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Proposed industrial park lot split raises issues

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Michelle Leonard, news1@farmingtonindependent.com

Splitting one lot in the Farmington Industrial Park into three separate lots should be an easy enough task, but is far more complicated than it seems.

Doing so requires consent from the Farmington City Council, the Farmington Housing and Redevelopment Authority and the planning commission, and involves a number of interrelated issues.

Issue no. 1

First, Farmington community development director Kevin Carroll explained, there is the question of whether the city council will allow city staff to proceed with a survey of a 9.37 acre parcel in Phase 2 of the industrial park.

The parcel in question has been on the market for the better part of seven years, if not longer, Carroll said. The property has a pipeline easement running diagonally through it. Any business that may have considered purchasing it in the past has opted not to, simply because the easement requires a business to either build on the south side of the property and leave the other portion empty, or construct two separate buildings, one on either side of the easement.

Carroll, city staff and the HRA have recommended cutting the parcel into three lots. As it is, Carroll said, most of the lots in the industrial park are around two acres. Dividing the one lot into three would mean lot sizes of 2.5 acres, 3.4 acres and 3.5 acres.

"Both city staff and the HRA agree, it's better to have three smaller lots to sell instead of one large one that you can't sell," Carroll said. "These lots are still bigger than many out there, but it's a good size to sell in the market, under the current economic circumstances."

The city council, at an April 30 meeting with the HRA and planning commission, implied they would approve the replatting, and suggested Carroll do a survey of the parcel in preparation.

Issue no. 2

If the lot is split into three, there is a potential business owner who is interested in purchasing the 2.5 acre lot.

While a new business would be beneficial, there are a couple of unusual issues that must be addressed. The first is that the building proposed does not fit the city code established for buildings in the industrial park.

Specifically, the city code lists exterior building materials that can be used in the industrial park. The potential business owner, though, wishes to use an exterior known as handiplank, a type of lap siding that has Portland cement in it, Carroll said. Handiplank is not listed in the city code, but concrete is. The question of whether the presence of Portland cement qualifies as concrete is one being considered this week.

City staff, Carroll said, contends handiplank does not have enough concrete in it to qualify as concrete. The potential business owner has appealed that decision to the planning commission, which was going to consider the appeal at its meeting Tuesday night. The decision was not available at press time.

The other consideration is that handiplank was not widely used, if even in existence, when the city code was established for the industrial park.

"There's no way to know whether or not that material was considered," Carroll said. "I suspect not, but don't know that for certain."

If the planning commission overturns staff's determination, the potential business owner would have to seek a variance from the planning commission and purchase the lot from the HRA.

Issue no. 3

The potential business owner is Jan Karrmann, who wishes to open a daycare facility on the lot. While not necessarily "industrial" in nature, daycare facilities are among the alternate uses allowed through a conditional use permit in the industrial park.

Carroll has brought the issue of daycare as a conditional use in the industrial park to both the HRA and planning commission, and both have acknowledged daycare is an allowable use for the land.

The question Carroll is posing to the city council now is whether the council wants to make an amendment to city code to strike daycare as a conditional use for the industrial park. Or, alternatively, Carroll said the council could change the amendment to read that daycare is allowed only in existing or future industrial buildings to provide service to parents working at the individual businesses.

At the April 30 meeting, the majority of city council members indicated they did not want to change the language in the city code to eliminate or restrict daycare as a conditional use for the industrial park.

The process is confusing, Carroll admits, but city staff is trying to process Karrmann's request and do it within the city requirements and the city council's wishes.

"I think everyone has the city's long-term best interests at hand, but there are differing thoughts on what to do and what's best," Carroll said.