

Planning Commission Meeting for New Castle City took place on January 25, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. in the City of New Castle's Town Hall.

Members Present: David Bird, Chair
Bill Simpson, Co-Chair
Joe DiAngelo
Dan Knox
Dorsey Fiske
Florence Smith
Vera Worthy

Member Absent: Dr. Jack Norsworthy

Staff Present: Marian Hull, URS, City Planner

City Personnel: Mayor John F. Klingmeyer

Mr. Bird called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. Roll call was taken.

Approval of Minutes – A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the 11/23/09 meeting as amended. The minutes were adopted by unanimous vote.

Status of State Transportation Plans for New Castle – *(The Dept. of Transportation was not contacted asking them to appear this evening. Mr. Bird acknowledged this was an oversight on his part and that he will attempt to get them and a representative from WILMAPCO on the agenda in March.)* Mr. Bird distributed a package of transportation-related information/correspondence for review by Commission members. Mr. Bird will follow up with State officials to inform them what is discussed this evening.

A WILMAPCO press release was discussed indicating they are soliciting comments for the FY 2011-2014 Transportation Improvement Program. Projects and funding for those projects that affect the City of New Castle were reviewed. Those projects include four (4) along Route 9 intersecting with other City roads and one (1) affecting Washington Street. *(The draft funding spreadsheet was reviewed and discussed by Board members.)*

Mr. Bird noted that within our Comprehensive Plan there is a transportation element and DelDOT's presentation to this body indicated they wanted our recommendation to go forward with those plans that were recommended to City Council. There appears to be a discrepancy in the information that was distributed this evening. *(Brief discussion followed.)*

Budget Review – A budget review was provided to all Commission members. Professional development and training represents the APA subscriptions for Commission members and trainings that UD offers for Planning Commission members in Dover. Other topics discussed included expenditures associated with Ms. Hull's work on the Comprehensive Plan update and general expenses (expenses for reviewing items that come before the Commission, reviewing plans that fall under our consultant, URS). *(Mr. Bird explained the process the City uses for the budget.)* Mr. Simpson requested an accounting from the City showing what has been reimbursed and charged to the Planning Commission budget. This information has been requested previously. Mr. Bird indicated he would speak to the City Administrator and convey this request. Mayor Klingmeyer agreed and supports the Planning Commission's desire to have this information. *(Discussion followed.)*

Report on Planning Project to Implement Comprehensive Plan – Mr. Bird reported that the Planning Commission met jointly with City Council earlier this month and that it was a productive meeting. Ms. Hull informed that since that meeting it has been confirmed that a public meeting will be held at the middle school on 3/16/10 at 7 p.m. Ms. (Cathie) Thomas will publish a notice in an upcoming newsletter announcing this meeting. URS will write an article for the newsletter to accompany the notice.

Technical work – Ms. Hull does not want to focus on writing language for zoning until concepts have been viewed by the public on 3/16/10. We already know some of the things we want to do such as developing an environmental protection overlay district that we will expose to the public to get their reaction. This month she will work on evaluation of uses in the general/commercial district and bring that information back to this body at the February meeting with a more modern and more typical highway/commercial list of uses for that zoning district. The City Council will be kept informed of our progress as well. Ms. Hull will work with Mr. (Roger) Akin, City Solicitor, concerning regulation of churches in the City and see how other jurisdictions have handled the subject. *(Ms. Hull distributed an article to all Commission members from the New York Times concerning the potential legal challenges concerning churches in various zoning districts.)*

Recommendations on how to address this issue will be presented at the February meeting along with a draft of an environmental protection overlay district and a draft of the zoning amendment process. Also at the February meeting we will focus on materials that will be presented to the community at the public meeting. It is important to get as many members of the community to attend the public meeting as possible to offer their suggestions, comments and concerns. Planning Commission members are asked to be available at the public meeting to address questions from the public as needed.

In light of the high volume of topics to be discussed at the February meeting, Mr. Bird suggested having DeIDOT officials come to the March meeting and he can speak to the person in the interim and keep all Commission members abreast on his conversations with that party. Commission members were in agreement.

Ms. Hull said we should have direction from the community by the March meeting. If we do not have a clear idea of the public's opinion at that time we may need to have another workshop before we start drafting language.

Planning Commission Member Comments

Mr. DiAngelo asked if we are trying to establish what type of zoning that churches will be permitted in and if those that currently exist would be grandfathered but new churches would fall under the new zone. Ms. Hull confirmed that is what this body will be doing. *(Discussion about non-confirming uses being grandfathered followed.)* Mr. Bird noted an article in a recent APA publication talking about this subject and associated legal challenges that have come up. He will make copies available to all members at the next meeting. *(Lengthy discussion followed.)*

Mr. DiAngelo raised the problem of flooding issues along Route 9 and in the City. Traffic concerns were then discussed. Mayor Klingmeyer reported that the City has applied for stimulus funds that he hopes will help with some of these issues.

Mayor Klingmeyer stated that he would like the Planning Commission to lobby for more planning in the City. This body's work is very important and the City should allot more funding to this Commission. We have to look at long-term benefits to the City that will need to be supported with proper planning.

Mr. Simpson said he would like to see a study prepared for the areas to be developed showing the different value level of properties sold for a particular area/development to help ensure the area supports the value of homes to be built. *(Discussion followed.)*

Traffic congestion in the City was then discussed. Much of the problem is with commuters between Wilmington and the Middletown-Townsend-Odessa (MOT) area. Mr. Simpson proposed starting a rail service utilizing existing rail lines running from Wilmington through New Castle to Middletown. A supporter and a funding source are crucial for such a project. Mayor Klingmeyer noted that some of the stimulus monies will be available for public transportation issues and that WILMAPCO is very supportive of public transportation.

A motion was proposed by Mr. Simpson to draft a letter to WILMAPCO and copy DART suggesting that a study be done on the possibility of developing a rail line utilizing existing rail lines that would run from Wilmington to the Middletown area and even those that run through New Castle to alleviate the traffic situation that exists currently between Wilmington and the MOT area similar to that done by SEPTA and the New Jersey Department of Transportation. Ms. Smith suggested copying both of Delaware's U.S. Senators. It was also suggested that the News-Journal be copied. Mr. Simpson welcomed the amendment to his motion. Ms. Smith seconded the motion as amended. *(Additional discussion followed.)* Mr. Simpson will draft the letter for review by Commission members. **The motion was approved by unanimous vote.**

Next Meeting – The next meeting is scheduled for 2/22/10 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment – **A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and approved by unanimous vote. The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Turner
Stenographer