STUDY SESSION

The study session commenced at 6:17 p.m.

1. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)

Ms. Trapp explained ADU’s and noted they can expand housing and allow for more affordable housing units. She noted they come in many different shapes and forms and the city is looking to develop a definition, to comply with the MN state building code, including internal, attached or detached.

Ms. Trapp added they will be allowed on only single-family lots, in R1, R2 or R3 zoning areas. An ADU that’s detached needs to be at least 6 feet away from the primary unit. ADU’s can also be in the side or back yard.

Mr. Walther explained about roof pitch and considerations to be reviewed for the ordinance. He stated at some point the commission will need to provide feedback to help in writing the rule.

Ms. Trapp discussed set back and height as well as parking. She stated the recommendation is to not have additional parking for an ADU as it is being treated as a single-family home. Prohibition of sale of the ADU is also recommended, and that the property all be treated as one. Prohibition on short-term rentals is city code and Ms. Trapp stated this is the time to make that clear within the ordinance.

Commissioner Beneke asked if basements are allowed, second stories on homes as ADUs and second stories on garages.

Ms. Trapp stated the second story is allowed depending on if it would be part of the dwelling or a separate dwelling unit. If separate then fire walls would be needed. She added this is fairly
limited depending on the slope. She stated it the ADU is to be completely separate from the primary unit, then a fire barrier would be needed.

Chair Kraft asked about the detached unit and the setbacks and how the 5-9 foot was arrived at. She asked about smaller back yards in St. Louis Park where it would be difficult to build these units.

Mr. Trapp stated earlier 5 feet was discussed, but added it might vary from district to district and also that it will be on a lot by lot basis also. Mr. Walther added today you can build a detached garage in a side yard, but it needs to meet the setbacks required within the districts. If the detached unit is in the backyard, it can then be in the back yard.

Commissioner Beneke asked about allowing parking in driveways. Mr. Walther stated the restrictions are only related to parking on the street, and if there is on-street parking available, then parking is allowed there.

Commissioner Dagane asked about the structure of an ADU. Mr. Walther stated if staying within a 15-foot height, materials just need to stay compatible, but do not have to be the same. If taller at 24-foot pitch, then at least one of the house materials must be incorporated into the detached ADU.

Commissioner Erwin asked about owner occupied ADUs. She stated she would not be in favor of non-owner occupied ADUs. She said she would be concerned that people would increase maximum uses.

Ms. Trapp stated if a rental license that is managed through the city, there will be less concern about this because the city would be tracking. Mr. Walther stated if there is concern about using ADUs for short term rental, then the code will be clarified and enforcement will become important.

Commissioner Eckholm stated the way rental laws will be applied here will help with any potential abuses. He added it won’t work to make it owner occupied unless the ADU can be sold separately, and then there would be more flexibility. He added if the goal is more housing, it may be a difficult way to get there.

Chair Kraft stated she likes the way the ordinance is written now, with the owner not needed to be on site. She stated rental agreements work on other properties and this can work for folk’s flexibility and incentive for people to add ADUs to their property.

Commissioner Dumalag added if this eliminates other barriers to housing, then she is for it.

Commissioner Erwin stated the solution to create more affordable housing is creating more multi-family apartments and increasing the affordable units within them. Her concerns with increasing rental properties within single-family areas, is pricing out younger families to purchase single-family homes.

Commissioner Beneke added home in St. Louis Park are already becoming more expensive and he also is concerned about pricing out folks to purchase single-family homes.
Commissioner Eckholm stated he is worried about giant, corporations coming in and buying multiple houses and renting them out within owned property areas.

Mr. Walther stated regarding affordability, if someone is going to build a stand-alone ADU, the costs involved are the same as building a house, so this is not that affordable. However, he added, folks have said the cost of caring for a family member on a homeowner property can be less expensive than a nursing home.

Mr. Walther stated he will propose to maintain the ordinance as it is, and not requiring owner-occupied property. He added if the planning commission wants to change it back at the public meeting that can happen at that time. He added the council is wanting to create more housing, so allowing this to be all rental vs. owner occupied may appeal to the council, so he suggested keeping it not be all owner occupied.

Commissioner Beneke stated he is comfortable with how it is currently and asked also for some varied language if the commission decides to go with owner-occupied instead.
Mr. Walther stated staff will provide alternative language related to owner-occupied options.

Commissioner Eckholm added he would not want to include ADUs to be sold separately from the primary home. Mr. Walther agreed.

Commissioner Erwin asked how many commissioners are needed to pass the ordinance. Mr. Walther stated a majority of 4 commissioners would be needed.

Commissioner Eckholm asked how a home occupation affects the ordinance. Mr. Walther stated it would not prevent someone from residing in the ADU from having a home occupation. He stated this would refer to a home-based business in the ADU.

Commissioner Erwin asked if property taxes would increase if an ADU is included on a property. Mr. Walther stated he will ask the city accessor about this. Ms. Trapp stated it would be an improvement to the property, so there would be value changes. She stated she can also follow up on that question.

The commissioners noted they did not have any issues with the roof pitch guidance.

The public hearing for this issue will be at the September 2nd planning commission meeting.

2. Historic Walker Lake mixed-use zoning district

Laurie Chamberlain, HGKI, gave an update on the district and an overview of the area design guidelines. She explained the area has retail and slight industrial uses. Input from residents, businesses owners in the area, as well as the planning commission and city council was used for the guidance.

Chair Kraft asked about the allowable uses and additional uses. She asked how many non-conforming uses will be allowed in the district.
Ms. Monson stated auto-repair stations will be a non-conforming use, as long as they continue to operate, they will be allowed. She noted Ready Rents is also non-conforming. She added all C2 uses are now all allowed also and will be non-conforming.

Additionally, some set-backs may be non-conforming also as they relate to the high school being so close.

Mr. Walther stated there will still be liquor license restrictions at 1000 feet restriction from the high school.

Ms. Chamberlain noted some of the elements of what can be done to properties in the district. She noted one main feature of the design should follow the historic examples, however this doesn’t mean they need to have a replicated historic look. She stated innovation is encouraged in the architectural details. Other elements include canopies and signage, which can help businesses distinguish themselves within the district and encourage interaction at the pedestrian level. She also noted open spaces and adaptable spaces that can be utilized for sitting and/or other uses to activate sites such as the use of food trucks or activities/events.

Additionally, raised planters and street levels come together to convey the feeling of the Historic Walker Lake district.

Commissioner Beneke asked about landscaping and if this is done by the businesses or by the city. Ms. Monson stated all landscaping will be done by the individual property or business owners. If the city did this, there would need to be a special service district with a contract over 10 years. She continued within this district there are smaller businesses, so there was no interest by the businesses to pay for a special service district.

Mr. Walther added the city is doing some improvements within the district such as sidewalks and seating, but there are things being suggested over and above this. In the special service district, the items over and above would be paid for by the merchants.

Commissioner Ekholm stated the images shown convey the district very well.

Chair Kraft added she liked the mix of showing the actual district as well as areas around the country, along with the text.

Commissioner Dumalag added the images are great that were shown. She stated license numbers should be blackened out as well as campaign signage that is shown.

Mr. Walther stated the commissioners can email him with any further questions about the presentation on the district.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 p.m.