

CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, January 6, 2020

BOARD MEMBERS:

Valeriano Gomez, President
Anthony Serna, Vice-President
Lilia Ramos, Secretary
Monique Kurmis, Commissioner
Joanne Moricz, Commissioner
Douglas Sloss, Commissioner
William Allen, Commissioner
Lydia Lopez, Commissioner

STAFF:

Belinda Bonilla
Richard Morrisroe, Legal
Doug Cunningham

Reported for Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde, CSR RPR

Call to Order: 4:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

Roll Call: Present: Valeriano Gomez, Anthony Serna,
Lilia Ramos, Monique Kurmis,
Joanne Moricz, Douglas Sloss,
William Allen, Lydia Lopez

Motion to approve meeting minutes of Monday, December 16, 2019, as written, made by Monique Kurmis. Second by Anthony Serna.

Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: None
Opposed: None Motion carries.

MR. GOMEZ: New Business. First item, reorganization, election of officers. We have president, vice-president, and secretary. The floor is open to nominations. Any nominations for president?

MR. SERNA: Make a motion to nominate Val Gomez for president.

MR. SLOSS: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: Nominations for president closed. Roll call vote.

Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: Val Gomez
Opposed: None Motion carries.

1 MR. GOMEZ: Nominations for
2 vice-president. The floor is open for nominations for
3 vice-president.

4 MR. SLOSS: I'd like to nominate Mr.
5 Anthony Serna for vice-president.

6 MR. ALLEN: Second.

7 MR. GOMEZ: Nominations for
8 vice-president closed. Roll call.

9 Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: Anthony
10 Serna Opposed: None Motion carries.

11 MR. GOMEZ: Floor is open for nominations
12 for secretary.

13 MR. SERNA: I nominate Lilia Ramos.

14 MS. KURMIS: Second

15 MR. GOMEZ: Nominations for secretary
16 closed. Roll call.

17 Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: Lilia
18 Ramos Opposed: None Motion carries.

19 MR. GOMEZ: We'll move on to New
20 Business. Planner's report. Chapter 3, pages 42 to 53.
21 Mr. Morrisroe.

22 MR. MORRISROE: Good afternoon, Ladies
23 and Gentlemen. I'd wish you all a Happy New Year, and
24 say a prayer our officers may do as well as they did
25 last year.

This chapter is Avoiding Pitfalls.
I chose this one because I thought we'd do the first one
when we have a new member to do the first chapter on
Plan Commission Basics. So this one covers both Plan
Commissions and Board of Zoning Appeals.

How many have their books with them,
if I may ask? The others I'm sure can be writing in the
chapters, not just listening to them.

So it mentions about avoiding
pitfalls. Pitfalls is when we have not addressed
something and it comes back to haunt us. Now, notice
about this, one of the main things that I could find in
this, that I would try to do and comply with, is having

1 written recommendations. Usually you receive oral
2 recommendations. It just hasn't been an issue
3 apparently. Even though we have not had a legal case
4 involving the Plan Commission for some time, we did have
5 a BZA matter on a zoning site for a liquor license. We
6 also had a court fight over a gas station in Roxana,
7 when the newer gas station, the Luke's Oil, on the east
8 side of the street, was okayed by the Plan Commission.
9 Some of the people on the other side of the street,
10 including the gas station owner, contested it, and we
11 went to court.

12 And while it was successful, as far
13 as upholding the decision of the Plan Commission, it was
14 one of the kind of cases where having a record is
15 important. We do have the court reporter's record and
16 that is important, but we also have some kind of paper
17 trail that I would present or my successor would present
18 that would also help in doing those situations.

19 Now, avoiding pitfalls. We haven't
20 had kind of a study session with coffee and donuts
21 recently. I can't remember the last one frankly, but
22 where it talks about regular communication coordination.
23 Where it isn't simply coming -- may I ask how often
24 during the last six months you have called another plan
25 commissioner to discuss the issues, in general or
particular case?

MR. SERNA: It was probably a little
longer than that, when we were dealing with the mural.
We met in a committee to talk about the murals and that
probably was in the Spring. So longer than six months,
we met a little bit in a subcommittee when Marino
Solorio was director.

MS. RAMOS: We had a couple meetings and
we communicated e-mail.

MR. SERNA: Longer than six months
though.

MR. MORRISROE: That's good. I think
what is being encouraged here in this chapter -- some of
this doesn't apply to us, as far as neighboring Plan
Commissions -- although there is some. The planner from
Roxana, David Pollen and I, had met at different times.
We had planning meetings and he's very interested in
what goes on in Roxana.

Hammond didn't consult us about the
Leer Plant exactly. The Leer Plant is below the South

1 Shore Railroad, right across Michigan Avenue. It
2 combines a plant that was on 165th Street, in Hammond,
3 with another plant that they had in Portage, Indiana.
4 So they put up a newer, larger plant and integrated the
5 plant. Hammond was very fortunate in being able to
6 maintain the Leer Plant. They largely make seating
7 assemblies that typically go to the Ford Plant, in
8 Hegewisch, to be part of new cars and new trucks, and
9 different types of automobiles that are produced at the
10 Hegewisch Ford Plant.

