

New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting  
Minutes  
July 23, 2018 -- 6:30 p.m.  
City of New Castle Town Hall

Members Present: David Baldini, Chair  
Jonathan Justice, Vice Chair  
Brenda Antonio  
Gail Seitz  
Russ Smith  
Marco Boyce  
Peter Toner  
Vera Worthy

Members Absent: William Walters

Mr. Baldini called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum was declared.

**Minutes**

**A Motion to approve the Minutes of the June 25, 2018, Planning Commission Meeting as presented was made, seconded and approved.**

**2019 Comprehensive Plan**

Mr. Baldini asked Ms. Seitz to bring the Commissioners up-to-date on their meeting with WILMAPCO. She advised that Heather Dunigan sent her a sample of the Wilmington Survey and that she will look for samples of surveys from smaller communities to share with the Commission. Ms. Dunigan also volunteered to do a draft of the New Castle survey with questions that would be more specific to New Castle for review by the Commissioners. WILMAPCO will upload the final survey to Survey Monkey. The Planning Commission will publicize the survey to the community and WILMAPCO will summarize the results. After the results have been reviewed by the Planning Commission, community meetings will be held to drill down further into the neighborhoods' primary issues. Mr. Smith suggested that a hard copy of the survey be made available to the residents.

It was agreed that the best way to conduct neighborhood meetings was to make the survey results the basis for those meetings in order to have more structured meetings rather than open forums. Mr. Toner asked if there was any feedback available from the previous Comprehensive Plan Survey and community meetings. Ms. Seitz suggested that a hard copy of the survey be published in the Weekly, and Mr. Toner added that directions to the Monkey Survey website and/or information on how to obtain a hard copy of the survey be included in residents' Utility Bills. Ms. Antonio asked if a link could be posted on the City website, and Mr. Toner advised that Mr. Barthel had already agreed to that. Mr. Baldini had a concern that the survey results would include such a small sampling that it would not be representative of all the neighborhoods. He added that the data that is gathered should not only be of today's issues, but of the future vision of where the City will be in 10 years.

Mr. Smith suggested that the neighborhood meetings need to be carefully structured to target specific issues and avoid an open session. He added that perhaps some value-voting

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could be done. Mr. Baldini noted that he felt Mr. Smith understood what was needed and asked if he would put together a plan for structured meetings.

Ms. Antonio asked if there was a deadline for completion, and Mr. Baldini advised everything should be implemented by July 2019. Ms. Seitz suggested that the surveys should be sent out this summer and meetings held in the fall; however, time is an issue and the Commissioners still do not have a draft survey to review. Mr. Toner clarified that after the survey results are received the goal is to narrow the scope of the community meetings to 5-10 core issues. Mr. Baldini added that some neighborhoods share common issues, such as sidewalks, technology issues, and the bike path. A discussion of technology issues, cyber security, and obsolete technology in the next 10 years was held. During further discussions, it was agreed that conversations should be held with the Trustees for their input and support.

Ms. Antonio brought up the fact that the survey population may be small and the results are not necessarily a quantitative scientific study, but more qualitative and care should be taken during discussions at community meetings to ensure residents do not feel excluded from the survey. Ms. Seitz added that regardless of how the survey is presented to the residents, the results can only be based on the responses received. She also noted that many residents are only concerned about the current issues and not far-reaching issues. Ms. Antonio suggested that the survey should not be too long and that the length of the survey or the time needed to complete it could be added to the directions. She asked if there was a concern that people could take the survey multiple times and if there was a control environment with the online survey so an individual can only take the survey once. Mr. Boyce stated that the County uses Poll Everywhere, and that paid survey sites do have a restriction based on an individual's IP address. He added that a free version of the survey allows only a limited number of surveys in a question. Mr. Baldini suggested that the University of Delaware students' research be reviewed to see what they recommended and the costs involved. Ms. Antonio also asked if the survey would be anonymous. Ms. Seitz advised that there are some demographic questions at the end of the survey. Mr. Justice suggested that asking for the "nearest intersection" to the resident's home could be a way of identifying the neighborhood without intruding on anyone's privacy, and knowing that spatial information would also assist in giving weight to the responses. Mr. Smith noted that asking in which neighborhood the individual lives would help in identifying the issues in each area.

