

WASHINGTON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION WORKSHOP MEETING – December 7, 2009

The Washington County Planning Commission held a workshop meeting on Monday, December 7, 2009, at 4:00 p.m. in the Washington County Administrative Annex, 80 West Baltimore Street, Hagerstown.

Members present were: Chairman George Anikis, Andrew Bowen (arrived at 5:00 p.m.), Terry Reiber, Clint Wiley, Linda Parrish, and Ex-Officio James Kercheval. Staff members present were: Planning Director Michael Thompson, Chief Planner Steve Goodrich, Senior Planner Jill Baker, and Administrative Assistant Debra Eckard.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman George Anikis called the meeting to order at 4:08 p.m.

MINUTES

Mr. Anikis questioned proposed language from the MU zoning district that states, "The Planning Commission may allow reductions or require increases in building spacing or height.....", specifically requiring a developer to build a taller structure. Mr. Goodrich stated that the language is proposed to provide the maximum amount of flexibility and taller structures would allow for greater density while still providing green space. Mr. Reiber noted that discussions from the previous workshop focused on square footage rather than height. Mr. Anikis stated that he is not comfortable with the Planning Commission requiring increased height limitations.

Mr. Wiley made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 23, 2009 workshop meeting as presented. Seconded by Ms. Parrish. Unanimously approved.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Goodrich began discussions on Article 17 – PB (Planned Business) zoning district. He read language from the Comp Plan that states, "It is recommended that the Planned Business and the Business Transition classifications be eliminated. Both classifications have deficiencies in their application and their purposes can be better addressed through other business classifications." Staff is proposing that the zone be kept because it is located in some very significant areas, such as the Valley Mall, and that the zone be a Euclidean zone. Mr. Goodrich briefly described some of the problems with the PB zone and efforts that are being made to correct those problems.

Mr. Goodrich stated that efforts to communicate with developers in the PB (Planned Business) and PI (Planned Industrial) zoning districts would be early in the process. A master plan or overall plan would be required for an entire parcel of land to be viewed as one entity; however, development may take place in phases. Mr. Goodrich reviewed the purpose in Section 17.0 which states, "Comprehensive preplanning will improve function and may increase compatibility with adjacent land uses where random placement of commercial development may not be compatible".

Mr. Goodrich explained there are three categories under Section 17.2, which includes: 1) existing Planned Business district with existing approved comprehensive development plans, 2) existing Planned Business district without approved comprehensive development plan; and 3) applications for new planned business districts. Members briefly discussed each of the categories. Ms. Parrish pointed out that in Section 17.2.B there is no reference to historic structures. Mr. Goodrich stated the historic structures reference was inadvertently missed and would be added. Ms. Parrish expressed her opinion that the Commission needs to review the map to determine if there are any areas that should be pre-designated with the PB zone.

Continuing the review of the PB zone, Mr. Goodrich noted that the consultation of the development plan must be completed before the developer can apply for the PB zone. He stated that the zoning amendment application shall be accompanied by preliminary traffic data. Mr. Goodrich reiterated that the concept plan is not approved prior to the zoning change; however, the plan review must be completed before applying for the zoning change. Mr. Anikis asked why market studies are not provided by the EDC to determine if a specific business or industry is appropriate. Mr. Goodrich stated that developers typically do their own market analysis. Mr. Anikis questioned why the market studies are not required during the concept plan phase. Mr. Goodrich stated that the Planning Commission can add that requirement if they feel it is appropriate. Mr. Anikis believes that the EDC or another professional would be better qualified to review the market analysis than Commission members. He asked who could evaluate the information. Mr. Goodrich stated that the Commission could rely on the information provided by the developer, which could be obtained early in the process. The other alternative would be to have a Staff member trained review the information; however, there is currently no one on the Staff qualified.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that the developer be required to provide a market analysis in the concept plan stage.

The Commission continued its review of the proposed language for Article 17 with Mr. Goodrich pointing out new language and existing language. Mr. Goodrich noted that Staff has been discussing signage issues in the PB zone. One problem is the large pylon signs that have several stores listed on one sign

that are not on the same parcel of land. In accordance with current sign requirements, the sign must be located on the same parcel as the store and uses that are on a different parcel of land are not permitted to be advertised on that sign. Staff is working on ways to address this issue.

Mr. Goodrich summarized the proposed language for Section 17.8 Design Guidelines. All of this language is new and is not currently in the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Goodrich noted that the proposed language in Item I relative to outside display areas will be modified to incorporate the parking text amendment recently approved by the BOCC.