11 So the Leer Plant is kind of a parts
12 supplier, but assembly of parts. They also have a large
13 labor force. At one time I had a class at Calumet
14 College. I had one student from the Leer Plant and
15 another from the Hegewisch Plant. They would compare
16 benefits the auto workers had. The Hegewisch Plant had
17 better benefits in some ways than the Leer workers.
18 Although both were making pretty good money, when it
19 came to certain manufacturing in this area. They were
20 certainly middle to high end as far as manufacturing,
21 both in terms of hourly salary, health care, and other
22 benefits, including the education benefits of being able
23 to attend classes at Calumet College on the company's
24 dime, rather than their own. They were very good
25 students. They worked hard. I think they had to get
some kind of grade, A or B, to maintain that tuition
privilege, but they certainly did that.

15 But what I am saying is, as far
16 communication, with Hammond/Roxana area, the Leer Plant
17 on the south side and the new traffic signal that serves
18 both the South Shore Railroad and the Leer Plant. It's
19 at the far end of our current parking there for the
20 South Shore. By far end, I mean towards the east, going
21 toward Kennedy Avenue. That both provides an
22 opportunity for workers both to catch the train on the
23 north side of Michigan Avenue and going to the Leer
24 Plant on the south side, as well as for the large amount
25 of trucking that comes in and out of the Leer Plant, in
terms of parts and then assembled product, that's taken
over to the Ford Plant.

15 I'd like to move to page 43. It
16 talks about refusing complete applications. Sometimes I
17 have been guilty of this. We try to be positive with
18 people who are making plans or considering coming here.
19 We, for instance, had an inquiry recently about the
20 Dupont property, the property on 150th and Kennedy,
21 which for a long time was vacant, except for a small
22 portion of it that has been a chemical plant. But there
23 is a large, almost 200 acres, that are about to be --

1 they are being remedied now environmentally and where
2 they hope to set up a couple -- as many as three --
3 warehouses.

4 Now, the major contractor who is
5 going to do that has set up a meeting with the Building
6 and Planning Department. But what we need to do in
7 doing that is to make sure that we make them aware of
8 the ordinances that govern industrial development,
9 whether it be construction, parking, traffic, traffic
10 flow in and out, and what they are doing in those --
11 probably would be their warehouse or manufacturing
12 facility.

13 So what we have is an informal
14 discussion in early stage to let them know where they
15 are, to try to make them comfortable, encouraging. On
16 the other hand, we don't want to give the keys of the
17 City without any conditions, until they have submitted
18 -- in writing -- some of the requirements of the
19 development plan for industries, and those are part of
20 our Planning and Zoning Codes.

21 Preparing for the meeting, it
22 mentions the seven habits. Seven habits are very
23 important in kind of professional work and personnel
24 work. This is at page 44, near the bottom. This talks
25 about preparing for the hearing, and in that it lists
seven habits for highly effective application.

26 So, again, to start with an open
27 mind, which is I think something we all try to do. Pre
28 meeting expert review, that in the City generally
29 involves our Tech Review. However, we have been -- in
30 the light of a couple -- one recent bad experience for
31 instance, was the City and the School City setting up a
32 parking garage apart from the school across by the old
33 administration building. The company that was doing
34 that was a South Bend based company, that kind of came
35 with a plan to put a building there, but did not hire
the expert it required until later to know the
infrastructure. There was an amount of pipelines that
run across the front end of that property. And now,
because of those pipelines, their initial plan to have a
reservoir kind of area for water overflow, was out of
line. They had to put it somewhere else and they had to
turn the building kind of on its side because they had
underground utilities.

36 Now, Mr. Doug Cunningham, who's the
37 Mayor's Construction Manager, had to try to sort out
38 some of those problems, some of the lack of planning and
39 homework that had gone on with this building, in both
40 tying up Columbus Drive and costing a loss in overruns

1 because of that. We have a larger project that we need
2 at the front end to make some of those -- make sure that
3 they have locaters, make sure they have the kind of
4 homework -- so to speak -- that would avoid those
5 problems in the future. So we are adding to the
6 Technical Review, the requirement for some projects,
7 that there be technical experts hired by the City to go
8 over some of those plans and make sure we are not
9 leaving gaping holes.

10 Looked like the South Bend based
11 company, they knew what they wanted to do -- they did
12 know what they wanted to do -- but they weren't doing it
13 within the context of the City. That's a hundred years
14 of development, hundred years of pipelines. There are
15 petroleum pipelines. There were Praxair pipelines of
16 nitrogen and oxygen. It really turned out to be a mess
17 because of the amount of industry that has been in this
18 City for so long, and we needed that because of the
19 history of other problems.

