

CITY OF EAST CHICAGO  
PLAN COMMISSION

BOARD MEMBERS

Val Gomez, President  
Anthony Serna, Vice President  
Lilia Ramos, Secretary  
Monique Kurmis, Commissioner  
Joanne Moricz, Commissioner  
Douglass Sloss, Commissioner  
William Allen, Commissioner  
Lydia Lopez, Commissioner  
Stacy Winfield, Commissioner

Regular Meeting Minutes  
Monday, February 17, 2020 @ 4:30 p.m.  
Reported for Fissinger & Associates  
By: Lisa Pena

CALL TO ORDER: 4:30 p.m.

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting of Monday, February 3, 2020

Comments/Questions: None

Motion to approve February 3, 2020 Meeting Minutes made by  
Douglass Sloss. Second by Monique Kurmis.

Roll Call: "All in Favor": Val Gomez, Anthony Serna, Lila  
Ramos, Monique Kurmis, Joanne Moricz, Douglass Sloss, Lydia  
Lopez Abstain: William Allen Opposed: None  
Motion Carries.

NEW BUSINESS: None.

CITY PLANNER'S REPORT:

MR. GOMEZ: We'll move on to City Planner's Report. We  
have no New Business. We do have Chapter 3. Mr. Morrisroe.

MR. MORRISROE: I had the Planning Standards sent to

1 you just if you wanted to look. For instance when we looked  
2 at all those signs on Columbus Drive they were almost all 32  
3 feet. They were within the Commercial 2 zoning.

4 What they were larger than was the Commercial 1  
5 zoning which would be okay on this side of town, Indianapolis  
6 Boulevard, Chicago Avenue. But they were too large for the  
7 C-1 which is zoning along Columbus Drive which is kind of a  
8 lesser commercial category.

9 Anyone have any questions or comments about this  
10 which we sent to you? You can keep it. Had we brought our  
11 punch along they could have stuck it in their book.

12 MR. SLOSS: We've got pockets.

13 MR. MORRISROE: Very good. Any questions or comments?

14 The article was one I just thought interesting. It  
15 was in yesterday's Chicago Tribune. It both is a classic  
16 picture of an old neon sign and then an article about some of  
17 the status of signs as they're changing with technology. I  
18 won't read that to you. I'll leave it to yourselves. But  
19 you might bring back a question or comment about it later.

20 When one isn't prepared, he tries to flood his  
21 students with information. So my apologies for doing that.

22 Let's go back if we could to where we were. We  
23 were looking at Avoiding Pitfalls with Legal Considerations.  
24 For instance plat vacations. We have a couple of alleys in  
25 the Harbor that we're going to be working on with yourselves  
and the City Council over the next month, month and a half.

The blocks on Michigan Avenue some of you remember  
very well. Others of you weren't here at the time or were  
too young to remember. But Michigan Avenue near Guthrie was  
actually a commercial area before Main Street was and was a  
large commercial area. It had a very large theater, the  
Indiana Theater and a hotel that I guess was kind of a hotel  
rooming house. They were apartments.

MR. GOMEZ: There were several hotels, Indiana Hotel,  
Mohawk Hotel. There were quite a bit of hotels down that  
street. Furniture store, clothing store, bars, hardware  
store.

MR. ALLEN: No theater?

1 MR. GOMEZ: Yeah.

2 MR. MORRISROE: Indiana. And then there were two or  
3 three theaters on Main Street. And there was one on Broadway  
4 as well.

5 This was a large viable center. There was no  
6 Merrillville. There was no Schererville. There were no AMC  
7 Theaters to draw our time and money and pay expensive popcorn  
8 prices. All of that came later.

9 (Commissioner Stacy Winfield entered meeting)

10 MR. MORRISROE: Anyway two of those blocks are now going  
11 to be probably sort of industrial commercial, businesses that  
12 serve the steel plants and the oil refineries.

13 So we have one block that has almost been acquired.  
14 It's a block bounded by Michigan and Watling and then by  
15 Guthrie and Grand. I think that's the block that the Indiana  
16 Theater was on.

17 MR. GOMEZ: It was the next block.

18 MR. MORRISROE: Anyway these blocks had alleys. The  
19 block that I just defined, Guthrie to Grand, Michigan to  
20 Watling, has one steel producing plant on the northwest  
21 corner, a small plant. And the rest of the block is probably  
22 going to be bought by a single plant servicing the  
23 industries.

