New Castle City Board of Adjustment Meeting Minutes Town Hall March 30, 2023 – 6:30 p.m. 1 Municipal Boulevard, New Castle, DE

Members Present:	Mayor Michael J. Quaranta Steve Zorrer Robert Irwin
Absent:	Megan McClelland Dennis Anuszewski
Also Present:	Jeff Bergstrom, City Building Official & Fire Marshall N. Christopher Griffiths, Esq., City Solicitor Chris Rogers, City Planner

Mayor Quaranta convened the meeting at 6:32 p.m. He introduced the Board members and declared that a quorum was present.

Mayor Quaranta stated that three applications would be heard and explained the procedure that would be followed in hearing them.

HEARING 1 – Christine Masiello, 151 Casimir Drive, New Castle, DE

An application has been filed by Christine Masiello 151 Casimir Drive New Castle, DE 19720 (Owner & Applicant) regarding a property located in the R-1 Zoning District at 151 Casimir Drive; Tax Parcel No's 21-007.00-036 requesting a variance to Code 230-33 (A) (1) restricting accessory buildings to 15 feet in height for to construct a garage out building with a height of not more than 19 feet.

Ms. Masiello stated that she would like to build a shed in her rear yard to house a recreational vehicle with an air conditioning unit on top that would require a roof peak of 19'. The shed is 24' wide x 28' deep x 19' high with a garage door 12 feet in height. She noted that she has an oversized lot that slopes down in the back yard and abuts with property owned by the Trustees of the New Castle Common that to the best of her knowledge will not be developed. The shed will be placed as close to the rear property line as is allowed by Code. Ms. Masiello distributed photographs of the property depicting the recreational vehicle and described where the proposed shed would be built. She stated that sheds of similar style are in the neighborhood that do not exceed the height limit. Letters in support of the application were presented from Michael Marinelli (138 Casimir Drive), Carol Syva (136 Casimir Drive, Bill Gawinski (10 Van Dyke Drive), and Gary Fumitani (153 Casimir Drive). Ms. Masiello stated that none of her neighbors objected to the proposed shed. Mr. Zorrer confirmed that the peak of the shed roof would not be any higher than Ms. Masiello's house.

HEARING 2 – Jay E. Evans, Jr., 311 Baldt Avenue, New Castle, DE 19720

An application has been filed by Jay E. Evans, Jr., 311 Baldt Avenue, (Owner & Applicant), for a property located in the R-1 Zoning District at 311 Baldt Avenue, New Castle, DE 19720, Tax

Parcel No. 21-004.00-006, seeking: (1) an appeal from the Code Official's determination of a violation of the City Code Section 230-28; or alternatively, (2) a variance from the maximum aggregate driveway width requirement of Code Section 230-28 to allow for construction of second driveway for off street parking with aggregate driveway width of 44 feet.

Mr. Evans stated that his lot is oversized and the property includes a section where there was a garage and driveway many years ago. Mr. Evans is seeking approval to utilize that area to park his boat and submitted photographs showing the depression where the driveway once was. Mr. Evans submitted a petition in favor of the application signed by Charles Barlow (304 Baldt Ave.), Julie Luiken (109 E 14th St.), Jeanette Henretty (310 Baldt Ave.), Jason Ellison (308 Baldt Ave.) and Lisa Prosachik. Mr. Evans stated that none of his neighbors objected to the application.

Mr. Bergstrom testified that the law is clear that the maximum permitted width for a driveway is 24 feet and the applicant installed a second driveway making the maximum width 44'. He noted that the lot is quite large; however, that does not increase the maximum permitted driveway width.

Public Comment

Jeannette Henretty – 310 Baldt Aenue

Ms. Henretty stated that she does not have any objection to Mr. Evans putting in an additional driveway and testified that there was a shed and driveway in the subject location at one time and when the street was repayed they put an indention for the driveway.

Mr. Griffiths clarified that the applicant has asked for two things: (1) an appeal from the Code Official's decision and in the alternative, (2) a variance from the maximum aggregate driveway width. Mr. Griffiths stated this is a clear violation of the law, and asked if the applicant would like to simply ask for the variance. Mr. Evans stated that he wanted to ask for a variance.

Mayor Quaranta called for a motion to adjourn the Hearing.

