

CITY OF IVANHOE
PUBLIC HEARING
CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT

MINUTES

July 1, 2021
6:00 PM

Meeting was called to order by Mayor Bennett at 6:00 PM. A Quorum was established with all Council members present except Councilman Morris. All Planning & Zoning Commission members were present. 18 individuals were in the audience. The meeting was livestreamed via the city YouTube channel. Mayor Bennett welcomed those present and reminded the audience of the upcoming weekend Golf Cart Parade and other activities. She noted that individuals on social media need to submit questions or comments thru the YouTube chat feature, and provided guidelines for the public hearing.

Agenda Item #1 – Presentation of Conditional Use Application of Yessica Montserrat Magana Santa Ana (dba Wisdom Universe)

Mayor Bennett turned the floor to Ms. Yessica Montserrat Magana Santa Ana (dba Wisdom Universe, LLC.) who provided background on Wisdom Universe which has been in operation for 35 years in Mexico. The company is a for-profit Bi-cultural company dedicated to education. The proposed museum/home will provide an interactive learning environment with emphasis on multi-cultural instruction, material recycling, crafting, etc as a living museum. (People will be living in the museum to provide actual living experiences). Ms. Montserrat had provided a handout with description of a variety of planned activities, and a slide show accompanied her presentation. She clarified that as a for-profit operation, reservations will be required for anyone who wishes to participate. The building will serve as the property owners home with the living museum to serve as the educational side.

Mayor Bennett then opened the floor for the public hearing.

Agenda Item #2 – Comments and questions from the public

Michael Varholy, (Galahad Estates) commented that the presentation was very informative and the concept is a wonderful idea, but he is concerned about the location in a residential area with increased traffic on city streets.

Mike _____ (Marion Dr. North) voiced that there is enough wear and tear on the old street surfaces without adding traffic on Sherwood Forest North which is zoned for residential use.

Karl Muench (Sherwood Forest N.) commented that property owners expect the deed restrictions/zoning ordinance to be abided by with no commercial activity in a residential district, which could adversely impact folks considering buying and building homes in the district. He also expressed concern about negative impact on home values, allowing a Conditional Use permit will set a precedent that may be detrimental.

Danny Muzny (Sherwood Forest N.) Asked if the museum activity were to fail what happens? Mayor Bennett clarified that a Conditional Use permit is for a singular use and becomes void if the use ceases to exist.

Fred Trask (Sherwood Forest N.) expressed similar concerns regarding the deteriorating condition of city streets, especially Sherwood Forest North and said any Conditional Use that is permitted should benefit the community as a whole. He questioned the hours of operation of the museum and why Ivanhoe was chosen.

Ms. Montserrat responded that Ivanhoe is a beautiful place which led to the family purchasing property in the city. The thought is that since Wisdom Universe is already operating a similar museum in Mexico, it will be a good way to share cultures and the idea is to not have a noisy environment.

Mr. Trask asked about street signs directing folks to the museum and how the additional traffic will create additional work for law enforcement.

John Ables (Sherwood Forest N.) expressed concern that no one he spoke with in the neighborhood knew about the public hearing and wondered how the city gets the word out for public hearings. He commented that the location is residential and is worried about increase in traffic. He commented that the activity is a noble cause but should not be located in a residential district.

Gay Lynn Muzny (Sherwood Forest N.) asked if parents would drop off children or will parents remain with the children. She expressed concern about the times of the various activities and increased traffic since Sherwood Forest North serves as access to several other streets.

Karl Muench voiced concern about evening activities: how many and how often? Ms. Montserrat responded the evening activities are planned for twice a week with a maximum of 20 children but may increase in frequency as need arises.

There were two comments via YouTube: John Starling commented that such a facility would be better situated in the Museum District in Woodville. David Marshall asked if the operators had approached Wildwood about locating the museum there? (Response-no).

Office Assistant read three emails that came to the city:

Agenda item #3 – Comments and questions from the Planning & Zoning Commission

Valerie Weber expressed concern about school bus parking, turning around and traffic on the narrow street. She asked if the septic system would handle the number of people, and if the facility would be served by the water provider or from a well. Ms. Montserrat replied that the septic system design is being delayed until after a decision on the CUP, and a water well will be drilled if possible.

Dave Rader voiced concern about increased traffic on the narrow street, and asked what time the facility would open daily (10 AM and closing about 7 PM for children, 8 PM for adults). He asked what the economic benefit to the city would be if the CUP is granted? (Payment of property taxes and whatever the museum can do to help the city)

Suzie Fortenberry asked if there would be food sales on premises and how will the Museum handle food permitting regulations and trash disposal. (Wisdom Universe will pursue the necessary state and local licensing and permits, again it depends on the decision of the outcome of the CUP).

Jeff Heck asked if a site plan is available to show the location of existing structures on the property and showing the required setbacks from the property line. Also signage for the museum as well any directional signs to get to the facility. (The existing building will have to be remodeled. A surveyor will perform a survey to provide drawing showing the building setbacks and bring any structure into compliance. As for signage, something similar to what exists in the Woodlands).

Carla McCauley asked about special events that will be held at the facility including holidays, and would a schedule of events be publicized. (There will be a garden space with multipurpose use in the space between the museum and the parking area. There will be educational special events for various cultural celebrations. There will also be instruction in Spanish scheduled in the evenings).

Jeff Heck noted that the biggest concern seems to be having a commercial activity in a District zoned as residential.

Mayor Bennett then moved to the next agenda item:

Agenda item #4 – Comments and questions from Council

Councilman Herrington expressed appreciation to Ms. Montserrat for the presentation, and asked where the existing facility is located and how many students are served. (Puebla, Mexico. The students attend all day as a private school and the facility is not open to the public.

Councilman Craven observed that all the issues presented will be considered by the Planning & Zoning Commission and the P & Z will develop a recommendation to Council per the zoning ordinance.

Councilman Warren thanked Ms. Montserrat and her group for the presentation and information provided which answered all his questions and concerns.

Councilman Blackstone asked if Wisdom Universe is open to relocating the proposed museum to the District zoned for commercial use. He also expressed concern about the impact a commercial development would have if approved in a District zoned for residential. (Property was acquired for residential, but hope to have multi-use facility).

Agenda item #5 – Conclude Public Hearing

With no other Council questions or comments forthcoming, Councilman Warren made the motion to conclude the hearing. Councilman Herrington provided the second and the hearing concluded at 7:37 PM

Respectfully submitted,

C. D. Woodrome, City Secretary

Approved by Council September 16th, 2021

Cathy Bennett, Mayor