

**MINUTES OF THE
TUPELO PLANNING COMMITTEE
MAY REGULAR MEETING
Monday, May 1, 2023
6:00 PM Council Chambers**

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Lindsey Leake called the meeting to order. Other committee members present included Mark Williams, Bentley Nolan, Pam Hadley, Leslie Mart, Patti Thompson, Victor Fleitas, Gus Hildenbrand and Scott Davis. Staff members present included City Planner Jenny Savely, Zoning Administrator Russ Wilson and Director of Development Services Tanner Newman. Chair Leake asked Patti Thompson to open with a prayer and Pam Hadley to lead the pledge. Chair Leake then presented an opening statement of the committee purpose and reviewed how the committee would conduct its business. The Staff and Committee were then asked to introduce themselves and did so.

REVIEW OF MINUTES

Chair Leake asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Patti Thompson offered a correction under new business to correct where it says "Lindsey Leake will not be serving as chair, changed to Lindsey Leake will NOW be serving as chair." Scott Davis made a motion to approve the minutes of the April meeting with that correction, seconded by Patti Thompson and passed unanimously. Leake then opened the regular session of the meeting asking for a report on Council Actions.

REPORT ON COUNCIL ACTIONS

City Planner Jenny Savely said that there was nothing to report at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Planner Savely mentioned old business TA-22-02 remains in legal review.

NEW BUSINESS

Leake announced the first item on the agenda, FLEX23-03, Palmer Storage, 1005 East Main Street requests to allow the use of the former Palmer's Supermarket as self-service climate-controlled storage units. Leake asked the applicant to come forward. J.K. Palmer, Jr "Buddy" Palmer came to the podium. Palmer thanked committee members for their service. Palmer stated he once served on the Planning Committee. Mr. Palmer mentioned that they recently closed their supermarket after 66 years in East Tupelo for various reasons and that it has been a mainstay in East Tupelo. They had a contract to sell but that deal fell through. Mr. Palmer asked his son Damon to distribute renderings of their buildings and lot to the committee. They have received offers to purchase the building, but none have been reasonable. He is asking to allow his son, Damon, to operate a climate controlled storage facility in this location. They already have storage units on the lot which will remain. Mr. Palmer said that some would say we are getting too many storage units, but the demand is there. This business will not be a restaurant, nor a coffee shop, it's not built for that. It was good for a supermarket, and perfect

for climate-controlled mini storage. Palmer added that he's paid taxes for 66 years and would simply ask to be allowed for his son to earn back some of the money he's lost in the supermarket business. Palmer also said he bought the two residential lots facing Elvis Presley to keep those lots in good shape to help East Tupelo.

Mark Williams asked Palmer about the Downtown Overlay District's extension further east just recently. Palmer said he was supportive of that to protect the housing in the area. Williams asked if Palmer, knowing the vision for the area, thought his proposal was in keeping with that vision. Palmer said that it was as good as you can get. Victor Fleitas asked a hypothetical question of Mr. Palmer that if the overlay district was extended tomorrow to include his location, would that change his calculation about what he would do with the property. Palmer said he already had two storage units on the property with minimal traffic impact, and recognized that he's prejudiced but thought it was a good looking project for the east side of Tupelo. Tanner Newman said he would hate to see another empty building on East Main. We've got two home-grown Tupelo citizens who want to improve the area. Newman said that the Overlay was concerned about the aesthetics and it sounds like they are willing to work with the City on that.

Palmer mentioned the other two lots he hoped to build on with maybe an Airbnb type housing, with Johnnie's Drive in nearby, where visitors could stay nearby the Birthplace, go to Johnnie's and Veterans Park. Gus Hildenbrand agreed that what is currently there looks better than most in East Tupelo and that Mr. Palmer will keep it that way. Hildenbrand said he had owned storage rooms himself and knew it could be kept looking nice with landscaping. Palmer asked his son Damon to come forward and explain the plan. Damon Palmer discussed the look of the facility further mentioning new signage. Scott Davis asked about the parking lot. Damon said they don't own the parking lot. Savely asked for clarification about the current parking lot and Palmer said they don't need it. Leslie Mart asked if they had considered sub-dividing the building with an inviting coffee shop up front, with the mini storage in the back. Damon Palmer said they haven't had any interest in that. Mart asked about landscaping on the front of the building. Damon Palmer said maybe adding potted plants, but that there wasn't room for that, but he was open to ideas. Patti Thompson asked about access from the back. Damon Palmer said he was just going to wall that off. Access will be on the front and customers will carry items in through the front. Hildenbrand added that this would be similar to the two former furniture stores on Coley Road that closed and converted to climate-controlled storage. Thompson asked if there would be an awning. Damon Palmer said there is one there now. Buddy Palmer added that the lot is very well lit. Damon said the windows there will stay and there will not be anyone staying on site, so plans do not require an onsite manager. Pam Hadley asked if the current storage units there are filled. Damon Palmer said yes, they were, but that these new ones will be 10' x 15' mostly – with code access and a website. Leake asked if anyone from the public would like to speak for or against the issue. Seeing none, Leake closed the public input portion of the hearing and opened it up for discussion between the committee members.