A motion to adjourn to the Business Meeting was made by Mr. Zorrer, seconded by Mr. Irwin, and unanimously carried.

HEARING 1 - Christine Masiello, 151 Casimir Drive, New Castle, DE

Mayor Quaranta stated that the property backs to land that cannot be developed and the Trustees did not submit an objection to the application. Neighbors have submitted letters of support for the application. The Mayor also noted that having the recreational vehicle in an enclosed shed is preferable to it being on the street or in the driveway. Mayor Quaranta stated that he supports the application.

Mr. Irwin concurred with the Mayor's reasons and stated that he appreciated that the optics will make the shed appear to be lower than the house. Mr. Irwin stated that he supports the application.

Mr. Zorrer concurred with the other Board members' reasons and stated that he would support the application.

A motion to approve a variance to Code 230-33 (A) (1) restricting accessory buildings to 15 feet in height to construct a garage out building with a height of not more than 19 feet was made by Mr. Zorrer and seconded by Mr. Irwin.

Mr. Zorrer voted yes, stating that due to the slope of the ground the shed will not be higher than the house; the intended use is consistent with other properties in the area; and the neighbors have expressed their support of the application.

Mr. Irwin voted yes, stating that he agrees with Mr. Zorrer that the special conditions of the property provide that the building will not be any higher of the house.

Mayor Quaranta voted yes, stating that he concurs with the reasons stated by the other Board members, adding that it is important that if possible large recreational vehicles should be stored in a way that adds curb appeal to the community and the slope of the property disguises the actual 19 foot height.

The motion carried on a vote of 3 in favor and none opposed.

<u>HEARING 2 – Jay E. Evans, Jr., 311 Baldt Avenue, New Castle, DE 19720</u> Mayor Quaranta stated that Mr. Evns dropped the challenge to the Code Officials Decision and is requesting a variance to construct a driveway with an aggregate width of 44 feet with an entrance on Baldt Avenue.

Mr. Irwin stated that there was no concern from the neighbors, and it appears that there was a driveway there at one time. Mr. Irwin stated that he supports the application.

Mr. Zorrer concurred with Mr. Irwin's reasons and stated that he supports the application.

Mayor Quaranta stated that there was a structure and driveway there previously without any evidence of complaints to the City; it gives Mr. Evans an opportunity to move a recreational vehicle off the street; and there is sufficient space to construct the driveway. Mayor Quaranta stated that he supports the application.

A motion to approve a variance from the maximum aggregate driveway width requirement of Code Section 230-28 to allow for construction of a second driveway for off street parking with an aggregate driveway width of 44 feet was made by Mr. Zorrer and seconded by Mr. Irwin. On vote, the motion was unanimously carried. Mr. Griffiths noted that the Board members articulated their reasons for approving the variance, adding that the McLaughlin Case in the Supreme Court states self-created harm is not enough reason deny a variance.

Mayor Quaranta concluded the Business Meeting on Hearings 1 and 2 and called the Board of Adjustment Hearing to order to discuss Hearing 3.

HEARING 3 - ONC Investments, LLC, P.O. Box 338, New Castle, DE 19720

An application has been filed by ONC Investments, LLC, P.O. Box 388 New Castle, DE 19720 (Owner & Applicant) regarding properties located in the DG Downtown Gateway Zoning District at 702 & 706 Delaware Street; Tax Parcel No's 21-015.00-006 & 21-015.00.003 requesting a Special Exception to construct a three (3) story residential apartment (32 Apartment Units) Pursuant to Section 230-21.1(B)(2) of the City of New Castle Code.

Shawn Tucker, Esquire, representing the applicant, stated that the Planning Commission made a favorable recommendation for the project to come before the Board of Adjustment for a special exception. Mr. Tucker testified that:

- The property consists of two lots that the applicant purchased after they were zoned Commercial.
- The properties were purchased with no restrictions.
- Uses of the property permitted by right include: motel or hotel; retail and service; and restaurant with outside seating.

Mr. Tucker introduced Mr. Mark Ziegler, Civil Engineer for the applicant, to testify. Mr. Ziegler was sworn in by Mr. Griffiths. Mr. Ziegler testified that:

- The height limit in the DG District is 45 feet. The original plan called for a four story structure at a height of 45 feet and the applicant requested that the mass be reduced to three stories at a height of approximately 35-38 feet.
- There will be 32 one- and two-bedroom apartments with 48 parking spaces.
- No variances are required for the site for parking or any other proposal on the plan.
- For safety reasons the access point will be on 7th Street. Two points of ingress/egress on Delaware Street will be eliminated to move access from the major street to a minor street. DelDOT supported the access point on 7th Street.
- Mr. Ziegler's firm performed a traffic analysis in accordance with §230-57(B)(2). DelDOT also performed an analysis and has a proposed plan to add pedestrian crosswalks to the area, which will benefit the applicant's project.
- Mr. Ziegler explained the Traffic Generation noted in the presentation is derived from the ITE Traffic Manual recognized by DelDOT. According to the Land Use Code of the ITE Manual, traffic generation for a 32-unit apartment building is 280 weekday trips, which is lower than traffic generation for a business hotel, high turnover restaurant, medical/dental office, or liquor store; and the applicants use would have significantly less impact on traffic that other permitted uses. Mr. Ziegler reiterated that the ingress/egress is being moved from a heavily traveled street to a secondary street.

- Adequate circulation arrangements are incorporated in the Plan and the design protects major roads from undue congestion and hazard.
- Delaware Street is a major road and 7th Street is not considered a major road.
- Peak-hour (7 am-9 am / 4 pm-6 pm) trips generated for a 32-unit apartment building is approximately 33 and 34 trips respectively; and this data was taken into account in the design for the project.

Mr. Tucker introduced Mr. Gary Burcham, landscape architect for the applicant, to testify. Mr. Burcham explained the landscape design depicted on page 6 of the applicant's presentation and testified that:

- The design is in full compliance with the Downtown Gateway District Ordinance of the City Code of New Castle to "create a pedestrian oriented neighborhood commercial District and enhance the aesthetic appearance along streets, parking lots and other pedestrian areas" and to "accentuate building entrances, provide shade trees at 40' on center, provide street lighting ... for adequate sidewalk illumination, and provide benches or other street furniture at appropriate locations".
- The plan follows the parking lot standards for landscaping in §230-28 G.
- The Code does not require visual separation for the parking lot; however, 6 foot high 100% opaque fencing was added to the plan at the request of the applicant subsequent to a meeting the applicant had with neighbors to the rear.
- Lighting at the rear of the property will be from the building. Mr. Tucker added that shielding will be added to prevent light migrating onto adjoining properties.
- Mr. Burcham testified as to the types and sizes of trees and shrubbery on the plan.

At Mr. Tucker's request, Mr. Ziegler testified that the amount of open space being preserved is 25%.

Mr. Tucker introduced Mr. Kevin Wilson, architect for the applicant. Mr. Wilson testified that:

- He prepared the elevation on page 15 of the presentation.
- He followed the Downtown Gateway Design Standards in preparing the plan.
- The elevation plans comply with the provisions of the Downtown Gateway District. Mr. Wilson testified as to the materials and styles in the plan.

Mr. Ziegler explained the improvements DelDOT is proposing for the intersection that includes traffic calming and improved pedestrian walkways. He stated that the applicant's plan includes a 10 foot wide sidewalk in front that ties into the proposed DelDOT pedestrian improvements. Mr. Ziegler explained current public transportation bus stops in relation to the applicant's project and testified as to approximate distances from the applicant's project to various locations in the City. He stated that the site has water and sanitary sewer infrastructure. Mr. Ziegler stated that catch basins are included in the plan that will ultimately tie into the drainage system into Broad Dyke Marsh. Mr. Ziegler stated that the proposed plan fits in with other uses in the area as a mixed-use area.

Mr. Tucker noted that:

- The consolidation of parcels is encouraged in the Comprehensive Plan.
- The closing of two curb cuts on Delaware Street and the addition of a single curb cut on 7th Street is also encouraged.
- The reduction of the number of driveways is achieved by the plan.
- The landscaping and fencing minimizes the impact to substantially injure neighboring properties.
- The idea of the Downtown Gateway District is embedded in the Comprehensive Plan and portions of §230-57 incorporates language directly out of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Tucker submitted a number of letters to the Board in support of the project.

Mr. Tucker stated that he spoke with the City Police Chief and the Fire Chief of Good Will Fire Company about impact. The Fire Chief felt the plan was consistent with respect to sprinkler system and connection for fire trucks. He asked that a 4 inch connection be installed. The Police Chief had concerns about traffic and Mr. Tucker expressed his hope that testimony from the applicant's traffic engineer addressed those concerns.

Mr. Tucker noted they are not aware of any issues with public schools, and stated that any required impact fees would be paid.

In response to concerns of parking from the site migrating into the neighborhood, Mr. Tucker noted that the area is quite walkable, and he submitted photographs of 7th Street taken at various times and on various days. He opined that there appears to be adequate parking at various times on various evenings.

Mr. George Velitskakis was sworn in by Mr. Griffiths. Through questioning by Mr. Tucker, Mr. Velitskakis testified that:

- After doing research, he chose apartments to develop on the site because of the demand for housing in Delaware, as reported by the National Multi-Family Housing Counsel, the National Apartment Association and the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce that "the State of Delaware needs to build 830 new apartment homes each year to meet demand".
- He discussed the project with neighbors to the rear of the site.
- The neighbors expressed concerns regarding parking light lighting, vehicle lighting at night, and covering the dumpster and these concerns were addressed.
- The 6 foot fence was added based on conversations with the neighbors.
- The project is an improvement over the current use and a beautiful addition to the town that will brighten up the gateway.
- Mr. Velitskakis stated he was on the Transportation Advisory Board for the City of New Castle and proposed DelDOT improvements for the area were discussed, including railroad crossing improvements. Mr. Velitskakis explained his understanding of the proposed DelDOT improvements.

At Mr. Tucker's request, Mr. Velitskakis stated why he purchased the parcels and his opinion that the project is a perfect example of what the City has planned for the Gateway, it will bring new energy to this part of town, it will bring additional support to local businesses and it will help fill the demand for housing.

In response to questions from Mr. Zorrer, Mr. Velitskakis stated that the current building on the property is approximately 30-35 feet high, and the project is proposed with 32 units based on maximizing the space and available parking to support the units.

Mayor Quaranta moved the Hearing to Public Comment.

Public Comment

William Cannon – 703 Tremont Street

Mr. Cannon stated that the applicant's property line is in dispute with his mother's property at 703 Tremont Street, contending that there is a triangular shaped section that Mr. Velitskakis plans to use for five parking spaces that actually belongs to Mr. Cannon's mother. Mr. Cannon submitted documentation depicting the area in question. Mr. Cannon stated that he and his mother do not wish to sell the portion of land in question and asked the Board to table a vote on the application until the land dispute is settled.

Paola & Lawrence Ciskanik - 36 W 7th Street

Ms. Ciskanik spoke in opposition of the application, requesting that no decision is made by the Board of Adjustment until the following items are resolved:

- That the property dispute is to be settled.
- That the Riveredge development on Lukens Drive will significantly increase the number of apartments that Mr. Velitskakis states is in need.
- That a traffic impact study be done on 7th Street.
- That a flood impact study be done.
- That the application be brought to City Council after the April 2023 election.

In addition, Ms. Ciskanik brought up traffic, parking, the historic nature of the area, and ingress/egress.

Victor Bryson - 6021 Clark Street

Mr. Bryson spoke in opposition of the application, opining that the proposed apartment complex is too close to the railroad tracks; the project will not hold up over time; and drainage. He opined that the Comprehensive Plan is not working for the City of New Castle. He stated that the people of New Castle do not want the project and urged the Board to listen to the city residents.

Sally Venton – 2nd Street

Ms. Venton spoke in support of the project, opining that the property has deteriorated over time and the city deserves better by replacing what is there with a building that will enhance the city and the property. She stated that more density will support local businesses and restaurants; onefloor living is in demand; and it will allow new people to move into New Castle and support New Castle City Board of Adjustment March 30, 2023

businesses and the city. Ms. Venton stated that she supports development and urged the Board to vote in favor of the application.

Alicia Carson – 702 Delaware Street

Ms. Carson spoke in favor of the application, noting New Castle is a wonderful place to live.

Toni Bakry - 109 Demers Landing

Ms. Bakry spoke in favor the application, opining that additional rental units are needed in New Castle.

