

**New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes
October 26, 2015 -- 6:30 p.m.
City of New Castle Town Hall**

Members Present: Michael Quaranta, Chair
David Baldini, Vice Chair
David Bird
Joseph DiAngelo
Josephine Moore
Gail Seitz
Florence Smith

Members Absent: Jonathan Justice
Vera Worthy

Also present: Jeff Bergstrom, City Inspector
Debbie Pfeil, AECOM, City Planner
Deborah Turner, Stenographer

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. Roll call followed.

Minutes – A motion was made and seconded to approve the 9/28/15 minutes. Motion approved.

Parking Committee Report/Parking Study – Debbie Pfeil, City Planner, provided an update on all of the committee's work. The committee is comprised of volunteers. The Planning Commission formed the Parking Subcommittee to address parking issues and needs as stated in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. The goals of the committee were reviewed. Mr. Quaranta said one of the concerns this body has heard from the subcommittee and the public is whether there is enough parking in the City and conveniently located parking in the City. There are residents and commercial interests. We need to determine how many parking spaces are available in and around the City.

The committee did an off- street parking survey three different Saturdays in July and August 2014. The survey was performed again in the summer of 2015. A parking usage summary by location was distributed and discussed. the summary showed average and peak usage for the streets involved in the survey.

Mr. Baldini said the clarity of the report and amount of work done has satisfied many of his concerns. We now have a set of facts we can have discussions around. Dr. Jo Viola, Chairperson of the Parking Subcommittee, said all of the subcommittee's work has been documented and can be revisited at any time going forward, regardless of what City Council does.

(Tonight's presentation will be available on the City's website after the meeting.)

Downtown Gateway (DG) District Discussion/Considerations for the Future --

Ryan Mawhinney, AECOM Senior Planner presented. The 2008 Comprehensive Plan (Plan) identified two areas in the Downtown Gateway District (DG). During those processes it was determined there is a need to revise or review the Planning Commission's intent of the DG zoning code. It does not mesh with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Mawhinney gave an overview of efforts that led to the creation of the DG zoning district. Two workshops were conducted. Items discussed during those workshops included multi-family uses, density, parking structures, floodplain and remaining vacant land.

The goal of the 7th and South Street Redevelopment Area is to have a new residential neighborhood extending/connecting the historic district. Strategies included new, primarily residential extension of the downtown area with a mix of residential, retail and office uses. Some parcels would be considered as a mix of residential only with apartments, condominiums and single-family homes.

The second area is the Ferry Cut-Off Redevelopment Area. The goal is to have a new pedestrian-oriented neighborhood commercial district providing primarily local goods and services. Strategies are to redesign portions of Route 9 and the Ferry Cut-off as a pedestrian-oriented commercial district and invest in streetscape and gateway improvements for the area. This area identifies an economic component recognizing the City's historic downtown and the increase in tourism. The redesign of this area offers the possibility of creating a neighborhood commercial district.

Land Use Recommendations – 7th and South Street is proposed mixed-use development; the Ferry Cut-Off is mixed use with part commercial involving retail, office, and residential.

Workshops – 7th Street – participants indicated a preference for an extension of the downtown area with a mix of residential, retail and office uses. There was strong support for residential only with apartments, condominiums and single-family homes. There was some support for townhouses and row homes. Section 230-21.1(B), Permitted Uses, shows multi-family dwellings as a permitted use. Single-family and two-family homes are shown as special exception. Parking garage or structure is also special exception. Multi-family use is shown as a special exception in Section 230-21.1(C)(e), Special Exception. The City Solicitor has determined that multi-family use is a permitted use.

Density and development standards were discussed. Section 230-21.1(F), Density and Development Standards, shows no density or building footprint for multi-family dwelling. Ms. Pfeil informed that until an application goes through the zoning code process to match up to the Plan, it is only as good as it is written. The concern is there is no density for multi-family dwelling; high density is considered 12 units per acre. Unlimited development could occur, which is not meeting the intent of the DG. There should be higher density in the floodplain and some people have expressed an interest in multi-family dwelling without the economic or mixed-use components for part of the area. More discussion is needed while looking at development trends.

Mr. Mawhinney reviewed Section 230-21.1.C.3.g.1. Parking Garages and Structures, noting they are permitted uses by special exception. Parking structures along West 7th Street are on the street level with the exception of building along 7th Street. At the Triangle at St. Peters the parking structure proposed is along street frontages with screening of architectural details. There was concern whether this section meets the intent of the DG. The City Solicitor was consulted and advised that parking structures are incidental to the principal use and do not require special exception review.

