

TO: The Sycamore Plan Commission

FROM: Bill Nicklas
City Manager

DATE: January 6, 2009

RE: January 12, 2009 Plan Commission Meeting

The Plan Commission agenda has five action items.

I Action Items

A. Consideration of a Petition from the City of Sycamore to Annex Property Owned by Jerome Johnson at 401 N. Main Street and to Rezone the Property to “C-3,” Highway Business District.

On December 8, 2008 the Commission considered and recommended the annexation of three former railroad parcels. A recent title search had revealed that none of the parcels had been annexed to the City of Sycamore after the railroad had sold the fragments to adjacent owners, although each was surrounded by City-zoned property. The title search was prompted by the interest of BTS Tower Development in the Johnson parcel at the northwest corner of N. Main and Page Streets. As the Commission will recall, BTS Tower had petitioned the Plan Commission and City Council in the summer of 2008 for a special use permit to erect a monopole wireless communication tower at the southeast corner of Page and N. California Streets. The interest of the firm in the Johnson parcel was revealed to the City staff by DeKalb County’s planning director, Paul Miller, who had been approached by the vendor’s representative when he discovered that the parcel had not been annexed. With reference to both the DeKalb County Comp Plan and the Sycamore Comp Plan, Mr. Miller appropriately advised the gentleman that the parcel should be developed for urban uses within the framework of the City of Sycamore’s zoning and development codes.

In order to plan for orderly growth and to ensure that the goals and objectives of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan are met, the City staff have petitioned the Commission and the Council for the annexation of the 1.32-acre Johnson parcel at 401 N. Main Street and its rezoning to “C-3,” Highway Business. The “C-3” zoning designation is consistent with the commercial zoning that has incrementally developed to the north of the parcel in question, in the vicinity of North Avenue, and recent actions by the Commission and

Council to convert the old industrial neighborhood along N. Main Street into commercial-zoned parcels as redevelopment occurs. The owner, Jerome Johnson, and his attorney, Duane Slayton, will be present at the hearing.

Due to a surveyor's error in an earlier annexation plat and related legal description that was identified by Mr. Johnson's counsel, this consideration was continued at the December hearing and a new legal description and public notice have been processed. In the absence of any development plan, no annexation agreement has been recommended by the City staff.

A favorable Plan Commission recommendation is requested.

B. Consideration of a Petition from the City of Sycamore to Annex Property Owned by Laura and Eric Mathey at 403 N. Main Street and to Rezone the Parcel to "M-1," Light Manufacturing District.

This parcel is located at the northwest corner of the Johnson property and consists of a fractional land area of .03 acres that was not annexed to the larger Mathey parcel to the north when the former railroad right-of-way was purchased many years ago. With the cooperation of the owners, it is proposed that this parcel be annexed with a designated zoning that for the present conforms to the zoning of the larger adjacent parcel to the north. In the City's long-term planning scheme, this parcel and the remaining parcels to the north that are presently zoned "M-1," Light Manufacturing will be gradually rezoned for commercial purposes, as the parcels in the vicinity of North Avenue and N. Main Street have been in recent years. However, the proposed zoning is appropriate in the short run given the present contractor uses of the larger adjacent parcel.

A favorable Plan Commission recommendation is requested.

C. Consideration of a Special Use Permit Application from DeKalb County Youth Services for the Property at 203 E. State Street.

The former Drendel (Merle Norman Cosmetics) property at 203 E. State Street has been purchased by the County of DeKalb, consistent with the County's campus plan for the Locust Street corridor between E. State Street and Sycamore Street. DeKalb County Court Services proposes to remodel the building to accommodate a residential facility or "safe house" for juvenile offenders. The male and female youth (13-17 years of age) assigned to the facility would range from young persons temporarily relocated from very stressful and toxic home environments to young persons whose encounters with local police have required that they be detained outside the home but also outside of permanent detention centers. The proposed residence would be staffed full-time with either a foster family or full-time supervision from County authorities. This program would provide a structured and safe place in crisis situations and also a motivating environment for those who have not had positive lessons in conflict resolution at home. The facility would not house persons with severe mental health disabilities, substance abuse problems, sex offenders, or persons who have committed assault offenses with weapons.

DeKalb County Youth Services was initially interested in the Engh Farm, but the City Council dedicated that property for museum purposes in July 2008. A facility in proximity to the County Sheriff's department and DeKalb County court services would seem a very appropriate alternative location. A favorable Plan Commission recommendation is requested.

D. Consideration of a Rezoning Petition from Commonwealth Edison Company for the Property at 385 South Avenue, with a Special Use Request for a Utility Substation.

The above-referenced property already contains a Com Ed substation. Immediately north of the property is a parcel that formerly contained a structure that was set ablaze in March 2007 with a tragic loss of life. The substation, which provides service to a substantial part of the Sycamore corporate area, was damaged by that fire. Partly as a result of that fire and in consideration of the company's increased concern for safety, Com Ed has proposed the erection of a fire wall to separate its facility from the residential properties to the south and west. This brick wall would also screen Com Ed's high voltage equipment from the view of these homeowners.

The rezoning request would bring the substation in line with its current and future use. The parcel is presently zoned "R-3," Multiple Family Residence District, and would more appropriately be zoned "M-2," Heavy Manufacturing which is consistent with the utility use. A special use permit would be required to legitimize the proposed fence height.

Some graphics depicting the location and design of the new 10-inch thick, 15.6 foot tall fence are attached. A favorable Plan Commission recommendation is requested.

E. Consideration of an Amendment to the Special Use Request Granted to St. Mary's Church on August 18, 2008 to Allow for Certain Height and Area Revisions.

In August the Plan Commission considered and supported a revision to the St. Mary's Church special use permit to allow for an addition to their school facility at 222 Waterman Street. At that time, the plan was to construct a two-and-a-half story addition to provide much-needed classroom space. Since the Commission's review, the Church has performed soil tests which show that the underlying soils are too wet to provide confidence that the proposed basement would be dry in all seasons. Accordingly, in order to provide the requisite classroom space without expanding the footprint of the addition, the Church has asked its architect to draw an alternative three-story addition resting on a slab-on-grade foundation. This height of the three-story addition would likely be about 38 foot which would slightly exceed the 35-foot allowable height in the "R-2," Two Family Residence District.

It appears that the alternative of going taller rather than wider would be more consistent with the goal of minimizing the visual impact of the proposed addition. The slightly taller structure would have the modest footprint that was proposed to the Commission in August. To maintain the same square footage, a lower height would require a broader footprint and a more imposing presence at the end of S. California Street. A conceptual

elevation view of the north façade is attached for the Commission's review. A favorable Plan Commission recommendation is requested.