24 So the alley no longer is serving a series of  
25 stores that were on 25 to 35 foot lots that went all the way  
26 down that block. And there were some service kinds of  
27 companies that were on the back on the Watling Street side.

28 Watling was less commercial as I understand it.  
29 Would that be correct to say?

30 MR. GOMEZ: There was a lumberyard there. And now it's  
31 two different little companies in there. But that whole  
32 block used to be a lumberyard back then.

33 MR. MORRISROE: But the front part on Michigan Avenue  
34 was the part that was commercial.

35 MR. GOMEZ: You had the Boy's Club. You had Twin City  
Furniture.

1 MR. MORRISROE: Our President grew up a block away from  
there.

2 MR. GOMEZ: It had a lot of little bars. It was like a  
3 little Las Vegas.

4 MR. MORRISROE: Even before gambling became legal we had  
a famous institution called the Big House which was  
5 nationally prominent. It brought Senator Kefauver from  
Tennessee in the early 1950s to hold hearings in the old  
6 Federal Courthouse on State Street in Hammond.

7 I don't know how many people went to jail at that  
time. But at least he threatened jail to a number of people.  
8 People were subpoenaed.

9 I wasn't here at the time. But I managed to read  
about it and find it very interesting.

10 So anyway to vacate the alley means to kind of give  
11 it up. It no longer is servicing the rear of the stores  
along Michigan Avenue.

12 So just as we vacated a couple of alleys over here  
13 on the other side of the rail track alongside and behind Casa  
Blanca, an alley going from Indianapolis to Magoun and  
14 another smaller alley going from the alley behind the Chicago  
Avenue stores to connect with that alley so we're going to do  
15 in the Harbor.

16 And these vacations they're noticed for instance  
the conditions have changed so that it's no longer needed and  
17 serving as an alley. It's in the public interest to vacate  
all or part of the plat.

18 For instance in this case I went to the steel  
19 processing plant and spoke to the owner. He had no objection  
to the alley behind his enterprise being vacated because all  
20 the service for his work is done from Watling Street rather  
than from the alley.

21 And the value of the part of the land and the plat  
22 not owned by the petitioner won't be diminished. So nobody  
is going to lose anything.

23 Now again it talks about after that remonstrances  
24 or objections. The City may be exploring rezoning where the  
housing was in what is called Superfund Zone 1 where the  
25 public housing is over near the church.

1           That has been vacated now for about a year and a  
2 half. And there was a question of whether or not that might  
3 become residential and what level of treatment the EPA would  
4 be required to give.

5           Since it was on a lead plant and there was also  
6 findings of arsenic the City is questioning whether or not  
7 that should be housing and may rezone that for some kind of  
8 warehousing or other business purpose.

9           And that would have to be published as with the  
10 alley vacation so that if people want to come.

11           Those who come are called remonstrators. It's  
12 slightly different than demonstrators. Although sometimes  
13 they do in effect raise a ruckus and demonstrate and want it  
14 very well to be known that they do not want either the alley  
15 to be vacated or the housing area be to changed from a  
16 residential zoning, it's now zoned R-4, to some kind of  
17 commercial or industrial use.

18           So again variances, we deal with variances. I am  
19 on page 52 by the way. We're continuing from where we were.  
20 The variances that we have are two kinds. A use variance  
21 which is what we usually do and sometimes we have a  
22 developmental standard variance. But most of the variances  
23 which come before our BZA are change in use.

24           We have scheduled in March what was the Fresenius  
25 Kidney Dialysis Plant on Chicago Avenue. It is going to  
26 apply for both offices and a homeless shelter for women and  
27 children. And that will be considered sometime during March.  
28 Considered by both our BZA, our Board of Zoning Appeals and  
29 by the Common Council.

30           Whether or not that use from a medical use to the  
31 offices is not -- that area is zoned C-2. So it can be  
32 offices. But the use for homeless women and children, that  
33 would be a new use. And that would have to come before the  
34 BZA and before the Common Council.

35           So these are some of the points that I just wanted  
36 to make today. We're up to Making Motions. And we'll worry  
37 about Making Motions the next time.

38           Are there any questions or observations?

39           MR. SLOSS: I have a question if I may. On the rezoning  
40 of Zone 1 and also vacating of the alley would that actually

1 come before the Planning Commission or is that just Zoning  
2 and Common Council?

3 MR. MORRISROE: No. They would come before the Plan  
4 Commission. Zoning or the Plan Commission considers it and  
5 makes a recommendation to the Common Council. But the Common  
6 Council holds the power to do it or not to do it.

