

Meeting Minutes of the
City Property Committee of the Fitchburg City Council
for
Monday, March 28, 2022

Chairperson Cragin called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. in the Legislative Building at 700 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA.

Members Present:

Councilor Sally Cragin, *Chair*
Councilor Anthony Zarrella
Councilor Paul Beauchemin
Councilor Samantha Squailia
Councilor Andrew Van Hazinga

Others Present:

Tom Skwierawski, *Executive Director of Planning & Community Development*
Anne Cervantes, *Director of Housing & Development*

Public Comment:

Ms. Sue Downey, 98 Sawmill Pond Rd – Sawmill Pond Condo Board of Trustees is interested in acquiring Parcel S53/6/0 (Petition 034-22) for passive recreation use. Concerned about commercial development due to increased traffic within condo streets and capacity of development sewer pump. Ask that any commercial development of parcel be accessed directly from Rt. 31, tie directly into sewer system, and fence or other buffer to residential development.

Mr. Patrick Doyle, Sawmill Pond – Similar concerns regarding deeded rights of parcel to tie into condo sewer system. Requests that property is conveyed with this right removed. Condo is interested in submitting an RFP to acquire property.

Rosemary Thibodaeu, Sawmill Pond (written statement) – Supports proposal of condo Board of Trustees.

Additional Sawmill Pond Residents (written statements) – Expressed similar concerns.

Agenda Items:

034-22. Tom Skwierawski, Exe. Director of Community Planning & Development, to request City Council declare the following parcel as surplus property:
0 Sawmill Pond Road, Assessor's Map S53/6/0

Mr. Skwierawski explained that the RFP process gives greater flexibility to choose the best use of the property rather than putting it up to auction for the highest bidder. Plan is to submit these parcels as surplus property and also seek approval for disposition through preferred method

(RFP/Side yard program). Sawmill Pond parcel is a 0.89-acre parcel originally approved by the Planning Board for a commercial use up to 6,400 SF in size as part of the original approval of the condo development. Difference in grade indicates that it is likely that this parcel could tie into sewer line directly without using condo sewer system.

Committee Discussion: While current RR zoning allows limited commercial uses, Planning Board Special Permit appears to allow grandfathered commercial development, but any specific development plan would require additional Planning Board approval. In selling the property, the City has responsibility to make sure proposed use of parcel is in best interests of City as well as recover money lost through the non-payment of taxes by the previous owner. Minimal impact on neighboring residential community is a priority, but commercial use is a possibility due to its location on Rt. 31 at Great Wolf and the highway.

Consensus to hold petition pending further information on the following questions:

- Is commercial use of the parcel grandfathered through the prior Special Permit?
- Is it possible for development of the parcel to tie into the sewer line in Rt. 31 directly rather than tying into the condo system?
- How much in back taxes is owed by the property?

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Van Hazinga to **hold Petition 034-22**, seconded by Councilor Beauchemin. The motion passed 5-0.

195-21. Tom Skwierawski, Exe. Director of Community Development and Planning, to Declare 0 Daniels Street (Parcel 77 41 0) surplus property and designate the property for sale through the Side Yard Sales Program.

Mr. Skwierawski explained that the City is looking to sell this approx. 2,300 SF lot through the Side Yard program to an abutter, which include a church, commercial property, and vacant land off Beech Street approved for a 16-unit townhouse development. Land of low value that can't be developed on its own.

Committee Discussion: Concern that all abutters have opportunity to acquire property. Can use of property for access be shared? This must be agreed to by abutters acquiring the property, can be shared through use of easements. City has flexibility when selling a property through the Side Yard Sales program, end use is more important consideration than dollar value of sale.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Zarrella to recommend **approval of Petition 195-21** and sale of the property through the Side Yard Sales program, seconded by Councilor Squailia. The motion passed 5-0.