Mr. Baldini advised that he has some other small community surveys and will distribute those as well as the Wilmington survey to the Commissioners for their review. Mr. Smith expressed his concern for the timing of completing tasks, particularly since community meetings are targeted for the fall. Ms. Seitz suggested that more communications could be made via email in an effort to have an approved product before the next Commission Meeting. Mr. Baldini also noted that special meetings could be planned prior to the next Commission Meeting. A discussion was held of potential community meeting locations, including the Library downtown, Carrie Downie Elementary School for Washington Park, Shawtown and Dobbinsville, as well as locations for the other side of town in order to

ensure meeting locations are convenient to the neighborhood residents. Mr. Smith noted that the prior Comprehensive Plan did not include neighborhood meetings. After discussion, it was agreed that the number of neighborhood meetings and locations could be established after the survey results have been reviewed. Mr. Justice added that having the meetings in the various neighborhoods gives an excellent opportunity for the Commissioners to see the areas personally. Ms. Antonio suggested that additional help might be needed in order to make phone calls to lock in the meeting locations. Mr. Toner clarified that the Commission is waiting for the sampling of small town surveys to be received from Heather Dunigan, and asked if the Commission could agree that the optimum number of questions for the New Castle Survey be 20-25 questions. He asked if the Commission expected to have feedback from the survey prior to the neighborhood meetings. He also suggested that the survey be uploaded to Survey Monkey by August 15<sup>th</sup> and that community meetings be held in late September-October. After discussion, it was agreed that the Commission was doing its due diligence in communicating the survey to the residents and that the survey results were wholly dependent on the responses and residents identifying their neighborhoods. Mr. Baldini added that he is hopeful that residents will answer the questions honestly to get both positive and negative feedback to identify the critical issues that need to be addressed over the next 10 years.

Ms. Antonio suggested the survey should hit on all the main topics in the Comprehensive Plan and not include many open-ended questions. Mr. Baldini felt some of the key topics are: transportation, including car, truck and boat traffic; flooding; bike trails; quality of life; environmental issues; regular transportation issues; and the addition of more vehicle traffic to the City. He added that some of the sections will have more influence than others. Ms. Seitz noted that most of the questions were check-box and there were a few boxes where residents can add comments. Mr. Baldini summarized the pending tasks for the Commission: small town surveys to review; range of questions to establish; topics relative to the Plan topics; and exchange of ideas via email. He will review the presentations to see what the recommendations for the surveys to the control elements are to ensure there is only one IP address per response.

### **WILMAPCO**

Ms. Seitz noted that WILMAPCO will work on the Transportation section. Mr. Baldini added that their work will be a significant help to the Commission.

### **August 27<sup>th</sup> Commission Meeting**

Mr. Baldini noted that one of the things in process is a list of questions relative to what kind of materials are in town that Bill Barthel and Jeff Bergstrom are working on. As soon as the data is received, Mr. Baldini will distribute it to the Commissioners. He asked the Commissioners to think about the questions they should ask KCI at the August 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting to facilitate the discussions and ensure the Commission gets answers.

### **Visitor Experience**

Mr. Toner brought up Ms. Eliason's report. Mr. Smith noted that she did not have the resources or the time to do a strategic plan, and the information was more tactical. Mr. Toner criticized the report, noting that the gist of the report was "people want to bring their families here and they should be able to stay for dinner". Mr. Smith noted there were a few constructive points; however the plan did not solve the issue of knowing who our visitors are, what they do or what they want.

### **Funding**

Mr. Toner noted that the Commission is being tasked with certain projects, but he feels the Planning Commission is last when it comes to funding, and he questioned how serious the City is in planning the future when there is no funding forthcoming. He added that there is a cost associated with having the Comprehensive Plan Survey online and that funding should be requested from the Trust. Mr. Baldini noted that the financial crisis the Town faces will not change unless the methodology of addressing it changes. He added that a tax increase was not mentioned in the recent Budget discussions. Mr. Toner noted that besides applying for grants, the only way to increase income is to generate revenue, adding that he felt similar small towns with historic areas that draw visitors probably pay more in taxes than New Castle residents. Mr. Baldini noted that the \$30,000 budgeted for Planning was almost cut this year, and Ms. Seitz added that the \$30,000 was already earmarked for KCI. The Commissioners held a discussion of the lack of funding as a critical issue that is part of the strategies, tactics and goals of the Commission that needs to be addressed. It was suggested that Planning activities be staged out 2-3 years in advance in order for the City to accrue adequate funding. It was noted that it is within the Commission's scope to recommend adequate funding for Planning activities in the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Seitz added that the State recommended that as future activities are planned, sources of possible funding should be identified, which she said would include the City and the Trust. It was also noted that there is nothing precluding the Commission from identifying activities that have been accomplished with no funding.

### **Miscellaneous**

Mr. Smith asked what the Comprehensive Plan deadline is and was advised it was July, 2019. Mr. Justice added that the Plan needed to be presented to City Council 3 months prior.

Ms. Seitz clarified that the goal is to have data within the next week or so to review prior to the next Planning Commission Meeting on August 27<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Baldini will email all data received as well as the small-town surveys to the Commissioners this week. He requested the Commissioners notify him of any topics they feel should be included.

