

New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes
March 27, 2023 – 6:30 p.m.
New Castle Senior Center, New Castle, DE

Members Present: Matthew Lovlie, Chair
Cynthia Batty
Margo Reign
Tamara Stoner
Kristin Zumar

Absent: Brie Rivera, Vice Chair
Vera Worthy
Timothy Gibbs
Keaira Faña-Ruiz

Also Present: Chris Rogers, City Planner

Mr. Lovlie called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. The assembly rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll call followed and a quorum was not present.

Minutes

As a quorum to conduct business was not declared, approval of the February 27, 2023 Minutes was tabled until the April meeting.

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

Regarding the Comprehensive Plan, Mr. Gross urged the Commission to include a recommendation to hold up any new building projects until flooding and other issues are resolved.

Discussion of Comprehensive Plan Annual Report

Mr. Rogers noted the Annual Report is a reflection of what the Commission has done in the previous year, and that the Commissioners had asked to discuss what the Planning Commission can do proactively in anticipation of the budget season and to have a discussion with the City Administration of budgetary needs. He stated that Chapter 14 of the Comprehensive Plan (CP) includes some of the right items for further implementation of the CP; noting that if there is good reason, the Commission can also consider items that are not detailed in Chapter 14.

Mr. Rogers asked if there are any recommendations in the CP relating to land use that need to be implemented, noting that the primary tools of the CP are the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations. He opined that the 2020 CP does not include any changes to the Zoning Ordinance; whereas the 2009 CP recommended the Downtown Gateway Zone. Mr. Rogers suggested that the Commissioners consider what matters could potentially come before the Planning Commission in the future.

In response to a question from Mr. Lovlie, Mr. Rogers stated that the Planning Commission could request funding in the budget for surveys, engineering, planning, or special studies not related to a development application that would require the services of a professional consultant.

Mr. Rogers explained that the Planning Commission is required to review the CP every five years to ensure that it is still relevant to the City's needs and report to the State. Every 10 years the Planning Commission must review and adopt the CP with any necessary changes.

The Commissioners discussed items that the Commission could do proactively to benefit the City:

- **Drive the City to investigate and resolve the air quality problems identified during the Lukens Drive project evaluation.** Ms. Batty said this is clearly stated as being within the purview of the Planning Commission in the 2020 CP on page 122. Mr. Rogers opined that if the Commission wanted a report on air quality, it is something that could be requested in the budget. He added that a DNREC representative would be able to give the Commission an overview of the air quality regulatory program.
- **Do a study of rental vs. owner-occupied properties by neighborhood in New Castle to help drive happier neighborhoods.** Ms. Batty noted this is a quality of life issue, suggesting that the Commission do a study and review all areas of the City to consider what can be done to drive happier neighborhoods.
- **Initiate a greater New Castle tree program and help find funding and grants to help make it happen to beautify the whole city.** Ms. Batty noted that her idea is to plant trees in all neighborhoods in New Castle, and not just in the Historic District; adding that there is grant funding available for a tree program. Ms. Zumar stated that she recently spoke with Mr. Benson of the Tree Advisory Commission about other areas of the City that are having tree issues, and suggested that the City be approached about offering residents in those neighborhoods a discount on the purchase of native trees. Mr. Rogers noted that the Tree Advisory Commission has established a list of recommended trees that is available on the City website.
- **Education and training including the following:**
 - University of Delaware – Mr. Sean O’Neil of the University of Delaware offered to speak to the Commissioners and explain what a Comprehensive Plan is. Ms. Zumar suggested that a date for Mr. O’Neil’s talk be scheduled when as many of the Commissioners as possible can be in attendance. Ms. Batty noted that Mr. Rogers has already educated the Commissioners on what the CP is, and suggested that Mr. O’Neil speak about how to apply the CP and how other communities apply their own Plans.
 - Flood Ready Communities (part of the Coastal Management Training Program). To be held in Dover on May 12, 2023 from 9 am to noon.
 - Land Use Administration. To be held in Dover on May 24, 2023 from 9 am to noon. This is the third class needed to receive a certificate.
 - Board of Adjustment online training class to be held on April 26, 2023.
- **Partnering with other Commissions** – Ms. Zumar suggested that the Planning Commission partner with the Sea Level Rise Task Force (SLR) to discuss native vegetation that can be planted in an effort to mitigate flooding, run-off and erosion. In

response to a suggestion from Ms. Batty that the Commission receive the SLR Minutes each month, it was noted that all Commission and Board Minutes are available on the City website. Mr. Rogers gave a brief history of the efforts of the SLR to obtain capital funding and the various studies that have already been done. Mr. Rogers cautioned the Commission about involving entities that report directly to City Council because they have their own charge.

Ms. Reign opined that the University of Delaware would have other data that the Planning Commission could use. She added that there is a data analytic class being held at the University and they may be able to assist in processing any data that is acquired.

Mr. Lovlie suggested that the Commission set up a series of guest speaker workshops to be held outside the regular Planning Commission meetings that would be open to the public. Potential speakers included the University of Delaware Master Gardeners and Arasapha.

Commissioner Assignments:

- Ms. Reign will contact Mr. O'Neil to ask him to attend the May meeting.
- Ms. Zumar will contact Mr. Benson to discuss partnering with the Planning Commission in a workshop.
- Mr. Lovlie will coordinate workshop dates with the other Commissioners.

Mr. Rogers stated that the primary charge of the Planning Commission is dealing with Land Use and Land Development and the Commission has not yet been presented with a full site plan.

During discussion Ms. Batty suggested that the Commission investigate what types of businesses are planned to leave and those that are planned to come into the City. Mr. Lovlie opined that the types of businesses that come into the City is not within the purview of the Planning Commission. Mr. Rogers noted that the Planning Commission can have influence on where businesses are permitted, and that requesting a study of businesses needed in the City might be within the purview of the Commission. Regarding economic impact, he suggested going to the State Economic group to see what studies they have done. Further discussion included the types of businesses the City needs.

Comments from Commission Members

Mr. Lovlie commended Ms. Batty and Rivera for their presentation at the Community Meeting.

A Motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Rivera, seconded by Ms. Zumar, and unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer