

Minutes of the January 28, 2009 Planning Commission

Meeting called to order at 6:00 P.M. by Chairman Toby Gearhart. Planning Commission members Martin Sokolich, Jeff Garrett, and Mickey Newport were present. The following were also in attendance: Joe Mangini, Town Manager; Missy Vanskiver, Asst. Clerk; Kathy Smith, Town Commissioner; Nancy Gearhart, Dale and Betty Jean Mumford; Joanne Stepp; Steve Horne, Elm Street Dev.; and Tom Evans, Maryland Ready Mix Concrete Association.

Approval of the Minutes

Upon Martin's suggestion, it was agreed to delay approving of the minutes until the next meeting, so that the Planning Commission would have adequate time to review the minutes.

Election of Officers/Member Appointment

Martin made a motion to keep the same slate of officers, as long as that wasn't a conflict of interest since he was currently the Vice-Chairman; seconded by Mickey, unanimously approved.

Toby stated that Jeff Garrett's term as a member of the Planning Commission was up for renewal; Jeff has stated he wishes to remain a member of the Planning Commission. Joanne Stepp and Nancy Gearhart also stated their interest in serving on the Planning Commission when there is a vacancy. There was discussion concerning the process of nominating and/or re-appointing members to any commission/committee. A motion to make a recommendation to the Town Commissioners to re-appoint Jeff Garrett to the Planning Commission was made by Mickey, seconded by Martin, unanimously approved; Jeff abstained.

Town Manager's Report

There has not been much building permit activity since the last Planning meeting – one residential demolition and one new construction. WWTP upgrade should be completed in April; Joe, Robin and David will be meeting with an inspector on January 30th. The governor has requested input from local municipalities regarding projects to possibly be included in the stimulus package. Joe included the Water Tower project, the WWTP/spray field project and the Public Safety Building project in the letter; he said streets and other projects of that nature may also be able to be included.

Rails to Trails Project – JOK Walsh has been trying to save the rails between Park and Central Avenues, and relocating the portion of the trail in that area. For now, the town is going to put the project out to bid because the state has already approved the current plans. Bids will stay open for 90 days, which would allow time to address the issue of saving the rails. Presently, a letter has been sent from Senator Colburn to Secretary Porcari (MDOT) and Secretary Griffin (DNR) regarding this matter; a response is awaited. Joe recommended a meeting of all involved parties – town, MDOT, DNR, etc. He also stated that the major concern is the project funding. Approximately \$30,000 of the \$200,000 grant received for the original project plan from the Ehrlich administration has been used thus far; those are the only funds available from the state. If the project costs more than the remainder of the grant, additional funding must be sought. Mickey asked if the engineer has provided a budget; Joe said the cost based on the approved plans was approximately \$150,000. Martin asked if Joe had heard from JOK Walsh regarding the availability of other funding. Joe said he will be returning JOK Walsh's call, but that what probably needs to be stated is that any cost over

\$200,000 will be the town's responsibility. Kathy said she thinks what JOK stated was that he believed that the changes (saving rails, parallel trail relocation) could be made within the \$200,000 funding. Jeff asked if the rails are generally removed; Joe said that the rails have been removed in other projects he has seen. There was some discussion concerning the caboose. Nancy stated that she has been told that there is a trail between Baltimore and Annapolis in which the rails were not removed in certain sections.

Old Business

Memo from Shane Johnston regarding Comprehensive Plan timetable – The Planning Commission had previously received a copy of the Comprehensive Plan draft on CD to review. Martin and Toby have both met with Shane and Toby said the Comprehensive Plan is just about where it should be and it looks pretty good, with only minor language changes. Dale asked if the Schuster (sand pit) issue was addressed in the Comprehensive Plan, even though the property isn't in town, it still has an impact on the town. Toby said no, and Martin stated that some of the areas adjacent to town were identified as potential future growth. Dale referenced issues Goldsboro had with a similar situation. Toby stated that he would email Shane Johnston about this concern. There was discussion on the next few steps in the process, including notices and making the Comprehensive Plan draft available to the public.

Demolition Permit for 206 Caroline Ave – The house was destroyed by fire. The Planning Commission had approved the demolition permit via email prior to the meeting due to safety concerns.

Building Permit for Sign at Kiddie Kastle – The building permit for the sign at Kiddie Kastle had received preliminary approval at a previous meeting.

Toby said that he had invited Tom Evans from the Maryland Pervious Concrete Association to make a presentation, which dovetails into Steve Horne's presentation about the Ridgely Park project.

Ridgely Park – Steve Horne said that many issues were discussed at the last Planning meeting, and he wants to address each of those issues. He stated that since architecture was a major concern at the last meeting, he gathered a representative sample of architecture that he believes would work for this project. Steve said that he hopes this starts the conversation, with emphasis on 'start' because this is going to be a collaborative approach. The packet included samples from a number of builders. The majority of the first eight or so pages were more 'arts and crafts' approach, the last few examples included side-entry garages. Steve said that side-entry might involve increasing some of the lot sizes to make that work. He also said that those were included not as architectural elevations, but more so design. There was some discussion.

Steve said he wanted to reiterate that part of the benefit of making these plan changes is that it allows the project to proceed at pace. Toby said that eventually, the Planning Commission sees this project eventually turning into what was originally proposed. He also said that the template, to include storm water management facilities and a recreation pond, has to be right in order for the project to continue. Toby said that's why Tom Evans was invited to the meeting, because it looks like he may have an affordable, pervious solution to the impervious issue. Toby referenced Steve's statement made at a previous meeting about reducing the run-off problem by 40% by eliminating paved alleys. Steve said that they have considered different solutions, and they are willing to look

into it. He also stated that deleting the alleys isn't just a cost issue though, it's a market issue. If the top five national builders were to be asked what they would like to see in a community in this location on the Eastern Shore alleys would not be on the list. Steve said that they have been told they (national builders) won't do it; the layout and plan is not a product that their buyer currently wants. Toby said that only a few months ago, with the proposal that was approved, it was. Steve said the economics have changed and builders don't pull ground anymore, they option everything.

They are looking for lots of a configuration/shape/size that allows them to do what they do best, which is build the houses they design. That's not saying that Elm Street isn't open to modifications, because they do that in every community. Generally, Elm Street takes a builders standard product and send it to Urban Design Associates for exterior modification suggestions.

Martin asked about the market for the proposed homes in Ridgely Park. Steve said that the majority of people, on average, in the market to buy a home in Caroline County are commuters with two or more children. He also said that the price range today would be low \$200,000's, and probably wouldn't be much higher within the next 12 months. In 2006 the starting price would probably have been around \$275,000; today that starting price would probably be around \$199,000. Martin asked if Steve imagined the market to be more of a Symphony Village demographic, as opposed to something else. Steve said Ridgely Park might draw some 55+ demographic because of the nature of the demographics that move to this area, but most will be people commuting over the bridge. Martin asked about the project timeline, and if Steve thought that if houses were put on the market in a year if people would be interested. Steve said that the spring of 2010 should be a good selling season. Martin asked if the original product that had been proposed a few years ago was going to be the same group of buyers. Steve said that it would have been the same market, but the buying capacity isn't what it was. Toby said that hopefully the market will be back up within a year or two and the market from when the original project was approved will reappear. Steve Horne said a market will appear, but not the market on which the original project was based. Jeff asked if the starting price would be the same if the project were to be done in the Frederick or Hagerstown area. Steve stated Frederick has a higher price point, and referenced areas along the I-270 commuting corridor. Steve said that the Eastern Shore has an exceptional quality of life, and has long been a place where enough land and capacity exist.

Toby stated that the most recent development, Lister Estates, does not actually have alleys, but there is an alley-like right-of-way that runs behind properties. He said that the Planning Commission is considering what Ridgely Park will look like after things get going; they want the project to work, and work well. Martin asked why this third of the originally proposed project area was chosen. Steve said that there were two major reasons. One reason was that Elm Street places a high value on being close to town and extending the current town's footprint. The other reason was economics; there was a different price attached to each piece of land.

Toby asked about any changes in sidewalks and curbs, and if there would still be the narrowing of the streets at intersections. Steve said that no overall changes have been contemplated in those areas. Toby also asked if the overall price could be reduced by using another product, if that would have an effect on the alleys. Steve stated it isn't a cost issue, it's a marketing issue; people want bigger backyards. He also said that he personally likes the alleys and would prefer to buy in an alley/grid neighborhood; however that isn't the case with the research and feedback from the builders. There was discussion about alleys and garages.

Martin asked if there was any room to work on product styles with the parties who will acquire the lots and build the houses. Steve said there will be different product styles and sizes. He said he doesn't know if alleys could be incorporated in some situations, but that there is not a market for an alley product. Elm Street is willing to work with Ridgely; for example, if there is a stretch of alley that the town wants extended he would be willing to consider that. Regarding the houses, Martin asked if there would be different models and the customer would choose from a list of options. Steve said that Elm Street develops the ground (infrastructure) and works with builders to match up their product portfolios to offer a product line wide enough to attract the most interest. National builders are required for a project of this size to build at a successful pace.

Martin said in the original plan, it looked like the homes along Cow Barn Road were served by an internal road and asked if, in the new plan, there would be a driveway for each of the eleven houses along Cow Barn Road. Steve said there was an internal alley for those blocks along Cow Barn Road, and the original plan also allowed for parallel parking.

Dale expressed his concerns about the elimination of the alleys on the new plan, and the DRRA and its associated funding. Toby said the DRRA is totally inoperative and a new DRRA is required. Steve said he agrees the current DRRA does not work; it was scaled for 403 units, in a TND design, in a different economy. Martin stated that certain legislation will have to be repealed or replaced, referencing the ordinances establishing the overlay zones. Toby said that the ordinance in existence for the overlay won't be adhered to under the revised plan unless a way is found to include certain alleys or include in most places a right-of-way. Martin said he hopes that the design for the housing as well as the project can be worked on and feels like this is good grounds for further discussion. Nancy asked what the advantage would be to keeping the current DRRA; Toby said there isn't one. Joe said he would recommend that the present DRRA stay in place until the project is reviewed, then amend the original DRRA. He said another reason to keep the original DRRA in tact, is that the Tech Park would take precedence (sewer allocation) over Ridgely Park. Kathy asked how that would affect the allocation. Joe said the letters between the town and the state indicate there is a DRRA with Ridgely Park, that the town has allocation up to 200,000 gallons, and that there is funding coming from the state for the WWTP upgrade. Allocation for the Tech Park would be available upon the town's expansion of the WWTP from 200,000 gallons to 300,000 gallons. There was discussion concerning issues associated with the Tech Park sewer allocation, the DRRA, and the MDE loan. Martin asked if Steve could come back next month. Steve said he's not sure he has a clear picture if the architecture presented was what the Planning Commission was looking for, but he would like to continue the dialogue.

Pervious Concrete – Tom Evans introduced himself and stated that he didn't believe that any cost issues could be tackled tonight. Mr. Evans stated the Concrete Association in Maryland represents ready-mix concrete suppliers, contractors, and associates. They offer technical and promotional information on various concrete products. The association believes that anytime paving is discussed, most people generally default to a product (sidewalks-concrete, parking lot-asphalt). They challenge all developers and planners to consider concrete as a more cost-effective solution for all paving.

Pervious pavement is basically an inlet for storm water. Water hits the pavement, runs through it and then runs into either the ground as a natural infiltration system or is directed to a pipe or swale under the pavement and into a storm water management system. Before pervious pavement is installed the soil needs to be considered, and what amounts of water are expected over time needs to be determined. Mr. Evans mentioned some recent projects close to Ridgely which used pervious

pavement. He stated the larger cost savings are realized when the storm water systems are under the pavements, allowing land previously used for a storm water management area available for another use. Mr. Evans referred to some brochures and other literature he had available.

Kathy asked if this could be used for the Rails to Trails project. Mr. Evans said that it can be used for application in which pavement is being used. Jeff asked about the age of this technology. Tom said that pervious or porous concrete has been available in the U.S. for about 30 years. Kathy asked if a demonstration could be done. There was a demonstration and some discussion.

Subway Shopping Center Fence – Toby provided an overview issues concerning the fence between the cemetery and the shopping center. Toby said Martin had suggested leaving the existing posts in the ground, removing existing fencing material and installing the new fence on the existing posts. Joe asked that the Planning Commission keep in mind that no Certificates of Occupancy will be issued until the fence issue has been resolved.

207 Park Avenue – Joe said that Cary has met with the property owner's son to discuss having some estimates done, but the town has not received any contact since that time. A letter is going to be sent giving the property owner a certain amount of time to give the town a solid plan as to what will be done with the property, and requesting payment for the work that has already been done. Martin asked if an estimate hadn't been done because the property owner has not indicated her wishes; Joe said yes.

New Business

Building Permit for New Construction at 17 Ridgeway Drive – The building permit application was provided to the Planning Commission members. Nancy asked if the builder had provided all the house designs for this project. After some discussion, the Planning Commission decided they would like to meet with the builder to discuss the designs of homes at Ridgeway Estates. A motion to approve the proposed design for Lot 17 was made by Martin, seconded by Mickey, unanimously approved.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Mickey, seconded by Martin. Meeting adjourned at 9:37.

Sincerely,

Missy Vanskiver
Asst. Clerk