

**KENT PLANNING COMMISSION
BUSINESS MEETING
MARCH 18, 2025**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Amanda Edwards
Derek Salustro
Ken Crookston
Earl Clausson

STAFF PRESENT:

Bridget Susel, Community Development Director
Tim Sahr, Development Engineer

I. Call to Order

Ms. Edwards called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call:

Amanda Edwards, Derek Salustro, Earl Clausson, and Ken Crookston were present.

MOTION: *Mr. Clausson moved to excuse Naser Matar from the 3/18/25 meeting. Mr. Salustro seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-0*

III. Reading of Preamble

Ms. Edwards read the Preamble, which describes the purpose and procedures of the Planning Commission as well as the applicant's right to an appeal.

IV. Administration of Oath

Ms. Susel instructed those members of the audience wishing to be heard on the case to be presented at this meeting to raise their right hand. Ms. Susel administered the Oath, "Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, if yes, please say "I do." The participants responded, "I do."

V. Correspondence

None.

VI. New Business

A. PC25-003 PORTAGE PARK DISTRICT
 801 HOWE RD

The applicant is seeking a Conditional Zoning Certificate and Site Plan approval to allow a Recreational Facility, Outdoor, to be located at Parcel No. 45-016-00-00-012-001. The property is located within the R-1: Low Density Residential Zoning District.

Mr. Sahr presented the project as submitted and presented the staff report to the Commission. He stated that the site is accessed from Howe Road and is bordered by residential uses and/or vacant land on all sides. He stated that the subject property is owned by the Portage Park District along with an adjoining parcel that is not in the City of Kent. He stated that the plan is to use the currently vacant land as a new park, which is classified by the Zoning Code as a Recreational Facility, Outdoor. He stated that the improvements to the site include a parking lot, restroom facility, two picnic pavilions, and a walking path. Mr. Sahr read Section 1105.50 – Concerns & Conditions as well as Section 1111.02(D)(6) – General Conditions for a “Recreational Facility, Outdoor” use. He stated that the total parking spaces proposed is 66 and that the Recreational Facility, Outdoor use does not have specific parking requirement but rather is “based on the nature of the use”. He stated that trash receptacles will be installed and emptied by the Portage Park District staff on a regular schedule. He stated that no additional landscaping is required as the parcel is heavily vegetated and the location of the development preserves all but a small number of trees and bushes. He added that the existing vegetation keeps intact the existing buffer between the proposed development and neighboring parcels. He stated that the submitted plans include a lighting plan and photometric analysis showing the proposed lighting plan does not create light bleed beyond the boundary of the property, meeting the requirements of the KCO. He stated that at this time, the applicant is not requesting a signage review. He stated that a review by the Architectural Review Board is not required and no variances have been requested as part of this submittal from the Board of Zoning Appeals. He stated that staff finds that the request for a conditional use permit and site plan approval, as presented, to be in accordance with applicable sections of the City of Kent Zoning Code.

Christine Craycroft, Executive Director, Portage Park District, 705 Oakwood St., Ravenna introduced Consultant, Chris Bednar and Planning Manager, Nick Moskos. She stated that the property was acquired with grant funds in 2016 and they are now ready to proceed with the project after receiving public input. She explained the provided site plan showing the primary development area. She also explained the project will ensure the preservation of the bog and the existing walking trails.

Chris Bednar, Karpinski Engineering, 3135 Euclid Ave., stated that they are the design engineers for the project. He stated that there will be a new 66 space parking area located off of Howe Rd where there is currently a gate and an open clearing. He stated that their goal is to minimize any impact to the proposed project and stated that he believes that there are only 7 or 8 trees that need to be removed for the project. He stated that there will be a centralized plaza area with a kiosk and two prefabricated restroom buildings. He stated that there will be a .042 mile ADA compliant trail loop that goes around the property that also gives access to two pavilions: 24-feet by 36-feet and 18-feet by 24-feet. He further explained that the pavilions will be lit for security and have electricity available for public use. He stated that to protect the stormwater quantity and quality, they are proposing a bioretention cell that will be in the center island of the parking lot, which will capture stormwater for the parking lot and the driveway. He stated that there will also be an area of permeable pavers that will also help with runoff water quality. He stated that they are providing van accessible ADA parking spaces. He stated that the facilities will have potable water and sanitary sewer.

Mr. Claussen questioned if the parking lot will be lit all night long every night.

Mr. Bednar stated that they have provisions that the parking lot can be lit in the future if they decide to have it installed based on attendance, but currently there are no plans to keep it lit at night.

Ms. Edwards questioned if the trail would be paved.

Mr. Bednar stated that it will be a chip and seal type product that provides a smooth ADA compliant surface. He stated that there will also be a nice overlook area on the northwest corner as part of the trail. He explained that it will overlook Plum Creek with a nice stone wall and the intention of installing a swing in the area.

Mr. Crookston questioned if the railroad tracks would be affected by the new trails.

Mr. Bednar explained that the railroad tracks are farther to the west and not affected.

Public Comment

Jack Elrod, 4918 Sunnybrook Rd, stated that he is an adjacent neighbor to the northwest and he is questioning if there will be an impact to the farm animals on his property.

Mary Ridenour, 4891 St. Rt. 43 questioned where the campground area was going to be.

Ms. Susel stated that there isn't going to be a campground area at this location.

Linda Ball, 810 Lakeview Ct., questioned who notices were sent to.

Ms. Susel explained that the notices are sent to property owners who are within 200 feet of the property.

Planning Commission Discussion

Ms. Edwards requested that one of the development team explain the park layout to the audience as they were not able to see it.

Nick Moskos, 155 Cherry Hill, Wadsworth, OH stated that he is the Planning Manager for the Portage Park District as well as a landscape architect. He explained the site plan stating that the parking area is close to Howe Rd in an existing clearing. He stated that the rough-in for lighting will be installed, but actual light poles/features will not be installed at the present time. If lighting is installed in the future, the existing vegetation will buffer around the houses that are nearby and the project will comply with the City's ordinances prohibiting light bleed beyond the parcel line. He stated that the lighting was designed to ½ foot candle and is dark sky compliant so light will not go up or out off of the site. He explained to Mr. Elrod that the overlook area would be at least 500 feet from his pastures. He stated that they do not have plans for a crosswalk to the subdivision across Howe Rd. or a walkway going into a parkway. He stated that they have made accommodations for bicycles to enter the site as there are many cyclists that use the roadway.

Mr. Crookston stated that he doesn't have any concerns. He feels that it looks beautiful.

Mr. Claussen stated that he likes the project very much and is happy with what they are doing and has no concerns.

Mr. Salustro stated that everyone likes a park and this one looks great.

Ms. Edwards stated that she also enjoys seeing a project that isn't a big building and is something different that is beneficial to the city with little impact on the surrounding area.

Mr. Crookston stated that he didn't realize that this parcel would help to protect the southern part of the bog, which is awesome to hear.

MOTION: *In the case of PC25-003, Portage Park District, 801 Howe Rd., Mr. Salustro moved that the Planning Commission approves the Conditional Zoning Certificate and Site Plan to allow a Recreational Facility, Outdoor, to be located at Parcel No. 45-016-00-00-012-001 with the following conditions:*

1. Technical Plan Review.

Mr. Clausson seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0.

**B. PC25-004 CITY OF KENT
 ZONING CODE TEXT AMENDMENTS**

The applicant is seeking approval of text amendments to the City of Kent Zoning Code for the following:

- CHAPTER 1103: ZONING DISTRICTS, LAND USE, AND ZONING MAP**
- CHAPTER 1104: SUPPLEMENTAL ZONING DISTRICT STANDARDS AND OVERLAY ZONING DISTRICTS**
- CHAPTER 1106: GENERAL PROVISIONS**

Ms. Susel stated that although they already changed the term accessory structure to subordinate structure, it didn't get changed in each district table. She stated that the proposed amendments to Chapter 1103 will align each table in each zoning district to match the new language that was changed a few months ago.

