mixed Use-  
179 Neighborhood, lots of things are ... This type of zoning is characterized by multistory buildings,  
180 higher development densities, buildings located close to streets and sidewalks, and obviously,  
181 more traffic. For 40 years, we have been told that the entire area surrounded by I-90, and  
182 Highway 16 and 157, would be developed commercially. Thank goodness the Plan Commission  
183 and the Common Council have established us as an R-1 neighborhood over these 40 years. Why  
184 change it now? Only the residents of the 12 homes involved in this rezoning were notified.  
185 Nobody back in the neighborhood knew anything about it. We made some phone calls and tried  
186 to get out to let people know. They had no clue that this was even going to happen.  
187

188 In the letter that we received, it said the purpose of MC-U and MC-N is to provide areas of  
189 development of the land based on the design principles of pedestrian-oriented mixed-use districts  
190 that integrate all these types of businesses. That’s straight out of the letter that we received. We  
191 have that. We can walk to Festival Foods and that shopping district there, Sam’s Club, TJ Maxx,  
192 [Valley View] Mall, restaurants, Target ... We can even walk over to Home Depot if we want, or  
193 bike. There are a lot of bikers in our neighborhood, too. We have sidewalks [and] bike lanes,  
194 and we enjoy the location of it being easy access to La Crosse, the main part of Onalaska, West  
195 Salem, Holmen – wherever. We’re hoping that you’ll really truly look at us and continue to look  
196 at us as an R-1 neighborhood. You have supported us for 40 years that way, and we hope you  
197 will continue. Thank you.”  
198

199 **Adam Kirschner**  
200 **200 Mason Street**  
201 **Onalaska**  
202

203 “A couple of folks have already been up here about Mason Street, and [Ald. T. Smith], we had a  
204 conversation earlier in the week, and we’re actually going to meet with Amanda [Thursday]  
205 morning. For the record, there are a few things we want to make sure are clarified. As you  
206 know, Mason Street is kind of a mixed bag. Jim [Finch] was up here earlier, and he talked about  
207 how Mason Street was developed industrially. At this point, we have Eagle Crest, the elderly  
208 home, and there’s also the YMCA. Everything else on Mason Street is truly what you would  
209 find to be in an industrial area. If we move to B-2, this kind of mixed-business deal, as long as  
210 that category incorporates the things that we would be losing, is something that we’re open to.

211 However, these are the things that I would like people to know that we're already doing in this  
212 area, and that is storage facilities for personal – that is occurring. [There is] light manufacturing,  
213 printing and publishing, storage and sales of machinery equipment, warehousing and  
214 distribution, and wholesale trade. All of those things are happening on Mason Street, and will  
215 continue to happen. Now, a PUD to me seems kind of like a band-aid deal. If that happens, it's  
216 critical to us that it sticks to those properties all along Mason Street so if we end up selling them  
217 that we're not losing economic value for the future to future buyers. If you drive up Mason  
218 Street, it looks industrial. Look at where the Public Works [Facility] is; that's heavy industrial.  
219 You can call it P-1 as a public area or whatever you want to call it, but it's industrial. They're  
220 out there operating front-loaders and [similar equipment] all day long. Thank you.”  
221

222 **Mike Peterson**  
223 **1216 County Road PH**  
224 **Onalaska**  
225

226 “Thirty-plus years ago, I moved out into the country, and now the city has moved into me. I  
227 strongly oppose the rezoning in this case. I've lived with my neighbors for almost the whole  
228 time. Almost all the neighbors there are still there. We intend to be there until God takes us  
229 away, I guess. But if this changes by the zoning, then I can see us feeling like we need to leave  
230 the area, and that's not what I want to do. And I can about guarantee I won't be in the City of  
231 Onalaska if I'm forced to leave here. One of the biggest lies that came out of this Council – I  
232 don't know when it was; 10 years ago – [is] that the chiropractor office wasn't going to generate  
233 any more traffic than a house with teenagers. I tell you that was laughable then, and now it hurts  
234 because I have to put up with that construction down there, and it keeps getting bigger. I don't  
235 want to see that next door. I don't want to see it next door to my neighbors. I'd like to see this  
236 continue the way that it is. Thank you.”  
237

