

New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting

Minutes

April 23, 2018 -- 6:30 p.m.

City of New Castle Town Hall

Members Present: David Baldini, Chair
Peter Toner
Brenda Antonio
William Walters
Vera Worthy
Gail Seitz
Russ Smith

Members Absent: Jonathan Justice, Vice Chair
Marco Boyce

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

Minutes – A motion to approve the Minutes of the 3/26/18 Planning Commission Meeting was made, seconded and approved.

2019 Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Baldini received notes from Debbie Pfeil regarding the status with the University of Delaware students and the Members' assignments. Ms. Pfeil advised that having the students meet with the Commission may happen in May, and she hoped their work product will be available in approximately two weeks. That will give the Commission an opportunity to review their plan and give feedback.

WILMAPCO –

Ms. Seitz and Mr. Baldini attended a meeting in November 2017, and WILMAPCO's participation and workshare was discussed, as well as the issue of funding. Mr. Baldini advised that there was insufficient funding to accomplish some of the goals. WILMAPCO was asked to participate in the transportation section of the Public Plan using the information they already have and assist the Commission with that section. Ms. Seitz said there appeared to be some confusion regarding roles and responsibilities, and that a meeting she requested Heather Dunigan have with Debbie Pfeil to discuss Ms. Dunigan's role as a professional planner for the project did not occur. Mr. Baldini confirmed that the meeting did not occur, but noted it was his understanding that the transportation package was going to be done by WILMAPCO. Ms. Seitz was not certain that had ever been established. Mr. Baldini suggested the Commission obtain from WILMAPCO any raw data they have on such things as sidewalk inventory, traffic studies, etc., and assimilate that information into the Project. Mr. Baldini will reach out to WILMAPCO. Ms. Seitz suggested that she be part of the conversation as well.

Ms. Seitz also advised that City Council received a letter from Heather Dunigan requesting the City do some outreach to the community for a Bicycle Plan by the County, and Ms. Seitz asked if this could be included in the Commission's Outreach Plan.

Mr. Baldini noted that in the original conversations, WILMAPCO agreed to assist with writing. During discussion it was recommended that the transportation section be very clear and include not only topical issues such as parking, bicycle paths, and usage, but also quality of life and visitor experience. Mr. Baldini also noted the importance of reaching all neighborhoods and demographics, and that multiple methods of contact, such as media, print and face-to-face, should be utilized in order to give the Commission the best return on the communications and ensure everyone has a voice.

Mr. Toner suggested that the recommendations received from the University of Delaware students may be more technology-focused, such as using the internet, Facebook or online surveys, and questioned who was going to do that, how much it would cost and who would pay for it. He also noted that many residents may not be technology-literate. One of the first things that needs to be done is getting feedback from the community, and it was suggested that multiple public meetings be held to which the various neighborhoods would be invited. The importance of reaching all demographics was stressed again. It was also noted that although each neighborhood has specific issues, many issues, such as sidewalk conditions and traffic, span multiple neighborhoods. Mr. Baldini advised that he asked Ms. Pfeil for her budgetary estimates on the Outreach Program.

Ms. Seitz noted that although the University of Delaware study will offer the Commission a plan, it is still undetermined who will implement that plan because Outreach is not in Ms. Pfeil's scope. Ms. Antonio explained the process used in many corporations for employee feedback, and suggested the Commission could use a similar approach in communicating the Outreach Program. Mr. Smith asked if comments in the workplace were anonymous, and suggested some participants within the community might want to offer their comments anonymously.

Mr. Baldini advised that the City noted a number of issues that the Commission could work on and he asked that those assignments be passed on to the Commission. Ms. Seitz identified the current assignments as the SWOT Analysis, Last Plan, Organization and Event Interviews. Mr. Baldini noted that the City has all the information compiled by the Commission set out in a spreadsheet, and he will follow-up with them. Ms. Seitz also noted she wanted to see a timeline, and Mr. Baldini advised he has asked for that as well. There is some data that will be coming out in July.

Public Comments

Ms. Terry Gormley from The Weekly commented that since Dr. Justice recanted his students' work on the Parking Study, she wondered if the Commission was concerned that the work they are doing for the Outreach Program is valid. Mr. Baldini replied that when the work was done on the Parking Study, the students did their best, and from that perspective, he feels the work was good and legitimate. The fact that it was discounted at the end doesn't discount the work that was done. The inference was made that their work had no merit because the students were not professionals, but he felt the real point was that the work was done. He noted that these students have the same opportunity, and they are learning a skill set that can be put into a real world situation and that can be

reflected on their resumes. He anticipates that the study will give the Commission an insight into communications used and utilized by a younger demographic, and he doesn't see any reason to discount what they present. Ultimately, the plan they present will be reviewed by the Commission and a determination will be made as to how and what parts of the plan will be used. Mr. Toner noted that the poll the students took for the Parking Plan was deemed as not analytical, and Ms. Antonio added that if the Commission puts out an Outreach Plan survey for statistical validation a representative sampling must be ensured to avoid a later claim that the data is invalid for a lack of adequate sampling. It was suggested that each community select two or three representatives to act as influencers in order to start grass-root conversations going and then bring their neighborhoods' issues and comments to the Commission. Methods of compiling the data were discussed for group meetings, including presenting issues on whiteboards where attendees could indicate the issues that most concern them. It was suggested that best practices for holding community meetings should be investigated. Ms. Gormley asked if the University students' Plan could be reviewed by peer class of students, or another professor to validate the work.

Commissioners' Comments – None.

There being no further business, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Kathy Weirich
Stenographer