Ms. Pfeil believes based on the calculations presently being used for mixed use in the DG zoning area, mixed use could be penalized for lesser density and require more architectural features. That was not the intent of the Code. We want more incentives for mixed use.

A FEMA map of the DG area shows a majority to be within the FEMA 100-year floodplain and must comply with the City's Floodplain Regulations.

Mr. Mawhinney estimates there is approximately 20 acres of developable land left in the DG district, not including the Triangle at St. Peter's and 7th and West 7th Street.

Ms. Pfeil and Mr. Quaranta will meet with Administrator Barthel this week to discuss the topics presented tonight to move forward next year. She hopes to return to the next Planning Commission meeting with recommendations. We have identified items of concern in the current zoning code and now we need to get some input from developers and staff and return with recommendations. We will not need to revisit the Plan. A full study has been done and will not be redone. An ordinance may be the only thing needed. Mr. Quaranta asked commissioners to give him their input prior to the aforementioned meeting. He would like to narrow down commissioners' concerns to 2-3 specific sentences. The Planning Commission has always understood 'districts' to be a district, not zoned for one thing or the other. From an economic standpoint, mixed use zoning is dependent on the other components of the mixed use. *(Discussion followed.)*

Buttonwood Update – Mr. Quaranta said that an application for rezoning was approved. A piece of that application was not in this body's purview and no action was taken. The requested use did not match the existing zoning. The property is zoned commercial and no interest by commercial entities has taken place for some time. Parcel sizes may be the issue. The Planning Commission discussed having a public meeting to discuss possible rezoning to Residential. We would like to get the input of residents and property owners in Buttonwood. If there is a pressing need to rezone the area it could be addressed in the next Plan that is due in 2019. By waiting for a Plan update process the City would save major expenses involved with rezoning.

Commissioner's Comments

Mr. Bird – If there is a transportation component connected to DG zoning it should be kept in mind. He spoke about 'roundabouts', which are different from traffic circles. They are very effective with slowing traffic. They also have an environmental benefit by keeping traffic moving rather than idling at stop lights.

Ms. Seitz – Talked about the role WILMAPCO plays with planning. It is our regional transportation organization and covers New Castle County and Cecil County, Maryland. Their regional long-range planning includes their Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that includes some City projects. The Unified Planning Work Program is providing funding to the Route 9 corridor.

Mr. DiAngelo -- Mr. D'Angelo asked how many parking spaces are located at Bellanca. Chris Castagno (Trustees) said there are 112 parking spaces and it is a lighted parking lot.

Comments from the Public

Mayor Reese – Suggested that all nine commissioners be uniform in support for the Plan being presented to City Council.

Glenn Rill, City resident, pointed out a few things about the parking survey. Parking Use in the Historic District – he said it encompassed only a few blocks and not the entire district. The Strand is not included in the count. He did some counts personally and claimed that in the town center there were no parking spaces. There were thirty (30) on The Strand between Delaware and Harmony Streets. Harmony Street is not counted, nor is anything beyond Harmony Street. It is less than one block from the New Castle Historic Society. He detailed other areas included in his study. He questioned why the survey includes 5th and 6th Streets if residential areas are not being included. He talked about the 5-minute walking map noting the center is on Delaware Street and The Strand, but if the court house is used and you go out 5 minutes that includes a lot of parking. He believes remote lots with shuttle buses will be needed in order for the national park to be successful. He suggested discussing this with the Trustees of the New Castle Common (Trustees) to find a parcel that can be used for parking.

Ms. Seitz (Parking Subcommittee member) clarified the data was gathered from Delaware Street at 6th Street to the Wharf and some of the side streets (East 2nd, Market) used by visitors. They did not intend on counting all residential streets.

Terry Gormley of the *New Castle Weekly* asked if any thought has been given to meters. Ms. Pfeil said data taken from the initial survey indicated that merchants frowned upon meters and time limits. In addition, there is a cost to maintain the meters. Ms. Gormley said some towns have given tokens to businesses for taxes they paid and gave to customers. Revenue from the meters would help to defray costs. Ms. Pfeil said the next Plan update will reflect the national park and other issues that were not present when the last update was performed.

The Planning Commission's next meeting is 11/23/15. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.