238 **Ryan Beach**  
239 **1203 County Road PH**  
240 **Onalaska**  
241

242 “I don't really have anything new to add other than I agree with everyone else who has spoken  
243 about that area. Before you [Mayor Chilsen] got here, the one gentleman had mentioned we  
244 have empty buildings out there right now, [like] that new building that they put up by Bronston  
245 [Chiropractic]. A big portion of that is sitting empty and not even finished yet. Why rezone?  
246 That's all I've got.”  
247

248 **Denise Hanrahan Brown**  
249 **700 Krueger Court**  
250 **Onalaska**  
251

252 “I was notified about this today, so I didn’t have time to prepare. But some people already gave  
253 many points that I would have said. One more thing that I would like to say is I live near  
254 Stonefield Manor, and I want everyone to take into consideration that age group of people – 55  
255 and above – that use that sidewalk. I use that sidewalk myself. I walk a lot and I bike a lot, and  
256 there is so much traffic that comes through that neighborhood that those speedbumps do not slow  
257 people down. Everyone uses us to pass through, and adding more businesses to that area that’s  
258 already accident-prone at that corner I just don’t think is a good idea. Without a good purpose, I  
259 really don’t understand why that even would be looked at. Just like everybody said, there are so  
260 many empty buildings over there. Why are we trying to rezone a residential neighborhood? I  
261 grew up in that neighborhood, and I’m 56 years old. It’s sad to see what it’s become.”  
262

263 **Dave Caauwe**  
264 **1208 County Road PH**  
265 **Onalaska**  
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267 “I’ve lived there a year and a half; I just moved in there. I had no idea there was any kind of  
268 rezoning or any of this kind of stuff in mind or I wouldn’t have even bought the place. But in  
269 fairness to myself and to the people on the street there, I really don’t see any reason for rezoning  
270 that place because you have plenty of stores and businesses that are empty right now. Why not  
271 utilize them? They’re already built up. There’s no reason to rezone an area that’s very, very  
272 comfortable with their lifestyle of living, and so am I. I’m totally against it, and that’s all I can  
273 say.”  
274

275 **Noelle Weber Strauss**  
276 **639 Winter Street**  
277 **Onalaska**  
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279 “I live very close to the area being considered for rezoning. I found out about the meeting late  
280 [Tuesday] night, and have since reached out to several neighbors. I’ve spoken to about 20  
281 different homes, and overwhelmingly the response has been, ‘Wait, what’s going on? When is  
282 this meeting? How haven’t I heard about it until now?’ Concerns are traffic. There is already so  
283 much traffic in our area and in our neighborhood. The other concerns were, we already have so  
284 many vacant spaces in Onalaska that could be used for businesses, so why rezone our  
285 neighborhood, the Mayfair Addition? I grew up in this neighborhood. I’ve lived there since  
286 1987. I spent a little time away from home and moved back two years ago and bought the home  
287 from my parents. I live there with my husband and two kiddos, and just like Denise said, we use  
288 those sidewalks often and I’m chasing after my 3-year-old who’s just starting to bike. It’s pretty  
289 scary back there at times when people fly through. My neighbors – Bob, Jean, Bill, Sue, Mr.  
290 Growt – they’ve lived in this neighborhood for 50 years. I think the concern is also if we take  
291 this one section and rezone it, what’s next? Is it the next street over and then the next street  
292 over? And how long before the neighborhood we love so much is no longer? That’s all I have  
293 tonight. Thank you.”

