

**New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes
March 28, 2016 -- 6:30 p.m.
City of New Castle Town Hall**

Members Present: Michael Quaranta, Chair
David Bird
Joseph DiAngelo
Jonathan Justice
Gail Seitz
Florence Smith*
Vera Worthy

Members Absent: David Baldini, Vice Chair
Josephine Moore

Also present: Chris Rogers, City Planner (AECOM)
Jeff Bergstrom, City Building Inspector

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

*Joined the meeting at 7:36 p.m.

Minutes – A motion was made and seconded to approve the 2/22/16 minutes as amended. Motion approved.

Minor Subdivision Review (one parcel into two parcels) – 423 West Seventh Street: Parcel 21-014.00-555; Claire Holdings, LLC – Mr. Rogers stated the purpose of the subdivision is to subdivide an existing lot into two (2) parcels. No new development is being proposed. The applicants are seeking to subdivide off a parcel around an existing structure and keep the front part of the parcel along West Seventh Street as an empty parcel. The subdivision meets the definition of a minor subdivision per City Code. Once recommended by the Planning Commission, City Council can consider via a resolution rather than an ordinance. The subdivision is situated in the DG District. The resulting lots are consistent with the Downtown Gateway (DG) Zone. Mr. Rogers questioned how the parent lot is being subdivided yet the boundary goes through an existing building. (Applicant) Anthony Gambacorta responded the existing building was once the Chrysler Service Dept. and the Buick Service Dept. was built later -- both owned by separate people. A property line was drawn between the buildings. There is no access between the two buildings.

Mr. Gambacorta confirmed that utilities serving the existing building do cross the newly created lot. There is a cross over access according to Mr. Gambacorta. Mr. Rogers added that parcels subject to all utilities, underground and overhead, ingress and egress, and drainage must be approved by the City Solicitor.

Mr. Rogers noted that parking spaces serving the existing building are all located on the lot serving that building. The number of spaces to serve the square footage is in compliance.

Ingress/egress will not be restricted to the 23 ft. wide panhandle. The frontage of the lot the building is on does not restrict access to the panhandle to the back lot. Easement language will be provided to the City Solicitor.

Mr. Rogers has no objections to the subdivision.

Mr. Bird asked why the parcel was being subdivided. The applicant wants to have the bigger lot in the front and the smaller lot in the back. They added they want the front parcel to be attached to the other parcels it will be a rectangle-shaped lot that could possibly be developed later.

Mr. Rogers noted the DG Zone allows the front parcel to be developed separately from the rear parcel in accordance with all City zoning requirements.

Mr. Justice made a motion to approve the plan as submitted. Ms. Seitz seconded. Roll call vote was unanimous in favor of the application.

Update on DG Zones and Downtown Development District (DDD) Plan (*Handouts provided.*) Diane Laird, Main Street Program, State of Delaware Dept. of Economic Development, spoke on trends in housing and commercial and professional use as it relates to downtown development; DDD application benefits, and progress in the state with other municipalities, and the Downtown Gateway (DG) program.

There is a shortage of rental units in the State, particularly 1-2 bedrooms (condos/apartments/houses), and New Castle County shows the greatest growth and need.

Ms. Laird further informed that the economic order of downtown development indicates that retail follows residential. Residential provides an audience for professional and retail services. That does not negate doing research and planning to determine the best path for the City. Identify who you want to attract and support those people, determine your needs then develop a plan. Recruit to keep the businesses that are already here and possibly expand them as well as bringing in new businesses based on 'shopping' trends of the population in the area.

To accommodate for appropriate growth in the DG and DDD you need to look at businesses and services that are good for both areas. Ms. Laird's recommendation is to support small businesses (barbers, small grocers, cafes) and not larger, upscale businesses. Professional services would bring in employees who may support area businesses and may utilize housing in the area. In the historic area she recommends a combination of destination and retail shops, upscale shops, boutiques, and restaurants.

Ms. Laird talked about developing a master plan to include transportation, design, façade and branding for communities. The DDD has provided funding to help communities with these items.

Mr. Quaranta inquired if there are public monies available that support the master plan and what should we be focused on to link surrounding neighborhoods. Ms. Laird conceded she is not versed in transportation funding. However, there are creative ways to fund façade improvements. She spoke about ideas used by the towns of Middletown and Smyrna. She also suggested that a river taxi would be a good addition to the community.

