

New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes
April 25, 2016 -- 6:30 p.m.
City of New Castle Town Hall

Members Present: Michael Quaranta, Chair
David Baldini, Vice Chair
Joseph DiAngelo
Jonathan Justice
Josephine Moore
Gail Seitz
Florence Smith
Vera Worthy

Member Absent: David Bird

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. Roll call followed.

Minutes – Upon motion made and seconded, the minutes of the 3/28/16 meeting were approved as distributed.

Discussion Regarding University of Delaware – Student Study of Downtown Parking Inventory – A group of students from the University of Delaware (UD) conducted a parking study in historic New Castle over the past several months. Data was collected on Sundays between noon and 4 p.m. Their presentation included data on existing parking places, public opinions from residents and business owners, recommendations and a volunteer manual for data collection.

Existing parking space data was provided using two measurements. The first calculation is based on the 18-foot standard Delaware Code parking space measurement. The second uses a 15-foot measurement that represents the average space used between cars in the survey area.

18 ft. – Total number of parking spaces = 804

15 ft. – Total number of parking spaces = 932

Their findings show there is more parking available when streets are unmarked.

Public opinion – Metered parking is considered a deterrent to potential visitors. There is interest in increasing parking availability, but businesses and visitors should not pay for it. Some downtown businesses would like to see increased parking for employees recognizing their proximity to the residential area.

Recommendations – The group made three recommendations. Option 1 – Support the parking lot proposed by the City that is behind the M&T Bank. It should be built as soon as possible with the maximum allowable spaces and proper signage directing to the lot, and increased signage to existing parking areas. Signage should reflect the historic nature of the City.

Option 2 – Business employees park in the new lot at the M&T Bank freeing up spaces on Delaware Street. If the problem continues build an additional lot at the corner of Chestnut Street and Wilmington Road (former recycling center).

Option 3 – Better communications between public officials and business owners when parking will be blocked because of events, etc.

The manual provides a framework and strategic planning template for future parking studies. It can be customized to fit the City's needs. The manual speaks to defining the survey area, engaging stakeholders, inventory existing parking (supply), accumulation count (demand), duration and turnover, and determining land use demand.

Ms. Moore likes that the existing parking inventory shows additional parking possibilities. She noted that some residents have off-street parking. Additionally, there are other parking areas aside from the Methodist Church (part of the study) that permit parking, namely, St. Peter's Church and the library among others.

The presentation concluded and Mr. Quaranta thanked the students for their work and presentation.

Discussion followed about the proposed parking locations submitted to City Council. Mr. Quaranta summarized there were funds available to do studies of certain locations. Former City Planner Debbie Pfeil suggested the monies available be used to review five locations for potential parking areas. Comments from the public were received and the view of the Planning Commission was to consider further study of 3 of those 5 locations. Our recommendations were forwarded to City Council who decided to pursue all five locations. Ms. Moore reminded that the M&T Bank parking lot location was one of the two not recommended to City Council. She has spoken before City Council in opposition to the M&T Bank parking lot citing safety concerns, including illicit activities in Battery Park. Mr. DiAngelo thinks the parking lot will create problems.

Minor Sub-Division – 322 East 14th Street – There is a legal piece of land that does not belong to the residential property. Want to make the lot comply with a number of provisions in the City Code and by taking out the added parcel it makes the lot result with the appropriate setbacks and all appropriate conditions needed for an original structure. It makes the lot comport to City zoning and/or City zoning requirements. Mr. B stated when the house was built it was built prior to the modern zoning code (1976). The footprint of the structure does not meet the minimum setback requirements and encroaches on the Trustees property.

Mr. Bergstrom reported there is a non-conforming piece of land (DeAscanis) that is encroaching on the Trustees of the New Castle Common (Trustees) property. The property is entirely inside the flood plain. A letter dated 4/21/16 from AECOM (Mr. Rogers) was distributed to Commissioners and summarized by Mr. Rogers. He confirmed the property meets all requirements except the side yard setback. Additionally, he has no problems with the sub-division.

Mr. Bergstrom indicated the engineer for the DeAscanis parcel is working with the Trustees. The Trustees will need to sign off before it goes before City Council.

Mr. Quaranta stated that under today's zoning code the changes that have been recommended and put in writing by Mr. Rogers suggest that these changes will make this lot conform to current zoning and other City Code requirements.

Mr. Quaranta added that all parties must agree to a transfer of property. Ms. Moore emphasized the need to clarify "if both parties agree."

Mr. Quaranta made a motion to approve the minor sub-division as submitted and clarify in transmitting this approval that the Planning Commission makes no representations to the agreement or disagreement between the affected parties. We are acting on the technicalities of making a residential lot work with current zoning. Mr. Baldini seconded the motion. Motion approved by unanimous vote.

Discussion Regarding Ordinance No. 507, an Ordinance to revise Section 230.21.1B of the Zoning Code of the City of New Castle to: (1) Make Stand Alone Multi-Family Dwelling Development Projects in the Downtown Gateway (DG) Zoning District Permissible Only with the Grant of a Special Exception from the Board of Adjustment; and (2) Require Planning Commission Review and Recommendation for all Special Exception Applications in the Downtown Gateway Zoning District. A copy of this Ordinance is available online at www.newcastlecity.delaware.gov, or in the City office at 220 Delaware. Street -

Mr. Quaranta reminded that City Council plans to take this resolution up and may make an amendment to the City zoning code. Commissioners are charged with looking at the language and give consideration to the issues.

In the DG zone the stated goal is mixed use development. Proponents want commercial/professional services/multi-family. With a prior application there were issues concerning parking if 'commercial' was added. The Planning Commission could approve the application, but the applicant would then need to go to the Board of Adjustment to seek an exception for parking purposes. We have seen two proposals since that application that were multi-family.

Mr. Quaranta further reminded it was stated in a previous meeting that residential precedes commercial. This resolution is designed to say if a project is only residential and not mixed use, which could get approved by the Planning Commission, but the property owner would need to go to the Board of Adjustment to seek a special exception to get approval for single use. Another step in the process is created.

After considerable discussion, **a motion was made by Mr. Baldini to approve draft Ordinance No. 507. The motion received a second and was approved. Messrs. DiAngelo and Justice abstained.**

Mr. Justice then made a motion that the Planning Commission indicate to City Council its recommendation that as City Council is considering adjusting the zoning

requirements, that projects with mixed uses not require that commercial uses be included in parts of the project that are not adjacent to or visible from the street. Ms. Seitz seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Public Comments – None.

Commissioners Comments

Ms. Seitz – There will be a Route 9 Corridor Program Master Plan meeting on 5/24/16, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Rose Hill Community Center. The City of New Castle is not included at this time due to funding. We would like the route to extend through the City. Ms. Seitz encouraged public comments stating that WILMAPCO does take such comments into consideration.

Ms. Moore – Revisited the ‘parking’ discussion. The Planning Commission recommended three potential locations to the City. The two that were not recommended were the M&T Bank lot and the lot behind the tennis courts between Third and Fourth Streets.

Mr. Baldini – Suggested developing a flow chart outlining the DG process for applicants.

Mr. Quaranta – He thinks there are a number of mechanical considerations within the zoning code that present a conflict. One of those issues is the length of time an approval remains valid. At this time approvals are evergreen. This is not in the City’s best interest. Mr. Quaranta said if a proposed project is submitted and approved, the developer then obtains the necessary building permits and the clock starts running. Other communities have limits. He urged support to protect the City’s long-term interests.

The Planning Commission’s next meeting is 5/23/16. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.