

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**

April 11, 2024

A meeting of the River Forest Zoning Board of Appeals was held at 7:30 pm on Thursday, April 11, 2024, in the Koehneke Community Center on the campus of Concordia University Chicago, 7400 Augusta Street, River Forest, Illinois.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Martin called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm. Meeting started by calling roll. Upon roll call the following persons were:

Present: Chairman Frank Martin, Members Gary Dombrowski, Chris Plywacz, Mary Shoemaker, Corina Davis, Ron Lucchesi, Sheila Price

Absent: None

Also present at the meeting: Matt Walsh, Village Administrator; Jessica Spencer, Assistant Village Administrator; Luke Masella, Deputy Clerk; John Houseal, Village Planner; Anne Skrodzki, Village Attorney; and Clifford Radatz, Secretary.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS ON MARCH 14, 2024

A **MOTION** was made by Member Dombrowski and seconded by Member Shoemaker to approve the minutes from the March 14 meeting.

Ayes: Chairman Martin, Members Dombrowski, Shoemaker, Plywacz, Price, Lucchesi, Davis

Nays: None

Motion passed.

III. CONTINUATION OF HEARING – TEXT AMENDMENT REQUEST – PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ZONING REGULATIONS

Chairman Martin opened the topic for discussion with a brief history of the continuation of the hearings.

Secretary Radatz swore in those who wished to testify.

Administrator Walsh presented the additional information regarding the proposed text amendment changes.

Chairman Cuyler Brown of the Economic Development Commission was introduced to provide remarks based on previous discussions of that Commission.

John Houseal, Village Planner, presented his methodology and walked through a few examples of the requested shadow studies. Member Plywacz asked to see a few specific sites of the shadow study, specifically Madison Street in Winter and Summer.

Administrator Walsh completed his presentation.

Chairman Martin opened the hearing to public comment. He reminded those in the room that previous comments are part of the record and do not need to be repeated this evening.

1. Tanju Sofu – He asked the Members to consider a graded approach and study what is needed in the C1 district. He questioned why the Village was previously trying to block off streets and now is trying to knock down buildings.
2. Cheryl Starks – She reported being concerned that 5 story buildings will look into the neighbor's backyards. She asked that the members sincerely consider the comments of the public during these meetings. She asked that the current parking restrictions be enforced.
3. Elli Cosky – She spoke in favor of the proposals this evening, opining that height increases are the right thing to do. Speaking as an urban planner, she supported the opinion provided by CMAP (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning). She stated that having a good community includes having a variety of housing types. She suggested looking at the Village's design standards within the commercial corridors.
4. Reggie Leibman – She expressed concern about communication with the Board and the Village; she stated she did not know much about this proposal until she saw the yard signs. She stated that she's concerned about those who are building the buildings, and who is doing the due diligence. She asked how many children move into the tall apartments in Oak Park and Forest Park, and how that may impact the schools in those communities. She feels there is really no place to downsize in River Forest.
5. Heidi Ewell – She recognizes the effort to communicate this meeting to the residents. She has experience with retail and does not think that retail will be viable for the Madison Street project. She believes that all residents want to increase property values, but she questions how these changes will increase Village revenue, as well as the draw on Village resources and infrastructure. She asks about the impact on the school population. She wants to be sure the traffic of the Lake and Lathrop area is considered.
6. Thomas Lamm – He thanked the Chairman and Members for their time and President Adduci for spearheading the Comprehensive Plan. He feels that the proposed plans deal with the issues of the last 30 years, and questions why the change must be made now. He feels that the Village needs to have people on staff or consulting who focus on economic development. Residents deserve open transparency, but he was not aware of this discussion until he found it online. He asked why the Village did not mail postcards. He

suggested a village-wide survey asking what type of development the residents are interested in. He said asked to see the chapter changes, not just text amendments.

7. Robert Armalas – He stated that he is not against most of the proposal but is concerned about the increase in building height to 65 feet. He sympathizes with the residents who would get “shadowed out” by development on Madison Street. He is also concerned about parking; he claims that there is currently a car blocking his driveway and he had to walk to the meeting tonight. He agrees with Dan Lauber about the parking situation and stepping the buildings back on Madison Street.
8. Joe Sanfilippo – He spoke in support of the development in the Madison area; his wife is an urban planner. He understands the residents have been through a lot with the demolition at Madison, however he supports the changes that can spur economic development in the Village. He respects that some people have been here a long time, but he will be here for the next 30 years.
9. Michael Gibbs – He thanks the Members for their service to the Village. He stated that he is a former Village Trustee and noted that he did not vote against a single zoning variation in his 8-year tenure. He feels that the final decision lies with the Village Board, not with the Code.
10. Kelly Abcarian – She expressed her passion for data, identifying herself as a “data person”. She provided a written copy of her comments to the Secretary for inclusion in the public record. Her focus lies in ensuring that proposals are well-supported by data. Additionally, she felt that the Board packet contained an excessive amount of data. She elaborated on her examination of the school demographics report, paying particular attention to units without bedrooms (studios). She highlighted specific insights from the demographics report and drew parallels between Oak Park and River Forest’s zoning situations, and how she feels those conditions might impact our Village if similar strategies were implemented. Reflecting on her own upbringing in another state, she shared how that community changed over time as policies evolved.
11. Greg Abcarian – As a long-time resident, he stated that he coaches students in the Village and a lot of his students rent homes, so he believes that the demographic information is incorrect. He feels that the density is going to negatively impact traffic. He thanked the members for their service.
12. Debbie Borman – She asserted that she represents the neighbors in her area. She provided 4 letters from neighbors that should be included in the public record. She complained about the size of the packet of information provided to the public on Tuesday. She is concerned that the increased density and lack of parking will impact police response. She had her volunteers place fliers at homes in the Village. She created a “palm card” that

was handed out tonight. She noted that there have been no changes to the Village's proposal during this process.