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**Jay Twite**  
**1910 Pine Ridge Drive**  
**Onalaska**

“I’m moving in the third house I’ve built in Onalaska; I’ve been here 38 years. My wife is from Onalaska, and I also own a business on Mason Street. I purchased that from Jim Finch within the year. I bought the building for my business. I do operate a successful business there, and I have a renter which does some skating ability. They have a high-tech piece of machinery, and if this M-1 goes through, I could not have that renter. Obviously I bought the building not only for myself to use, but I also bought it for investment and future, and for my retirement. I didn’t know this was coming, so I’m actually totally against that as well unless we make some modifications. I don’t want a band-aid; I want it fixed correctly. I’ve spent a lot of money in this city. I used to sit on the hockey boards. I was with Mike Gargaro. I’ve been through a lot of things in this town. I’d appreciate it if you’d at least consider that. I don’t even know why this is happening or what the reason is. Those buildings on Mason Street are not ... They’re really Light Industrial. Thank you.”

**Dennis Stannard**  
**1224 PH West**  
**Onalaska**

“I probably don’t have anything to say about rezoning or commercial encroachment that you haven’t already heard. But I do want to remind you that we are one of several homes out there that have been out there and raised a family for almost 50 years – it’s hard to believe 47, to be exact. Obviously, we would be kind of concerned about rezoning and commercial encroachment. I also want to remind you that as I look across this committee, we’ve voted for a lot of you people. And I think over the years you’ve done a pretty good job of keeping the balance between the city’s needs and the needs of the people you represent. I hope you keep that in mind when you’re voting for this rezoning situation.”

**Betsy Stannard**  
**1224 PH West**  
**Onalaska**

“We were not sent this letter because I guess I don’t know how you decide who gets the letter, but we’re pretty directly affected because all the development that you’re showing will border us. ... We’re directly affected, but we really didn’t know. It would have been nice to have had more warning about this. And if it wouldn’t have been about the McGarrys or the mail being delivered to me wrong – I got Ron’s mail – I wouldn’t have known about this meeting. Just a point on that. We couldn’t go to the small meeting where we could come with concerns because we were in Ireland. ... We met with the City Attorney and our Councilmember, and from that

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9

336 meeting I said something kind of interesting came out of that meeting, and that was that we are a  
337 residential corridor. We have all been thinking about development on that PH that enters into  
338 our neighborhood, and I don't think it is. It is a residential corridor. Those are all homes along  
339 PH that affect everybody else should they be gone. I think about Onalaska. I see how you made  
340 a neighborhood here with [Irving] Pertzsch [Elementary] School and this City Hall. I bring  
341 people all the time; I think it's amazing how you brought that together. And I guess for the Plan  
342 Commission, I would like them to think about how might you make that neighborhood even  
343 better. We need some signage that that is Onalaska – I don't think a lot of people even know  
344 that. We have a great sign for Mayfair. These are historic homes. We remodeled three years  
345 ago, and in the wall in our little kitchen that we used to have was a 1957 calendar. That was so  
346 cool; I just thought, how neat. Braund was a builder. You could do some really neat things there  
347 just to tie that in, and to make us an even stronger neighborhood than we already are. And we  
348 are a strong neighborhood. We hang in there pretty good together, and we've been there a long  
349 time. Wealthy builders and buyers, the past doesn't mean much to them. But it means a lot to us  
350 because they're our homes and we've been there a long time. When these builders are given free  
351 rein to tear down the remains of the past, I think we all lose. I'd like to be on that [Plan  
352 Commission].”

353  
354 Mayor Chilsen called three times for anyone else wishing to provide public input and closed that  
355 portion of the meeting.

356  
357 Ald. T. Smith reiterated this is not the last session, noting there will be working meetings. Ald.  
358 T. Smith told those in attendance the Plan Commission members appreciate their input and  
359 reiterated the next public hearing likely will occur either in January or February. Ald. T. Smith  
360 also noted the final vote will not occur until early 2020.

361  
362 Mayor Chilsen thanked those in attendance for coming to tonight's meeting.

363  
364 An audience member's comments were inaudible on the recording.

365  
366 Amanda asked those who wish to receive email updates to provide their email address.

367  
368 **Adjournment**

369  
370 Motion by Craig, second by Ald. T. Smith, to adjourn.

371  
372 On voice vote, motion carried.

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374  
375 Recorded by:

376  
377 Kirk Bey

Reviewed 11/15/19 by Zach Peterson