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Grace Garden parking lot changes denied

By Katherine R. Dougan

Clinton’s Board of Aldermen denied an appeal filed by Grace Garden Event Center developer Dr. Crystal Hill at the Board’s March 3 meeting. Hill’s plat for the Grace Garden Event Center at 1240 Cynthia Road was approved on November 5, 2019; however, she submitted changes to her parking lot plans on January 5, 2020, which were denied by Roy Edwards, the Director of Community Development.

The Planning and Zoning Board and the Board of Aldermen approved Hill’s plat to have a hard surface or concrete parking lot, sidewalks and driveway. However, Hill proposed January 5 to change the bulk of her planned hard surface parking lot to crushed gravel or limestone. City ordinance 603.01 requires the parking lot, driveway and sidewalks to be an all-weather surface, asphalt or regular concrete, which is the reason the proposed change was denied by Edwards.

Hill’s proposed modifications to the originally approved plan called for the ADA handicap-accessible parking spaces and sidewalk be hard surface, while the rest of the parking lot, 89 total spaces, would be crushed gravel or asphalt.

Hill’s appeal questioned Edwards’ interpretation of the ordinance; however, the ordinance is clear in the requirements for hard surface parking.

“Help me understand,” Ward 6 Alderman Mike Cashion said to Hill. “My understanding is that you have appealed a ruling that Roy has already made. Roy already said limestone has not been approved. When it went through review, it was changed to hard surface. Now we are making an appeal on that.”

“Given the language of the ordinance that you read, what is the basis for the appeal? The ordinance is very clear about what the composition of the parking lot has to be. The appeal is that he [Roy] misinterpreted the language of the ordinance, and in this case I’m not seeing that. What am I missing that provides [for] the ap-

peal, when the language of the parking lot is clear?” Cashion asked.

“The request we are making is for limestone for the parking lot, but handicap and sidewalks would still be hard surface,” Hill said. She mentioned other event centers in Madison and Pearl that have gravel or limestone parking, with hard surface for handicap parking and sidewalks. She contends that the ordinance was unclear. Additionally, Hill said several businesses in Clinton have gravel parking lots.

“If the Board has acted on this [Roy Edwards confirmed the board had already acted on it], I don’t see that there’s an appeal, since the Board has already acted,” Ward 1 Alderman David Ellis said.

City Attorney William Purdie said he had already discussed the appeal with Edwards, and said, “A more proper motion would be a motion for reconsideration of the previous action.”

“They can come back and resubmit and ask for something different from paved. They can come back after the site plan is approved with minor or even significant changes,” Edwards said.

“It’s really too late for a motion for reconsideration. My concern about this, too, is that you were aware of what had been approved by the Board previously,” Alderwoman-at-Large Ricki Garrett said. “My other concern...this is a venue we are told will hold between two hundred and two hundred and fifty people; and, even with what we approved previously, that was only eighty-nine paved parking spaces, which in my opinion is not enough to hold two hundred to two hundred fifty people.”

The plat was approved on November 5, 2019. The subsequent plat with charges was submitted on January 7, 2020. Cashion cited a letter received with the appeal from Hill that stated the cost for a paved parking lot would put the project over budget, which was the reason for the appeal.

“We can’t use cost as a consideration for this,” Cashion said.

The Board voted 7-0 to deny the motion.

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