

New Castle City Planning Commission Special Meeting
Minutes
August 6, 2019 -- 6:30 p.m.
City of New Castle Town Hall

Members Present: David Baldini, Chair
Jonathan Justice
Erin Sabatella
Vera Worthy
Brenda Antonio
Gail Seitz
Peter Toner

Members Absent: Marco Boyce
William Walters, Vice Chair

Mr. Baldini called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Baldini stated that the mission for the meeting is to finalize the goals and strategies for the Comprehensive Plan. He added that there were some goals that required language revision. Ms. Antonio started a presentation of the updated goals document.

GOALS DISCUSSION

Introduction

- Mr. Baldini noted that at the previous meeting an Introduction was added as a preamble to the document and explained the first goal in the Introduction refers to staff and funding necessary to accomplish goals and the second goal is to ensure there is someone to shepherd the City through the project.

Government Services & Community Facilities Plan

- Revise Goal 1 to expressly focus on the zoning code and the planning process and that the documentation process has to be more clearly defined in the Code.
- Strike Goal 2
- Revise Goal 3 to add linkage to Goal 2 of the Introduction.

Land Use Plan

- Ms. Seitz noted that there is a Council Resolution to develop a comprehensive transportation and land use master plan. Mr. Baldini said that the Commission's objective is to gather all the plans, pull out what is relevant, and incorporate that data into the overall Comprehensive Plan. Identifying funding sources is also an objective. Ms. Seitz added that WILMAPCO is waiting to see if there is funding for this year; however it will require a 20% match.

Community

- No changes were made to the goals.

Councilperson Suzanne Souder stated that it was very difficult to see the presentation or to hear the discussion. Mr. Glenn Rill noted that if the public cannot hear or see, the Commission may not be in accordance with Sunshine Laws. Councilperson Souder added that it is difficult for the public to participate if they cannot hear the discussion or see data that is presented on a screen. Mr. Baldini explained that the microphones were for the purpose of recording the meeting and they were not hooked up to speakers. Ms. Antonio revised the presentation view and further discussion was conducted to ensure the public was able to hear properly.

Councilperson Souder asked for an explanation of how public comments from the workshops are incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, and Mr. Baldini explained that is still in process. He added that all the comments from the three workshops have been summarized and will be included as a separate section within the Comprehensive Plan. Councilperson Souder asked how the comments influenced the content of the Comprehensive Plan, and Mr. Baldini explained that the Commission is currently working at the broad level and will include more detail as the process continues. Councilperson Souder clarified her understanding that as the process becomes more detailed some of the comments will be incorporated and actually influence the Plan. Mr. Baldini noted that some of the public comments may not be relevant any longer, or are not within the purview of the Commission. He added that there will be some element of specific ownership in order to ensure that some goals are accomplished.

Annexation Plan

- No changes were made to the goals.

Infrastructure Plan

- Language change to goal 3.
- No change to goals 1, 4 and 5.
- With regard to Goal #2, Mr. Baldini explained that relevant goals and strategies in the MSC report should be pulled out and added the Comprehensive Plan.

Transportation Plan

- Language change to goals 1 and 2.
- No change to goals 3 and 4.
- Mr. Baldini noted that the pedestrian and bicycle traffic on the walkway on the river needs to be reviewed. Ms. Seitz added that subject is a major issue in Sussex County. Mr. Justice also noted that some of the issue of pedestrian and bicycle traffic is behavioral, and that is not within the purview of the Commission.

Historic & Cultural Resources Plan

- Language change to goal 2
- Strike goal 3.

Economic Development Plan

- Language change to goal 4
- Strike goal 5.
- With reference to goal 4, Ms. Seitz noted there may be goals in the Downtown Development District Plan (DDD) that should be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

Housing Plan

- No changes were made to the goals.

Environmental Protection Plan

- No change to goals 1, 2, and 4.
- Add new goal 3.
- Ms. Seitz noted that some of the goals from the Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan should be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

Open Space, Parks and Recreation Plan

- No changes were made to the goals.

Intergovernmental Coordination

- No change to goals 1, 2, and 4.
- Language change to goal 3.
- Mr. Baldini noted that a City of New Castle Emergency Management Plan is not on the City website. Ms. Seitz noted that the Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan includes emergency management goals that should be incorporated in the Comprehensive Plan.

STRATEGIES DISCUSSION

Councilperson Souder noted that the Downtown Development District Plan includes housing issues that the Commission may want to include in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Baldini noted that all the goals and strategies in relevant documents should be pulled and included in the Comprehensive Plan. Councilperson Souder added that the DDD should be finalized and available to the public in September or October 2019.