Ms. Susel stated that staff is proposing an amendment in Chapter 1106 under the fencing subsection to give the authority to the Community Development Director to approve an administrative variance to allow an 8 foot fence in the Industrial Zoning District only for safety and security of the site based on the use of the site or any use of an adjoining site. She explained that this was the intention when the code was rewritten but was omitted.

Ms. Susel stated that the proposed amendment for Chapter 1106 Exterior Lighting and Glare clarifies which elements of a lighting fixture need to be removed in the case of abandoned and inoperable lighting equipment.

Ms. Susel stated that the Architectural Design Guidelines were adopted in December 2023 as recommendations. She stated that Council discussed that they want to codify the design guidelines and make them more regulatory so staff has been presenting sections for approval a little at a time. She stated that the next proposed amendment is for the building massing and façades of the structures. She stated that staff used the proposed regulations that the consultant provided for staff to consider and adapted them to existing code terms to develop the proposed Design: Exterior Elements, Materials and Massing section that will be applied to new buildings and exterior renovations in the Overlay District. She stated that these standards came from the consultant and are consistent with other requirements when dealing with facades in a downtown area. She explained that the black text in the presented staff report was previously adopted and the blue text is new.

Mr. Clausson questioned why not just allow 8 foot fencing in Industrial Districts.

Ms. Susel stated that there are some instances where Industrial Districts abut residential districts and an 8 foot fence would not be wanted but maybe rather a landscape buffer.

Mr. Clausson suggested that maybe in that case the resident would want to come before the Planning Commission to tell them about how they feel.

She stated that the proposed language isn't a requirement. It is an allowance where it seems reasonable but in cases where it is questionable, it would definitely go to Planning Commission. She explained that the proposed provision would be for cases where it is industrial use next to an industrial use and they need an 8 foot fence for security. She stated that staff has this type of discretion in the Community Development Department for other minor things but if it is every questionable or its abutting a different zoning district or use, it has always been the departmental policy and approach to take it to Planning Commission.

Mr. Crookston questioned if the exterior code changes would affect a tenant or if it would just be the owner/developer.

Ms. Susel stated that anything that is existing will be a pre-existing condition. She stated that if it is the Planning Commission's recommendation to Council to adopt the proposed language, it would be for development from that point forward because it can't go retroactive.

Mr. Claussen questioned if the Design: Exterior Elements, Materials and Massing was all about aesthetics.

Ms. Susel confirmed that it is and stated that the proposed language is all based on building design and exterior elements specific to the Overlay District. She added that the new language has some practicality to it with respect to ensuring design continuity.

Mr. Claussen stated that he has discomfort with most of the suggestions.

Ms. Susel explained the background of the first Design Guidelines and how they were subjective guidelines based on a historic district that was never established. She stated that it caused points of contention with a lot of subjectivity and opinion, which created issues for the developer, the community, and the staff. She stated that a consultant was hired to come up with design guidelines that were not historic in nature and were based on what was currently in the downtown. She stated that those guidelines were adopted in December 2023. She stated that the group that advocated for the guidelines to be adopted did not like that they were recommendations only and Council agreed that they wanted them to become regulations. She stated that this is why staff has been working on this process because it is driven by the public and Council.

Mr. Claussen questioned the future of the Architectural Review Board.

Ms. Susel stated that the ARB is currently not an active board as all of the members have expired terms and Council has not appointed anyone to the ARB. She stated that the new guidelines were adopted as recommendations in 2023 and since then staff has been charged with creating regulations for the design guidelines. She stated that once the regulations are adopted and in place, Council will need to determine what they would like to do with the ARB. She added that currently, Council has the statutory authority to issue a "Certificate of Appropriateness" in the Overlay District but the question will be do they still require that authority now that the regulations are in place and staff can check whether they are met or not

through measurement and reviewing the plans. She stated that Council could decide to have the ARB provide recommendations only or Council could completely disband the board.

Mr. Claussen was surprised that the regulations would prohibit a front window that is wider than it is tall.

Ms. Edwards stated that she doesn't feel that you would want a downtown building in a walking district where you can't see in because all they have is a short wide window close to the ceiling. She stated that the point is to have open and inviting windows/store fronts.

