

Meeting Notes
Co-op Housing Public Meeting
October 16, 2008

Attendees: Gabriel Heck, Jeff Bessmer, Susan Hollingsworth, David Sparer, Mingwei Huang, Alder Julia Kerr, Amy Rountree, Matt Tucker, Rick Roll

Matt Tucker defined co-ops and how they are currently regulated.

David Sparer said that he is talking about “co-operatives” as corporations.

The group discussed where co-ops are currently allowed.

David Sparer referred to proposed zoning text he drafted that would allow co-ops in more zoning districts. He wants existing multi-flat buildings to be allowed to be co-ops, while not changing the occupancy of the building.

Alder Julia Kerr asked how David Sparer’s proposal affects the R-4A zoning district.

Matt Tucker said that units in the R4-A have a certificate of non-conformancy, but they lose it if they are changed.

Amy Rountree asked how MCC differs from fraternities and sororities.

David Sparer said MCC is a corporation in which all residents are part of the co-op.

Alder Julia Kerr and Amy Rountree asked about the status of the Badger Photo Co-op. They said it appears to be a rooming house. It was noted that residents must buy shares to live there.

Jeff Bessmer said Summit Co-op is regulated by Chapter 185. The owners do all the household work and manage the property.

Alder Julia Kerr said that under David Sparer’s proposal it seems that a co-op could locate anywhere. She asked what assurances neighbors would have that houses in the area wouldn’t be changed into co-ops. The conditional use permit process is a check on making sure that co-ops are properly located.

David Sparer asked why a co-op shouldn’t be put in a residential building if the number of occupants won’t change.

Matt Tucker said that the building code and the zoning code have different occupancy standards.

Alder Julia Kerr asked if co-ops could be allowed as conditional uses in R-1 and R-2 districts.

Matt Tucker said there might be some pitfalls with that approach. The City tends to approve all conditional uses with some conditions of approval.

Alder Julia Kerr said the conditional use permit process isn't exacting in Madison. By right approvals in the R-3 –R-6 districts would result in less review of parking and other considerations.

David Sparer said that under his proposal, a conditional use permit would be required in situations where a co-op wishes to exceed the occupancy of the existing building.

Alder Julia Kerr asked about which base occupancy number would be used for a proposed co-op if the existing building were over occupied. Matt Tucker said the legal occupancy limit would be used.

Gabriel Heck said that almost all of their co-ops are grandfathered because they exceed the family definition limit for unrelated persons.

Amy Rountree said the conditional use permit process is very difficult due to neighborhood resistance.

David Sparer said that co-ops are a very effective way of providing affordable housing.

Alder Julia Kerr said that the major issue with her is the potential intensification of R4A districts. The R4A district is intended to protect single-family housing.

David Sparer said he doesn't see how his proposal would have any impact on R4A areas because co-ops would not increase the number of occupants over what is now allowed.

Matt Tucker said the allowed number of unrelated occupants in the R4A district is less than in other districts.

Alder Julia Kerr said the amount of over occupancy is a big problem in her district and R4A is meant to prevent this.

Gabriel Heck said that they are interested in reunifying chopped up houses into co-ops. He said co-op residents tend to be very similar to the neighborhood residents. He said co-ops need at least eight residents to work well.

Alder Julia Kerr said MCC should give thought to how neighborhoods and their alders can be assured that the R4A areas will be protected.

David Sparer asked Alder Julia Kerr if her concern is illegal over occupancy. She said yes. David said it is an enforcement issue rather than a co-op issue.

Matt Tucker said enforcement is now complaint driven. There may be other ways to approach the problem such as self-reporting.

Alder Julia Kerr asked how the new zoning code would deal with R4A.

Amy Rountree said she wants to see creative ways to add more people to each dwelling unit. She said co-ops might actually reduce the number of occupants in buildings.

Alder Julia Kerr said she is concerned about long-term over occupancy issues.

Gabriel said there already is a problem.

Amy Rountree said that mapping the districts might help solve the problem.

Alder Julia Kerr said she could potentially support allowing co-ops as a conditional use in the new version of the R-4 and R-4A districts.

Matt Tucker said limited uses and performance standards are possible solutions.

Susan Hollingsworth said the family definition restricts co-ops. The family definition for the R-3 and R-4 districts could be changed provided there were restrictions relative to co-ops.

David Sparer said smaller co-ops aren't viable for several of reasons.

Amy Rountree asked Matt Tucker to discuss the family definition.

Alder Julia Kerr said preservation of her district and similar areas is healthy for economic development, schools, and more.

Matt Tucker described the R-3 down zoning process that made all apartments in the down zoned areas nonconforming.

Amy Rountree wants to see zoning language that lets co-ops happen.

Amy Rountree asked how the economics of deferred maintenance for existing older buildings work.

Jeff Bessmer said it seems that the primary issue with co-ops is how they relate to the R4A zoning district.

Matt Tucker said there are other issues such as parking. He said over occupancy could be handled in a creative way such as self-reporting.