13. Renee Duba – She stated that she is excited about development on Madison Street. She feels that the shadow studies confirm that a 50-foot building would be hard on the neighboring properties. She said that crowds like this scare away developers, but she suggested slowing the process down and doing a comprehensive assessment of the zoning code. She suggested incorporating step-down building requirements or including greenspace requirements.
14. Beth Chang – She expressed that the guiding principle for moving forward should be economic development and hearing the residents' feedback in a meaningful way. She noted that the third-party letters of review did not appear to incorporate the public feedback. She asked, what does "quality development" mean. She asks for creative approaches to the development process, including traffic solutions, not just traffic studies. She asked, if these changes are put in place, then what will stop the developers from requesting variances above these. She wants to see economic development but wants to see the concerns of the residents addressed.
15. Andrea Morowczynski – She inquired about what empty lots are under discussion, specifically at Lake and Lathrop. If so, then she supports that discussion. She asked if this discussion includes replacing housing on North Avenue, Harlem Avenue, Lake Street, or Madison Street, as this is a threat she has heard for the last 10 years.
16. Margie Cekander – She thanked the Board for holding the meeting in this larger venue. She feels that there were too many pages in the Board packet for this meeting. She disputes the details of the shadow studies as presented this evening. She asked if the ZBA was aware of the EDC questions that were raised at their meetings. She discussed the zoning for the Town Center. She discussed various Village projects and the recent FY25 budget proposal. She provided her opinion on the Lake and Lathrop project. She asked the members to reject the proposal this evening.
17. Annette Madden – She recalled when she learned that her property was in a TIF district several years ago. She felt that there have been no efforts by the Village to settle her fears. She hopes that the decision is made on knowledge.
18. Matt Nickels – He stated that he is raising 5th generation River Forest residents and values a walkable/bikeable community with small businesses such as are currently in the Village. He feels that these proposed guidelines can be used to hold elected officials accountable during the development process. He supports the proposal and notes his opinions on each item.

Chairman Martin asked the Applicant to make a final statement. Administrator Walsh provided his closing remarks and addressed a few of the concerns raised during public comment.

Chairman Martin stated that the public portion of the hearing is now closed and clarified that there will be no additional comments allowed by the Applicant or the audience unless called upon. He proceeded to explain the process that the Zoning Board will move forward upon and next steps for the Village Board. He thanked those who expressed opinions this evening, especially those that were well thought out. He further clarified that this is not a rezoning hearing, this is a proposed amendment to the text of the existing zoning code, despite what some may believe. Additionally, he reminded those present that the Village still has a Planned Development process for any developments over 20,000 square feet and that regardless of what decision the Village Board finally makes, any future development will go through the Planned Development process, which includes public hearings.

Chairman Martin turned to the Board and asked them how they would like to proceed. Member Dombrowski said that he is ready to go forward with a vote.

Member Davis said that she is open to discussion but has made up her mind on this and does not need to delay. Members Plywacz, Price, Shoemaker, and Lucchesi agreed.

A MOTION was made by Member Plywacz, seconded by Member Shoemaker to recommend approving the proposal as presented.

Member Davis stated that, while she understands the need for development in the Village, she feels that the proposals are too sweeping and do not incorporate the feedback from residents. She encourages the step backs that were suggested by a resident; however, she cannot support this proposal as presented for the vote tonight.

Member Plywacz agreed with Member Davis.

Member Shoemaker agreed with the suggestion of step backs and is also concerned about parking.

Member Price agreed with the statements of the other members. She stated that she has heard the residents say that the changes were a lot all at once and feels that there has not been room for compromise presented, so she cannot recommend the proposal to the Village Board.

Member Lucchesi stated that he trusts the process and believes they have done the necessary due diligence, and we must move forward. He would also appreciate compromise.

Ayes: Member Lucchesi

Nays: Chairman Martin, Davis, Dombrowski, Shoemaker, Plywacz, and Price

Motion failed.

IV. NEXT MEETING

Next meeting is scheduled for May 9, 2024.

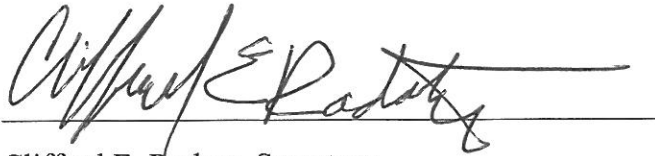
V. PUBLIC COMMENT

VI. ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION was made by Member Davis to dismiss the meeting, seconded by Member Plywacz to adjourn. A unanimous voice vote passed the motion.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:49 p.m.

Submitted:



Clifford E. Radatz, Secretary



Frank Martin, Chairman
Zoning Board of Appeals

Date: 5/9/2024