7 The role of the Plan Commission is to hear, to  
8 entertain, to kind of explore it and then make a  
9 recommendation. They kind of serve as a sounding board  
10 preparing for the Common Council.

11 We've had kind of decisions. The last time there  
12 was an application for a homeless shelter it was for men at  
13 that time on Chicago Avenue. The Board of Zoning Appeals  
14 heard it and made a positive recommendation. But the Common  
15 Council voted 5 to 4 to not have it. And the building  
16 unfortunately has burned down since.

17 MR. SLOSS: Thank you.

18 MR. MORRISROE: Any others? Mr. President, have we  
19 spoken enough? We made it to a quarter to 5:00.

20 MR. GOMEZ: Nobody has any other questions or comments?  
21 Any questions on the Sign Ordinance? I think Mr. Morrisroe  
22 sent it so you could look it over. Any comments?

23 MR. MORRISROE: One thing about that is that there's  
24 some preference to political signs. All of that was thrown  
25 out by the US Supreme Court. So the City has practically no  
control over political signs anymore.

There are some discussions and maybe some controls.  
But the ordinances the City of East Chicago had governing  
this area were all null and void on the basis of the Supreme  
Court decision.

MR. GOMEZ: So the Council would have to amend this  
anyway, right, take that up?

MR. MORRISROE: Yes. It's just inapplicable.

MR. GOMEZ: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Morrisroe.

MR. MORRISROE: In fact when I first asked about signs,  
Mr. Allegretti, our former Corporation Counsel, called me to  
ask whether or not I was messing with political signs. And I

1 told him no, that's far away from anything we want to do at  
2 this time. Thank you.

3 MR. GOMEZ: Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER COMMENTS: None.

5 PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

6 \* Next Regular Meeting Date: Monday, March 2, 2020  
7 @ 4:30 p.m.

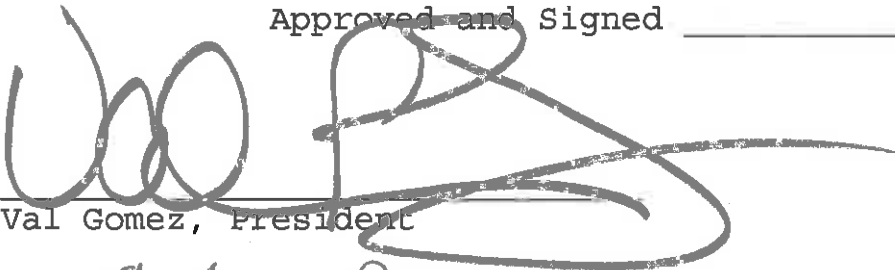
8 Motion to adjourn was made by Monique Kurmis. Second by  
9 Joanne Moricz.

10 Roll Call: "All in Favor": All Abstain: None  
11 Opposed: None Motion Carries.

12 \* Meeting ended at 4:47 p.m.

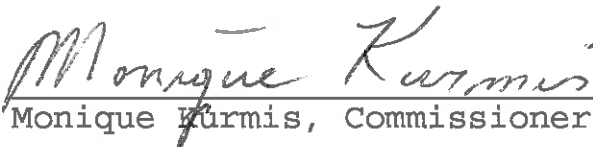
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

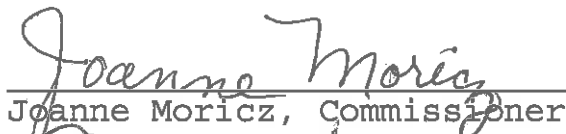
Approval of Meeting Minutes of  
Monday, February 17, 2020  
Approved and Signed \_\_\_\_\_

  
Val Gomez, President

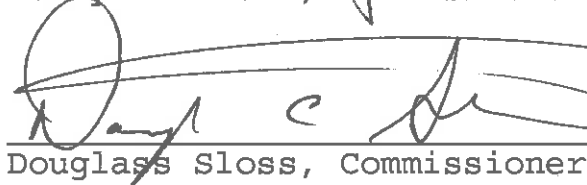
  
Anthony Serna, Vice President

  
Lilia Ramos, Secretary

  
Monique Karmis, Commissioner

  
Joanne Moricz, Commissioner

  
Stacy Winfield, Commissioner

  
Douglass Sloss, Commissioner

  
William Allen, Commissioner

  
Lydia Lopez, Commissioner




C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Lisa Pena, 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 said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Portage, Indiana, this 27th day of February, 2020.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lisa Pena  
Notary Public Porter County  
Certified Shorthand Reporter  
License Number 084-003483



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