Mr. Goodrich began reviewing Section 17.9 relating to additional design standards with a 75,000-square foot threshold. He noted that the Urban Growth Area Advisory Committee recommends that these guidelines be removed from this section of the Ordinance and combined with staff proposed guidelines for buildings in the PI district to have one set of guidelines for both districts. The proposed standards mirror the requirements adopted by the City of Hagerstown. In reviewing many of the proposed standards, Mr. Goodrich used the recently constructed Stone House Square, which is a “main street” development, as an example. Commission members briefly reviewed all of the standards. Mr. Wiley expressed his opinion that there is no easy or safe ingress or egress for pedestrians or bicyclists. He believes this is an issue that needs to be addressed within these guidelines. Mr. Goodrich stated that the Staff is trying to take a more active approach to addressing traffic patterns within shopping centers. Mr. Wiley believes that it would be appropriate to address pedestrian access in this section of the design standards. Mr. Goodrich verified with Commission members that they want a requirement or stronger policy for the connection of pedestrian or bicycle access to the existing systems; and, if a system does not currently exist more responsibility needs to be put on the developer to provide the off-site access. Commission members clarified that they recommend these connections in the Urban Growth Area only and not for development in the rural areas. Mr. Wiley expressed his opinion that in the UGA if residential neighborhoods have Planned Business zones amongst them, then a comprehensive approach should be taken in the way planned business development is addressed. Mr. Bowen noted that Section 10.6 in the RM zoning district states that a “cohesive and comprehensive network of pedestrian paths shall be provided”. He suggested that the same language be incorporated into all districts within the UGA.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends and supports the requirement for a network of pedestrian and bicycle access in the UGA.

Commission members continued their review of Section 17.9. Mr. Goodrich explained the “main street” concept for shopping centers. This concept allows a more “human-friendly” atmosphere by having the parking located around the outer limits of the parcel, stores facing each other and providing pedestrian access inside the perimeter of the store fronts.

The Commission then began a review of the UGAAC’s recommended design standards with a threshold of 75,000-square feet. Mr. Goodrich explained that these standards are a combination of the Staff’s design standards, which the Commission just finished reviewing, and the standards from the Planned Industrial zoning district that the Staff created. Ms. Parrish and Mr. Anikis expressed their opinions that they were not in agreement with the first sentence, which states, “The Planning Commission shall not approve or deny the exterior appearance of structures in the Planned Business District.” Mr. Ditto, a member of the UGAAC, stated that the proposed standards dictate the type of materials that must be used during construction and the Committee did not want developers to be limited if building materials change in the future.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that the first sentence [as noted above] in Section 17.9 be removed as well as the first word in the second sentence [However].

Ms. Parrish expressed her opinion that the proposed guidelines written by Staff in Section 17.9.A “Intent” are very specific and the language recommended by the UGAAC is too generalized. She believes the guidelines within the “Intent” need to be more specific to address the “big box” stores. The Commission continued their review of the UGAAC’s recommended text for Section 17.9. Ms. Parrish pointed out that the UGAAC recommended the removal of the minimum height limitation language proposed by Staff. Mr. Goodrich stated that the UGAAC made its recommendation because they believe the minimum height limitation is not applicable to an industrial building. Ms. Parrish asked what the Staff’s intention was for proposing the height minimum. Mr. Goodrich stated that Staff was trying to encourage a variety of heights and to encourage development to go up instead of out for more compact development where possible. He noted that the Planning Commission can waive the requirement. Ms. Parrish reiterated her opinion that the intent section needs to be more specific. Mr. Anikis expressed his opinion that separate guidelines would be better. Mr. Goodrich stated he would attempt to put the two proposals together and let the Commission review the proposal again.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends that the Planned Business “intent” section, preliminary consultation requirement, and minimum height limitations be added to the UGAAC’s recommendations for further review.

Mr. Goodrich began reviewing the proposed text for the maintenance of abandoned buildings. He noted that the language was taken from the City of Hagerstown’s Zoning Ordinance. There was a brief discussion regarding enforcement of maintenance of abandoned buildings. Mr. Anikis asked why the maintenance of smaller buildings (less than 75,000-square feet) is not being required. Mr. Goodrich stated that 75,000 square feet is the threshold adopted by the City of Hagerstown. It is proposed for the

County to be consistent with City standards. Mr. Kercheval made an inquiry regarding the illumination of surrounding commercial areas. There was a brief discussion regarding this requirement.

- **Consensus:** The Planning Commission recommends changing # 6 in Section 17.9.D from “leasing information” to “current contact information”.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Anikis adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

George Anikis, Chairman