

New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes
August 28, 2017 -- 6:30 p.m.
City of New Castle Town Hall

Members Present: David Baldini, Chair
Brenda Antonio
Marco Boyce
Jonathan Justice, Vice Chair
Gail Seitz

Members Absent: Joseph DiAngelo
William Walters
Vera Worthy

Mr. Baldini called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Roll call followed. A quorum was declared.

Minutes – One correction was made to page 1. **A motion was made and seconded to approve the amended minutes of the 7/24/17 meeting. Motion was approved.**

2019 Comprehensive Plan (Plan) – Mr. Baldini informed that two planning firms are bidding on work associated with the Plan update. Selection should be done by the end of the month. Once a planning consultant is selected the process of getting a template and establishing a timeline can begin. Mr. Baldini asked commissioners to generate questions and concerns and submit to him. He will consolidate submissions. He believes this would be a good use of time. Mr. Boyce reiterated that modern Plans put emphasis on graphics and pictures and less text.

Mr. Baldini said other elements of the Plan process include public input, including concerns of neighborhoods. The City has about 8-15 neighborhoods. He added there may be a few streets that are not identified as neighborhoods and we want to capture as much input from the public as possible.

Outreach – Spot analysis of neighborhoods: opportunities, threats and concerns. Develop a common theme such as road conditions, pedestrian improvements, gateways, parking, and traffic.

There are a number of stakeholders that need to be involved in the process. These include City personnel, residents, realtors, and others. Mr. Boyce noted that DelDOT's involvement is critical. Additionally, Mr. Baldini said the Plan will be influenced by State and County Comprehensive Plans along with a number of agency documents. He informed that the planning consultant will guide the Planning Commission throughout the process.

Ms. Seitz noted the Planning Commission has the resources of two planners from WILMAPCO. She stressed the importance of using these resources wisely.

Commissioner's Comments

Mr. Justice – It would be helpful to have an updated zoning map and a map showing parcels and streets. He suggested having a supply of printed copies that can be shared with the public. Building Inspector Jeff Bergstrom will address the request.

Following discussion at last month's meeting about the definition of 'fringe' that appears in the current (2009) Comprehensive Plan, Mr. Justice researched the Plan. He found specific locations for parking improvements on Table 18—Transportation Physical Improvements. References to areas considered to be suitable for parking lots are shown on Map 4: Transportation Map.

Ms. Seitz – The City has received a grant from the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control for a resiliency study in regards to sea level rise and its impact on the community. She reported the Resilient Community Partnership had their first meeting. Some of the things discussed were the FEMA 100-year flood model and how the City's flooding concerns stack up against other models. The City's evacuation plan needs to be updated. A public workshop is planned for 9/7/17, 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the New Castle Elementary School. All City residents and stakeholders are invited to attend to learn about the project and provide comments. A brief overview presentation is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. and will be repeated at 6:15 p.m. According to Ms. Seitz the goal of the group is to analyze the City's vulnerability to flooding and develop a strategy going forward.

She is representing the Planning Commission on the task force. Other task force members include Drew Hayes of ForeSite Engineering, Tom Clayton and Dave Majewski of Good Will Fire Co., Police Chief Jamie Rogers, Janis Oppenheimer representing the New Castle Historical Society, City Engineer Dave Athey, City Building Inspector Jeff Bergstrom, and City Council President Linda Ratchford.

Public Comments

City Resident Suzanne Souder sent a letter dated 8/9/17 to the Planning Commission. The letter concerned parking lots in the City and the application process in the new City Ordinance 510. Mr. Baldini confirmed receiving the letter and provided copies to commissioners. There are things in the letter (ex.-creating a master plan for the City) that Mr. Baldini said will be addressed during the update process with the Plan.

(Ordinance 510 allows public parking lot uses by special exception in Residential Districts, the Downtown Gateway District, the Historic Residence District and the Historic Commercial District.)

Further, Mr. Baldini said any application would have to be considered within one of three documents -- the current Comprehensive Plan, City Zoning Code, and the new Ordinance 510 in order for the Planning Commission to recommend approval. If there are no issues the application would go to the Historic Area Commission, provided it is in the historic district, and anything new would need to be addressed by the Board of Adjustment.

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Ms. Souder asked how a decision could be made when no one has determined how much parking the City needs. Mr. Baldini said that all issues will be considered.

Mr. Justice noted there has been a lot discussion about parking lots in this body and the Parking Subcommittee. Speaking personally, he is reluctant when studies are done to determine the number of parking spaces. He believes they are strongly biased in favor of more parking spaces than are typically needed. The information the Planning Commission has available is from parking counts done by the Parking Subcommittee in 2014-2015. Those counts were done by volunteers and analyzed by WILMAPCO.

Mr. Boyce said that parking is not an exact science when it comes to unique situations like the City of New Castle. We cannot compare to other municipalities. He does not think that parking is the issue; rather it is the lack of walk ability. It is about the comfort of the pedestrian, visibility, and landscape. Mr. Boyce believes if the City focused on these things more then parking might be better.

Resident Glenn Rill asked if the City has discussed reparations to City residents whose property values are negatively impacted by the installation of a parking lot near their property. He referenced eminent domain where a standard practice is used to reimburse property owners for the proper value of their property when it is being taken. Mr. Rill has not received a response from City Council. Mr. Baldini has not heard any talk of reparations.

Ms. Souder asked if the City wants to build a parking lot on property it owns would they need to follow the same process as the public. Mr. Baldini confirmed they would need to follow the same process.

The Planning Commission's next meeting is 9/25/17. There being no further business, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Debbie Turner
Stenographer