Mr. Boyce asked when WILMAPCO will have a draft of the Transportation analysis. Ms. Seitz advised they did not give a timeline.

Mr. Toner asked how much WILMAPCO costs per hour. Ms. Seitz advised they are a Regional Planning Organization and there is no cost. Mr. Boyce added they are an arm of

the Federal Government and each jurisdiction pays something, which sometimes is staff time. Mr. Toner asked what the Commission is getting for the \$30,000, and Ms. Seitz clarified the \$30,000 was being paid to KCI and not WILMAPCO. He asked for clarification of how much we have paid KCI so far, and Mr. Baldini advised they have been paid approximately \$3,500 to date. Ms. Seitz added they have not done much work to date. She also noted that KCI has crossed off Organize Task Spreadsheet, Assign Task Roles and Create Documents from the Comprehensive Plan, and she has not seen any of that information. Mr. Baldini noted these issues should be identified at the August 27<sup>th</sup> meeting as being outstanding.

Mr. Baldini asked for a status update on the maps from Jeff Bergstrom. Mr. Justice advised that meeting with Mr. Bergstrom is on his list of tasks and he will set up a meeting soon. Mr. Baldini asked that the maps provided to the Commission have overlays. Mr. Justice will ensure proper maps are provided.

There being no further business to discuss or Comments from the Commissioners, Mr. Baldini opened the meeting to Public Comment.

### **Public Comments**

#### **Rod Miller – 124 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street**

Mr. Miller asked about WILMAPCO, and if Ms. Seitz was the liaison. He advised that he contacted DelDot to get information on the traffic hub and also had some questions about a proposed by-pass on Rt. 9, and he was referred to WILMAPCO. He asked Ms. Seitz if she could update him on the Rt. 9 by-pass as the WILMAPCO liaison. Ms. Seitz advised she has no information on the status of a Rt. 9 by-pass, but she did not think there was funding at this time. Mr. Boyce explained that WILMAPCO has a Regional Transportation Plan that is updated yearly, and right now it is pointing to a future date of 2050. He added that he has never seen a line-item for a by-pass around the City of New Castle, and if the project were legitimate, it would probably already be noted in the Regional Plan. He added that there is also a Transportation Improvement Projects document that is a sub-set of the Regional Plan that directs DelDot where to start focusing their funding and a by-pass around the City of New Castle does not appear on that document either. There is a WILMAPCO Corridor Plan for Rt. 9 that is currently only from the City limits of the northern boundary of New Castle to the City limits of Wilmington which talks about doing some changes to help beautify the area and make it more walk-able and more economically viable. Mr. Boyce noted that it is possible the Corridor Plan will be extended into both cities, but WILMAPCO does not currently have the funding for that. He added that new projects can be added, but they have to follow the process.

Mr. Miller asked about an Application that was submitted to build apartments near St. Peter's school. Mr. Baldini advised that Application was approved 3-5 years ago. Mr. Toner stated that he also heard rumors that there has been difficulty with funding, but it is a reality. He added that it was going to be three stories with 82 units and he thought it was a 55 and older complex. Mr. Justice advised he thought their first marketing target was for a 55+ community, but he does not believe there are any deed restrictions. Mr. Miller asked if

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studies had been done and Mr. Justice noted that if lenders are not convinced there is a market for it, funding will not be forthcoming. Mr. Toner added that the developer will pay St. Peter's Church \$50,000 a year for approximately 50 years for the project.

Mr. Miller brought up a few issues he had previously mentioned including his dislike for multiple rental units in the City, particularly on his block, and a tree issue that he has presented to the Tree Commission.

He also noted that he felt there was much wasted parking throughout the City, and he suggested that the City paint specific parking spacing rather than having drivers determine how close to park from parked cars. Mr. Baldini advised that a survey regarding parking spaces is available online. He directed Mr. Miller to the area of the City website where he could view the documentation and review the discussions. He added that parking spacing could be added to the Planning Commission's tasks in the future. Mr. Justice explained that 2-3 years ago a group of students was tasked with counting the number of available on-street parking spaces within a bounded area from the Courthouse to 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> on Delaware and a block off Delaware. He added the students did a fine job using the correct tools and criteria for parking spacing. He also noted that the students computed supply, but had no data on demand; however, they did insert a recommendation for more parking in their report despite having no evidence to support the recommendation. Mr. Justice further noted that designating spaces can sometimes add more spaces, but it can also reduce the number of spaces available. Mr. Smith concurred that there is an issue of parking in the City that should be addressed. Mr. Miller also asked about parking permits or charging for parking.

**There being no further business, a Motion to adjourn the Meeting was made and seconded. The Motion was carried and the Meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.**

Kathy Weirich  
Stenographer