Ted Megginson - 605 Tremont Street

Mr. Megginson spoke in opposition of the application, opining that 7th Street is too narrow and has trouble accommodating the parking there today.

Barbara Wright - 123 W 7th Street

Ms. Wright spoke in opposition of the application, expressing her concern with parking and more traffic on her street.

William Cannon – 703 Tremont Street

Mr. Cannon stated there is no hurry to vote on the application.

Mike King – 242 E 12th Street

Mr. King spoke in support of the application, opining that the City, the tax base and the community will benefit from the project.

Rod Miller – East 3rd Street

Mr. Miller spoke in opposition of the application, opining that a better use of the site would be single-family homes. He added that traffic is also an issue and opined that the site is a terrible place to build an apartment building.

Mike DiAlessandro – 607 Tremont Street

Mr. DiAlessandro spoke in opposition to the application, noting parking issues.

Bob Blakley – 26 Edgewood Drive

Mr. Blakley spoke in opposition of the application, noting traffic issues, the size of 7^{th} Street, overflow parking, and the property dispute. He asked that the matter be tabled until a traffic study can be done on 7^{th} Street.

Eric Frederick – 102 W 7th Street

Mr. Frederick spoke in opposition of the application, noting that 7th Street is residential and opining that it is not designed to handle the traffic and overflow parking; the corner at Delaware and 7th is difficult to navigate; and suggesting that a traffic study be done on that side of 7th Street.

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<u>Pete Toner – 603 Delaware Street</u> Mr. Toner spoke in favor of the application.

Jackie Metz – 102 W 7th Street

Ms. Metz stated that 7th Street is not a State street and a traffic study needs to be done on 7th Street between Delaware Street and South Street.

Victor Bryson - 6021 Clark Street

Mr. Bryson stated that there were multiple residents who attended meetings relative to new apartment buildings and they were not listened to by the Commissions and Boards.

Mayor Quaranta paused the meeting for a five minute recess at 9:07 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 9:14 p.m.

Mayor Quaranta read letters submitted to the Board of Adjustment through the City office into the Record:

Letters In Opposition Leanne & Frank Moriarty Kathy Lawson Ioannoni Jackie Metz Thomas & Donna Rash <u>Letters In Support</u> Chris Cashman Susan Hagar Jan Henion – 27 W 6th Street Aaron Vederman – 26 Delaware Street G. Douglas Lovett – 208 Delaware Street Chris Castagno

Mayor Quaranta invited Mr. Tucker to offer a rebuttal.

Mr. Tucker stated that:

- The Comprehensive Plan was adopted into law and carries the force of law. It is a blueprint for how land should or should not be developed, and the rules of the Comprehensive Plan have been followed in the application.
- A traffic study was performed by Mr. Ziegler on Delaware street that mentioned 7th Street and the positioning of the access to the site at the request of the applicant. DelDOT did not require a traffic study because it was not warranted under Code based on the number of trips generated by the project. The State's Office of State Planning coordination PLUS review states:

Per Section 2.2.2.1 of the Manual, Traffic Impact Studies (TIS) are warranted for developments generating more than 500 vehicle trip ends per day or 50 vehicle trip ends per hour in any hour of the day. Using the 11th edition of the Institute of Transportation Engineers' Trip Generation Manual, DelDOT estimates that the subject development, consisting of 32 multifamily low rise housing units, would generate 216 vehicle trip ends per day and estimates the weekday morning and evening peak hour trip ends at 33 and 34, respectively Therefore, a TIS would not be required."

• The applicant will be making some road improvements that will help the traffic situation.

• Mr. Tucker noted that the project is in a Level 1 Investment area and quoted again from the State Office of State Planning coordination January 23, 2023 letter:

Investment Level 1 reflects areas that are already developed in an urban or suburban fashion, where infrastructure is existing or readily available, and where future redevelopment or infill projects are expected and encouraged by State policy. Development in Level 1 is consistent with the 2020 Strategies for State Polices and spending; therefore, the Office of State Planning Coordination has no objections to this site plan provided it meets the relevant codes and ordinances of the City of New Castle.

- The applicant will move the location of the dumpster to be near the railroad tracks and away from properties to the rear of the site.
- The property line dispute was researched and case law was provided to the City Solicitor prior to the Hearing that states that the applicant is the owner of the strip in question Mr. Griffiths added that as long as there is a general finding of legal possession it is not the Board's role to resolve those types of disputes between neighbors, it is the Court's role to do that if there is a question. If it is not already a part of the Record a copy of the attorney's letter will be submitted for the Record.