Government Services & Community Facilities Plan

- Delete strategies 1, 2, 3, and 4
- Mr. Baldini stated that a Review Commission is required to study zoning issues and associated planning activities. The Review Commission should consist of City staff, Planning Commission members, and the City Solicitor.

- After discussion of a “buyer information package”, it was agreed that relevant information should be available on the City website.
- A designated individual should be appointed to explore funding sources and grants. Deadlines for obtaining funding should be determined. Ms. Seitz noted that the Pre Plus comments from the State note that, for example under Transportation, “DelDOT recommends that the City update and consider adding a column listing anticipated funding sources for the improvements apart from DelDOT’s capital transportation program.”

Land Use Plan

- The Zoning Code should have something more substantial and useful than a subdivision ordinance to regulate major land developments that are not suburban subdivisions.
- Delete strategies 1 through 7.

The discussion on Strategies was brought to a close with the recommendation that another Special Meeting be scheduled to complete the review of Strategies and incorporate them into the Goals document. Ms. Seitz suggested that each Commissioner review one or two of the outstanding strategies sections before the next Special Meeting. Assignments were made and the Commissioners will bring their recommendations for strategies to the next Special Meeting. Ms. Antonio emailed all pertinent documents to the Commissioners.

A draft of the Comprehensive Plan Goals and Strategies (in progress) is attached to the Minutes as Appendix 1.

The next Special Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 22, 2019, at 6:30 pm.

There were no comments from the public and no further business to discuss, and Mr. Baldini called for a Motion to Adjourn.

A Motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:47 pm was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

Kathy Weirich
Stenographer

APPENDIX 1
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
REVISED GOALS AND STRATEGIES (unfinished)

Introduction

1. Obtain adequate dedicated resources to help obtain funding for goals and strategies.
2. Appoint a person who is accountable to create, manage and execute on getting the resources secured to implement the Comprehensive Plan (i.e. apply for grants).

Government Services & Community Facilities Plan

1. Review and update zoning code and planning process.
 - a. City to make a "buyer information package" available on the city website disclosing the status of the zoning, historic preservation, floodplains or wetlands.
 - b. Create committee to conduct the review, zoning code updates and planning process.
2. Long-term strategic plan with associated financial accrual plan. Needs to be resourceful and creative lead by appointed person. As noted in the introduction.
 - a. Appointed person to create a list of specific funding sources to implement goals of comprehensive plan.
 - b. Appointed person to prepare for future comprehensive plan.

Land Use Plan

1. Modification to zoning code with relevant design standards. Establish building code for multi-family and mixed-use structures.
2. Continue to encourage mixed residential/retail/office uses.
3. Incentivize private investment in New Castle's remaining undeveloped parcels, brownfields, and redevelopment areas harmoniously with nearby land uses. Ideas may include tax abatement.
 - a. Identify remaining undeveloped parcels and rezone if necessary to encourage an appropriate use.
 - b. Identify vacant land and parcels that may be suitable for new open space or expansion of existing open space.
 - c. Identify former industrial sites and rezone to appropriate uses given their locations and environmental condition.
 - d. Identify areas where long-term redevelopment of inappropriate and dilapidated uses should be encouraged. Prepare example site plans identifying new land uses and recommended zoning and setback regulations.
 - e. Strengthen non-conforming regulations to limit the expansion of non-conforming uses and explore the possibility of creating a City-sponsored program to assist and support the relocation of non-conforming land uses.
 - f. Define appropriate zoning designations for vacant land designated for open space in the event that they are developed or redeveloped prior to acquisition by the City. The zoning for these land areas should be provide

appropriate protection for environmental resources on the site and nearby, be compatible with surrounding land uses and promote a form of development that would yield at least some open space

4. In light of new plans for roadways (as noted in the transportation section of the goals), reevaluate plans for roadways to determine best use of land and transportation. Studies for land use and transportation will be needed.
5. Develop and adopt a long-term redevelopment vision for the 7th & South Street area as a new, primarily residential extension of the downtown area with a mix of residential, retail and office uses. It is appropriate to designate some parcels as a mix of residential only with apartments, condominiums and single-family homes.
6. Develop a capital improvement program identifying desirable physical improvements ranging from enhanced pedestrian connections for the Ferry Cut-off to entirely new neighborhood streets for the 7th & South Street area.
7. Coordinate state and local transportation improvements to achieve better pedestrian linkages between these areas of the City and existing adjoining neighborhoods.