Gus Hildenbrand said he was surprised by the demand for storage buildings, but they are still hard to find and did not think they would have any trouble leasing these as climate-controlled. Leslie Mart asked Jenny Savely what the requirements were for landscaping and glass on the frontage. Savely gave the requirements but stated that the Committee could set the standards through the Flexible Use approval process, but that increasing the landscaping would require breaking up the concrete on the front. The windows meet code. Savely reminded the committee that they are considering the use as self-storage and that the construction would have to be approved during Plan Review. Patti Thompson shared a concern about turning down a similar request earlier this year across the street on Briar Ridge and asked if we would have any “flak” from that? Savely stated that what had been asked of that previous applicant was, even though they were not part of the downtown overlay area, that we had requested having Downtown Main Street’s input for their renovations, signage and aesthetics, but that location had some limitations. If the committee wanted to consider adding that same contingency on this project as that previous one that would soften how the committee had handled it. Mart summarized that the committee would be asking to allow DTMSA to assist with the review of the aesthetics and exterior of the building. Savely said yes, but not have to go through their stringent design review process but DTMSA could instead offer to review and comment, make suggestions. Thompson said she wasn’t sure how to word that. Newman offered that you could require their advice on review of the signage. Zoning Administrator Wilson added that the previous applicant did call in for more information. He did not receive a notice because he was not the owner of record on file. That applicant backed out of the deal based on the input from the committee. Their project got delayed when the property seller went into bankruptcy and the applicant never proceeded with the project, so the Committee never considered their application or voted on anything. Mart added that there were some traffic flow issues with that project that made it different.

Mart said that she was still concerned that it looked like a former grocery store that has been converted into mini-storage and hoped there was something that could be done differently in the front with the storage in the back that would be a win-win for the City and applicant. Savely explained a little about business recruitment and tax incentive processes, but said that the Tax Abatement incentives stop at Veterans. Newman said he still recommended wording having the developer work with the Downtown Overlay to come up with some exterior design options and hasn’t heard any negative feedback on that. Hildenbrand said that looking like Palmer’s Supermarket isn’t a bad thing. Buddy Palmer said that this has nothing to do with the Palmer legacy. It’s about the store. Most of East Tupelo knows about Palmer’s history the same as Leake & Goodlett’s. But it’s just a building, but they will retain the Palmer’s name.

Mark Williams made a motion to approve the Flexible Use of climate controlled mini storage as submitted provided the applicant works with the Downtown Main Street Association in consultation on the exterior design and signage that meets the spirit and intent of the association and the harmony of the district. Seconded by several simultaneously and approved unanimously. Leake asked Savely to inform the applicant of their next steps.

Leake announced the next application RZ23-01, a split zoning lot on the east side of South Veterans. Since City of Tupelo is the applicant, Savely went to the podium to present the case. The subject parcel on South Veterans has split zoning with the portion directly off Veterans being MUCC and the rear portion being MDR. The reason for the application is that the owner has brought forward a plan for developing the lot for an assisted care facility. This requires that we correct the mistake of split zoning. The applicant requires zoning verification for the parcel and to allow the development, we need a fully commercial zoned lot. So, this is just tidying up the zone. Mart asked if we were just correcting the zoning on just this one lot, or what about the others nearby with similar issues. Savely mentioned that criteria for rezoning is different than most applications before the committee, we don't have demonstration of public need yet on the other parcels, but we do on this one lot. Those other vacant parcels will have to be looked at when they are considered for development. Gus Hildenbrand said you can't rezone just because you want to, you have to have a good reason. Scott Davis said we have had similar situations before in cleaning up zoning mistakes. Mart clarified where the current zoning lines are and how they would change. Leake asked if anyone wanted to speak for or against the application. Hearing none he closed the public hearing and asked if there was a motion. Scott Davis made a motion to approve, Mart seconded the motion with a unanimous vote in favor of approval.

Chair Leake mentioned that the next work session will be Tuesday, May 30th at 5:15 PM, and the regular June Planning Committee Meeting will be scheduled for Monday, June 5th at 6 PM.

Tanner Newman asked to speak for a moment. He thanked the Committee for their service. He said it has been an honor to serve with this team and feels there have been many accomplishments over the last two years. Since he had announced in January his intent to run for the Northern District Public Service Commissioner post, it has become evident that the time has come for him to step away from the City to focus his efforts full time on that race. So, effective Wednesday, May 3rd, Newman stated that he will be taking a leave of absence to campaign full time across North Mississippi. In that time, the Mayor has appointed City Engineer Dennis Bonds as Interim Director of Development Services. Newman thanked everyone for their support throughout this process. The Committee thanked Newman for his service to the City.

There being no further business, Patti Thompson made a motion to adjourn which passed unanimously.