Mr. Griffiths reviewed documents and case law from the applicant and stated that the Board can consider the land dispute in making a decision, but it is not a complete bar from the Board making a decision. Mr. Griffiths identified the parcel in dispute. Mr. Tucker stated that in his experience the Courts discourages local zoning boards from getting involved in property disputes that can be resolved in a private forum. Mr. Tucker identified remedies available to Mr. Cannon.

Mr. Velitskakis was sworn in by Mr. Griffiths. Mr. Velitskakis testified that he met with Mr. Cannon several weeks ago regarding the property in dispute. At that time Mr. Velitskakis told Mr. Cannon that his attorney had informed him that the property in question was his. Mr. Canon stated he has a deed showing that the property is his mother's.

- The applicant meets the requirement of 1.5 parking spots per unit.
- The photographs of 7th Street were not modified in any way and were not taken with a wide-angle lens.
- The property is not in the Historic Zone.
- Mr. Tucker asked Mr. Ziegler to respond to comments about the property being the flood plain. Mr. Ziegler stated that the elevation of the building will be 2.5' above the flood plain, which is consistent with Code and required by Law. In addition, the plan will be reviewed by FEMA. He added that the site is being tied into a drainage system that drains Delaware Street and West 7th Street.

Mr. Tucker stated that any comments from Mr. Rogers would be welcome. Mr. Rogers stated that the concept plan was submitted to the Planning Commission at its December 29, 2022 meeting for review and recommendation to the Board of Adjustment. The Planning Commission found that the proposed development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended that before proceeding to the Board of Adjustment the applicant provide (1)

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preliminary architectural plans and preliminary site plans demonstrating commitment to the design standards contained in §230-21.1G of the Zoning Ordinance and (2) written responses to the PLUS comments. Mr. Rogers stated that the applicant satisfied both of those conditions. PLUS comments were returned on March 28th.

A motion to adjourn the Hearing on 702 & 706 Delaware Street and move to the Business Meeting was made by Mr. Irwin, seconded by Mr. Zorrer, and unanimously carried.

Mr. Zorrer stated that there is nothing in the Code that talks about the number of units per acre with the exception of a mixed use building that limits the number of units to 10 units per acre. He stated that if it was a mixed use building, he would limit the number of units to 10 units per acre. He opined that might solve some of the parking and congestion issues. Mr. Zorrer stated that he would not approve because he would like to see 20 units per acre.

Mr. Irwin concurred with Mr. Zorrer regarding the number of units per acre. He added that traffic is a concern and he also would not approve.

Mayor Quaranta opined that the area needs a master plan, noting that the roadway is problematic, other buildings in the vicinity are unattractive, and the entire area needs to be master planned. The businesses on 7th Street are misplaced because there is insufficient parking. He opined that rental units in New Castle are in demand and stated that this project is better than many of the alternative options that can be built by right in terms of traffic and parking, including a restaurant, retail, or a drug/alcohol halfway house. Mayor Quaranta stated that residential is the least intrusive and smartest of the options available for the site. Mayor Quaranta stated that the supports the application and would vote to approve.

A motion was made by Mayor Quaranta to approve the application for a special exception as submitted.

Mr. Zorrer stated he would vote no because there needs to be more guidance in the Code regarding the number of units per acre and that he would be more inclined to accept the application if the units were in the range of 20-25 units per acre.

Mayor Quaranta asked if Mr. Zorrer wanted to make an amendment to the motion. Mr. Irwin stated he would second that amendment.

A motion was made by Mayor Quaranta to amend the motion on the floor to approve a special exception for 24 units given that the applicant has met all the other necessary conditions. Mr. Irwin seconded the motion and it was unanimously carried.

Mr. Irwin stated that he would like to see more guidance in the Code on the matter of units per acre for rental units.

Mayor Quaranta stated that the application meets all other necessary conditions of the Code.

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Quaranta called for a motion to adjourn.

A Motion to adjourn the meeting was made and seconded. The Motion was unanimously approved and the meeting adjourned at 10:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich Stenographer