It was reported that the City applied for and received planting monies and is in the process of completing the DDD application that is due on 6/1/16. The program is very competitive.

Chris Rogers explained how applications are scored. There is a maximum of 50 pts. awarded based on need; a maximum of 30 pts. for the plan, and a max. of 20 pts. based on incentives offered to support the plan. Ms. Laird emphasized there should be a strong case made for the 'need' portion of the application.

She reminded that Main Street programs are not part of the City. She spoke of the benefits of the program and what it entails and encouraged submitting an application.

Mr. Rogers reported the DDD Task Force met last week to review the results of their online survey. It was heavily publicized and a lot of data has been received. There were about 300 respondents. Data provided will help to shape DDD goals and objectives. Information about merchants and residents/visitors can help future marketing and branding efforts at the City level. Staff will discuss local incentives that might work and take to City Council on 4/12/16.

Minutes – Upon motion made and seconded, the minutes of the 2/22/16 meeting were approved as distributed.

Commissioners Comments

Mr. Quaranta – (to Ms. Seitz) There has been some discussion about the Route 9 Corridor Program route that ends before it gets to the City limits. In discussion with the Council President and City Administrator, questions arose as to what we think WILMAPCO's plans are in the near term, what options might there be for a second phase, and to perhaps expand the route boundary.

Ms. Seitz specified that WILMAPCO has decided the boundary ends outside of Southbridge and outside the City of New Castle. Upon Mr. Quaranta's request, she will revisit the subject with WILMAPCO.

Mr. Quaranta -- City Council will discuss changes to the DG Zoning Code at its meeting on 4/6/16. That meeting will be considered the first reading of a resolution being considered to make an adjustment to the existing DG Zoning Code. Shortly after that reading a public notice will be issued informing that the Planning Commission will discuss and act on the resolution at its April meeting. Whatever decision is made will be returned to City Council. The proposed change will not have any impact on the three (3) plans that have already been approved.

The change would not disallow multi-family housing projects that are absent commercial/retail, but the developer would need to go to the Board of Adjustment to get an exception if that is what they want to do.

Mr. Justice asked Mr. Bergstrom the status of an updated zoning map. Mr. Bergstrom noted the map is available for future needs, but will not be hung on the wall.

Mr. Bird has noticed more people in town on weekends and evenings and contributes this to the two restaurants downtown (Nora Lee's and Jessop's Tavern). Further he acknowledged that the SPCA is now occupying the former Brosius-Eliason building. He wonders if there is a way we can get property owners that have commercial property available to meet with the Planning Commission to express some of their thoughts on the City, use of their property, what is preventing them from developing their property. It would be a useful discussion.

Public Comments – Terry Gormley of the *New Castle Weekly* asked if the City has expressed interest in working with the Planning Commission on the DDD application. Mr. Quaranta confirmed that the DDD Task Force includes City Administrator Bill Barthel, City Council President Linda Ratchford, and several residents representing businesses and organizations in and around the City.

Further, Ms. Gormley asked if the City procured the services of a branding specialist valued at a specified amount and gave their time pro bono, would that be considered 'monetary'. Ms. Laird recognizes there is a monetary value attached to professionals providing services, but she is unsure if it would be considered monetary. According to Mr. Rogers there is no direction from the State on this, but encouraged they be used. Professionals involved in projects would be promoted in local incentives as helping to implement the plan.

If the City is unable or not on board with Main Street, Ms. Gormley wondered if the Trustees of the New Castle would be considered a local entity. The Trustees' mission is to maintain certain properties for the benefit of the City's citizens and are very good about helping the town. Ms. Gormley made it clear she is not speaking for the Trustees, but wonders if they would see value in funding a part-time staff person for the Main Street Program. Ms. Laird stressed the importance in showing ongoing funding, partners or in-kind donations on the application in order to run a successful, sustainable program. Office space could also be included.

Comments from the Public

University of Delaware (UD) Masters Student Lauren Camp informed that she and a group of UD students have been assigned the task of investigating the parking situation in the City. They are in the process of conducting a survey/evaluation on parking and providing possible solutions. They are up to speed on what has taken place to date, including the 2013 survey and will stay after the meeting if anyone wants to talk with them.

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Mr. Quaranta explained that students will look at parking from the broadest terms possible. The proposed parking lot was not part of the parking study and will not be part of their review.

The Planning Commission's next meeting is 4/25/16. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned 8 p.m.

(Minutes transcribed from recording.)