20 Number three is trust expertise and
21 recommendations. Notice it mentions that part of that
22 is a written staff report. It's my job, and my
23 successor's job, to have the written staff report. You
24 have been good in terms of trusting the expertise and
25 the recommendation of the Building Commissioner and
26 myself when it comes to these projects. Certainly
27 projects such as upgrading a pharmacy or restaurant,
28 dining area in St. Catherine's Hospital, is a different
29 kind of project, that doesn't have the complications
30 that putting in a garage on Columbus Drive had. So
31 those kinds of projects we don't need as much. We have
32 the expertise within house to address those issues,
33 whereas some of the industrial areas, we need outside
34 help.

35 Staff report -- well, if you don't
36 have a written staff report, you can't have read it, but
37 hopefully those go out as part of your package.

38 Unfold and review any maps or
39 drawings. I haven't had a lot of questions about the
40 drawings that we sent to you. I feel they are usually
41 before and after meetings, or sometimes bring those to
42 our attention. If something doesn't make sense on it,
43 ask about it. When the BZA asked about maps at a recent
44 kind of learning session or study conference, we were
45 able to get them and provide them that afternoon. We
46 had good questions, at least decent answers, if not
47 always good ones.

48 The last two things is about drive
49 by a site, if you have the opportunity, and review the

1 request with the applicable criteria in mind. What it
2 says about public hearings, usually we have not had
3 public hearings with a lot of people attending. We may
4 have that when it comes to what Dupont does or what any
5 industrial property wants to do, because people who live
6 nearby are much more likely to have an opinion today
7 than they might have had a few years ago. So we haven't
8 had a cast of thousands in here lately. I don't expect
9 thousands, but we might have a couple dozen for some of
10 those meetings when it comes to an industry that's at
11 people's back door and they feel may affect what is
12 going on in their community.

13 Any other questions or observations?

14 MR. GOMEZ: The application packet, if
15 the new company wanted to do something, they go to the
16 Plan Department, and then we have a packet. Has that
17 been updated recently or something?

18 MR. MORRISROE: We have done some of
19 that. I have a done a little bit with Belinda.

20 MR. GOMEZ: Do we have a checklist on
21 there and things that we have to follow?

22 MR. MORRISROE: I think we can go over
23 and review that, with this in mind, the criteria that's
24 spelled out here.

25 MR. GOMEZ: I think in relation to that
26 bus barn over there, you would think that would be part
27 of the things that they have done.

28 MR. MORRISROE: We kind of in general
29 understood what they were doing, the lack of specifics,
30 of specific locaters, and conferring. For instance, we
31 got inquiry from Citco. They had a major line that went
32 across there. And when they found out -- only by rumor
33 -- what was happening and how this company had kind of
34 almost mindlessly planned to put the reservoir over
35 their lines. So I think that, and maybe occasionally
36 having a notice about a major project.

37 MR. GOMEZ: Would it be a good idea to
38 invite the Plan Commission members to Tech Review?

39 MR. MORRISROE: We could do that. We'd
40 need probably a bigger room to do it, but we could do
41 it.

1 MR. GOMEZ: I was just wondering. That
2 would probably give an insight into things.

3 MR. MORRISROE: It's usually held at 9:30
4 or 10, on a Wednesday morning, and usually the Wednesday
5 before the Plan Commission has met, but I would see no
6 reason why not. Perhaps we can do it here rather than
7 --

8 MR. GOMEZ: It's usually at my office.

9 MR. MORRISROE: Yes, he offers his office
10 and usually all the seats at the table are taken.

11 MR. GOMEZ: This room is usually open at
12 that time. We can just invite the members if they wish
13 to come and they see what goes on in Tech Review on
14 these projects.

15 MR. MORRISROE: The key people are City
16 Engineer, Building Commissioner and his staff, and Fire
17 Department. The Fire Department always has some very
18 serious technical questions to answer beforehand, some
19 of which linger after the meeting, but are usually
20 addressed or about to be addressed before you are asked
21 to vote.

22 MR. GOMEZ: It might be a good idea. We
23 get a lot of insight on the projects. I sit in on a lot
24 of them.

25 MR. MORRISROE: As host, he has that
opportunity.

MR. GOMEZ: Any other questions or
comments? (None) Thank you, Mr. Morrisroe.

MR. MORRISROE: Thank you.

MR. GOMEZ: Move on to Old Business. Any
Old Business? (None) Any Commissioners comments or any
comments from the Public? (None)

Next meeting will be Tuesday,
January 21st, at 4:30 p.m.. It's on Tuesday because in
observance of Martin Luther King Junior Day, on that
Monday.

There being no further business,
I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

1 Motion to adjourn made by Monique Kurmis. Second by
Anthony Serna.

2 Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: None
3 Opposed: None Motion carries.

4 MR. GOMEZ: Meeting adjourned.

5 ***** Meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.*****
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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of Monday
January 6, 2020

Approved and signed _____

Valeriano Gomez, President

Anthony Serna, Vice-President

Lilia Ramos, Secretary

Monique Kurmis

Joanne Moricz

Christine Vasquez

~~_____
Douglas Sloss~~

William Allen

Lydia Lopez

Belinda Bonilla

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 13th day of January, 2020.

Peggy S. LaLonde



Peggy S. LaLonde, CSR, RPR