Mr. Salustro asked if there will be limits on proposed colors that you can choose from for a façade exterior. He doesn't think it should be controlled.

Ms. Edwards stated that she could see color being controlled because it will help keep value up and keeping the city looking nice, but unsure how you would go about categorizing which colors are permitted or not permitted..

Mr. Clausson stated that there is value in their comments but feels that there is also overspecification that makes a downtown area sterile, without character, and boring, which is what he doesn't want. He stated that there needs to be some nostalgia for the old downtown.

Ms. Susel stated that the consultant did reflect the old Kent in the guidelines based on what is existing in the Overlay District. She explained that if you look at the guidelines, it creates dimension, depth, and uniqueness at the street level where people walk because these all apply to the first and second stories. She stated that they are asking for natural materials and not just painted hardy board, etc. but it doesn't specify materials above the second story.

Ms. Edwards noted that the new Kent is able to attract more businesses and customers because it is a pleasant place to be.

Ms. Susel stated that the presented standards are more succinct and clearer and still allow a great deal of architectural latitude in design and creation. She explained that previously whatever the ARB specified in the Certificate of Appropriateness said was what the developer was required to do even though it was not specified in the former guidelines that were an appendix to the Zoning Code.

Mr. Salustro stated that the proposed hotel that was at the corner of Franklin and Summit was essentially shut down due to the ARB and the style that they wanted.

Ms. Edwards agreed and stated that the proposed language is very lenient compared to the old method, but still specifies building features that are required.

Mr. Salustro questioned who would oversee variance requests for these specifications.

Ms. Susel stated that it would go before the Board of Zoning Appeals. Ms. Susel requested the Commissioners input regarding the question of color and if a specific color palette is wanted.

Mr. Salustro stated that he feels that the color should be left to the property/business owner and should not be regulated. He stated that with regards to keeping the Kent feel, color choice is more important than the building style. He stated that he feels that there is enough leeway in the façade requirements and that concerns about overcontrol by the city has been because of attempted control of color choices.

Ms. Edwards stated that she feels that some form of color control needs to be in place to avoid the angry business owner from painting their façade a bright color out of spite. She stated that she doesn't feel that accent colors or awnings are wrong but would like to see the main building color be regulated with a harmonious color. She did not have any suggestions on how to specify/limit the primary building color.

Ms. Susel explained that this will be a regulation so you need to be able to define what that means.

Mr. Crookston stated that he feels that he falls between Mr. Salustro and Ms. Edwards in that he wants owners to be able to pick colors that mean something to them but doesn't want to see it go too far outside of what is there.

Ms. Susel pointed out that this is for the commercial downtown and the goal of the property owners and tenants is to attract customers based on their marketing.

Mr. Salustro stated that he has heard that people are angry about the colors of the t-shirt shop, Skullz, and Zephyr downtown, but he feels that they were all fine. He stated that if people paint their businesses obscene colors, people will not shop at your place.

Ms. Susel stated that sign color is not regulated. She stated that the proposed regulations would apply to new facades going forward and would not apply to the painted fronts as those would be considered pre-existing non-conforming.

Mr. Claussen stated that he is not in favor of regulating color. Mr. Claussen stated that he feels that there may be some holes in the regulation that would allow the use of vinyl or wood as those are "durable".

Ms. Susel stated that staff will look at the wording to better clarify.

MOTION: *In the case of PC25-004, City of Kent, Mr. Salustro moved that the Planning Commission recommend to Kent City Council that it hold a public hearing, review, and discuss the proposed Zoning Code Text Amendments for Chapters 1103, 1104, and 1106 and adopt the proposed text amendments with emergency as presented.*

Mr. Crookston seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0.

VII. Meeting Minutes

MOTION: *Mr. Clausson moved to approve the January 21, 2025 Meeting Minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Salustro. The motion carried 3-0-1. Ms. Edwards abstained.*

VIII. Other Business

None

IX. Adjournment

MOTION: *Mr. Crookston moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Salustro. The motion carried 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.*