008-22. Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development & Planning Department, to declare the following parcels as surplus property:

0 Taft Street, Assessor's Map 20/4/3
0 Taft Street, Assessor's Map 20/4/2

Mr. Skwierawski explained that this petition concerns two adjacent parcels totaling about 15,000 SF. Ms. Murphy has put together an RFP to allow for a non-profit to develop one to two affordable single family homes with support from HOME funds. One house by right and one through an infill approval. Rare to have an opportunity to support development of an affordable single-family home.

Committee Discussion: Concerns regarding whether an infill lot can be approved using a lot under common ownership with an adjacent parcel. If two lots is not possible, development of one home is feasible. Development of single-family homes is considered an advantageous use for the neighborhood. Parcel is also adjacent to a multi-family property that lacks off-street parking. Provision of off-street parking for adjacent properties would also be an advantageous use. Development of a duplex with two homeownership units is also a possibility. Development of affordable housing would most likely be done by a non-profit.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Zarrella to recommend **approval** of **Petition 008-22** and sale of the property through an RFP, seconded by Councilor Squailia. The motion passed 5-0.

033-22. Tom Skwierawski, Exe. Director of Community Planning & Development, to request City Council declare the following parcel as surplus property:
50 Granite Street, Assessor's Map 82/6/0

Mr. Skwierawski described the 7,200 SF parcel located at the corner of Granite and Salem Streets. A prior building was demolished in 2015. Possible uses include a single-family home or parking for neighboring multi-family properties that lack parking. May support the redevelopment of a neighboring multi-family property a half a block away on Granite Street that has been vacant for 20 years.

Committee Discussion: There appears to be another vacant lot on the opposite side of Salem Street, is this also owned by the City? Development of a single-family home considered the most advantageous use, parking is an alternative use.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Beauchemin to recommend **approval** of **Petition 033-22** and sale of the property through an RFP, seconded by Councilor Squailia. The motion passed 5-0.

057-22. Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development & Planning, to request the City Council to declare the following Parcel as surplus property:
491 Main Street, Assessor's Map 43/8/0

Mr. Skwierawski explained that this is a priority location on Main Street that has been a problem property for years. The two buildings total around 30,000 SF and are in poor condition. The

property has been in and out of land court for some time and significant sums in back taxes (over \$100,000?) are owed on the property. City just recently obtained clear ownership of property. The goal is to solicit proposals for mixed-use development as the most advantageous use (letter reference to single-family home or parking is incorrect).

Committee Discussion: Goal to activate property with people coming and going from property. Less of a market for commercial office space (in upper levels). Consensus that development of market-rate housing is considered most advantageous, considering the large supply of low and mixed income properties/developments in downtown area. Need balance of housing types. A larger development (if combined with neighboring property) may use public subsidies to be feasible, and include a mixed-income component (LIHTC is typically used for larger developments than likely here). Redevelopment of this problem property is the priority, even if it requires an affordable component. A mixed-use development wholly market-rate is most advantageous, followed by mixed-income, followed by wholly affordable.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Beauchemin to recommend **approval** of **Petition 057-22** and sale of the property through an RFP, seconded by Councilor Squailia. The motion passed 5-0.

175-21. Councilors Fleming and Hughes, to rename Union Street, located in Ward 5B to Adrian Ford Way.

Referred to: City Property Committee, Legislative Affairs Committee, Public Works Committee.

(Public Works Committee recommended to amend petition to read “Co-Name Union Street to include Adrian Ford Way” and grant as amended.)

Committee Discussion: This petition was already heard by Public Works, who amended as stated to avoid hassle and confusion associated with changing the name of the street.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Zarrella to recommend **amendment** of **Petition 175-21** as previously amended by Public Works, seconded by Councilor Squailia. The motion passed 5-0.

Vote: A motion was made by Councilor Squailia to recommend **approval** of **Petition 175-21** and sale of the property through an RFP, seconded by Councilor Zarrella. The motion passed 5-0.

Adjournment

Councilor Squailia motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilor Zarrella. The motion passed by unanimous consent and the City Property Committee of the City Council adjourned at approximately 8:31 pm.

Minutes prepared by Councilor Van Hazinga & reviewed by Chair Cragin