Stenographer's Note: Review of Strategies ended after discussion of strategy f of goal 3.

Community Design

1. Incorporate detailed urban design standards into the City's development controls to ensure high quality in new development.
2. Reinforce community identity with attractive gateways at the City's edges and appropriate design and architecture enhancements.
3. Establish requirements for landscape buffers to screen residential neighborhoods from more intense land uses.

Annexation Plan

1. Establish Citywide annexation criteria, policy, and procedures.
2. Identify possible areas for future annexation.
3. Encourage the development of areas outside but adjacent to New Castle, or under consideration for annexation, in a harmonious manner with nearby uses.

Infrastructure Plan

1. Encourage the relocation of aerial utilities below ground through development of a long-term utility relocation plan and through revisions to the City's subdivision and land development ordinance.
2. Encourage improvements to address both drainage and flooding issues (e.g., corner of 6th & Chestnut, Rt. 9 & Washington, Rt. 9 Bend). Pursue route 9 causeway plan as this will serve as an exit out of the city for an emergency. Leverage MSC report (Goal #3 Develop an infrastructure technology disaster plan and cyber security policy)

3. Strategic Replacement Repair/Maintenance Plan for aging infrastructure. Identify a multi-year capital improvement plan with project name, timing and estimated cost.
4. Technology infusions for Community Safety, Communications, etc.
5. Implement federal storm water treatment to adhere to regulations.

Transportation Plan

1. Enhance bike and pedestrian connections and facilities throughout the City.
2. Develop a transportation master plan and land use master plan for the city. Conduct an outside regional impact analysis on the interconnections of roads and streets (i.e. Rt 9, Rt 13, Rt 141, Rt 273, 295, etc.) If incident occurs local people cannot exit the city. Engage state and local representatives for support of analysis. Clarify regional and local traffic patterns throughout the City.
3. Redesign streets and intersections to reduce speeding and cut-through traffic, while improving pedestrian safety in all City neighborhoods.
4. Formalize and optimize the existing parking supply. Specifically improve the parking lot at the south end of the city just beyond Dobbinsville. Coordinate with DNREC.

Historic & Cultural Resources Plan

1. Develop strategies to protect resources such as Shawtown, Dobbinsville, Pennside and Bellanca that are outside the historic district.
2. Review historic district boundaries, design standards, and review procedures.

Economic Development Plan

1. Encourage the growth and diversity of neighborhood scale businesses.
2. Redesign portions of Route 9 and the Ferry Cut-off as a pedestrian-oriented commercial district.
3. Replacement market sectors for lost retail.
4. Coordinate the Downtown Development District (DDD) plan with this Comprehensive Plan.

Housing Plan

1. Increase affordable opportunities for home ownership.
2. Improve housing maintenance.
3. Improve the integrity of the housing stock through rehabilitation.
4. Facilitate investment in small run-down residential properties, and ensure that such redevelopment meets or exceeds the architectural character of surrounding homes.

Environmental Protection Plan

1. Preserve the capacity of the floodplain to carry floodwaters.
2. Improve drainage and stormwater management throughout the City.
3. Implement the recommendations of the Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan dated February 2018.
4. Plan for protection of Historic District and other flood prone areas.

Open Space, Parks and Recreation Plan

1. Enhance the maintenance of neighborhood recreational facilities, particularly in Buttonwood, Van Dyke Village, Shawtown, and Dobbinsville.
2. Expand local recreational opportunities by creating new neighborhood parks in Washington Park neighborhoods.
3. Explore the development and potential funding of new community-wide recreation facilities, including:
 - Community swimming pool and Fitness Center
 - Public fishing pier and/or non-motorized boat launch
 - Greenway and multi-use trail system expansion
 - Dog park
4. Wildlife management, specifically of the geese at Battery Park, perhaps a partnership with DNREC
5. Walking repaired and improved
6. South parking lot improved or use as launching lot for walkers and cyclists (an alternative to people parking in the city who only want to use the paths)
7. Partner with Trustees to further improve the New Castle Little League to include a playground and walking path around the complex.

Intergovernmental Coordination

1. Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with the Trustees of New Castle Commons, MSC, New Castle County (sewer).
2. Develop an Information Technology Disaster Recovery Plan and Cyber Security Policy (from the MSC Goals /Strategies/ Input doc)
3. Emergency Management Plan - Implement the recommendations of the Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan dated February 2018.
4. Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with state and local agencies.