

New Castle City Planning Commission Meeting  
Minutes  
May 22, 2023 – 6:30 p.m.  
1 Municipal Boulevard, New Castle, DE

Members Present: Matthew Lovlie, Chair  
Margo Reign  
Tamara Stoner

Absent: Kristin Zumar  
Timothy Gibbs  
Keaira Faña-Ruiz  
Vera Worthy

Also Present: Chris Rogers, City Planner  
Sean O’Neill, President, DE Chapter of APA & Policy Scientist at  
UD Biden School for Public Policy

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 to conduct business was not declared.

**Minutes**

As there was no quorum in attendance, review of the April 24, 2023, Minutes was postponed to the June meeting.

**Public Comment**

Phil Gross – 1301 13<sup>th</sup> Street

Mr. Gross thanked the Commissioners for the work they do and Mr. O’Neill for making his presentation.

**Presentation – Sean O’Neill**

Mr. O’Neill gave a presentation on Comprehensive Plans in general and a brief overview of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. Key points made during the presentation included:

- Having a Comprehensive Plan is a legislative requirement in Delaware.
- A Comprehensive Plan is designed to be a guide for citizens and developers.
- The State has a Grant Assistance Program that is intended to work with towns like New Castle to provide funding for projects that are directly related to the Goals in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. O’Neill noted that if New Castle has not connected with the Grant Assistance Program he can assist in that process. He added that grant funding is available for projects related to storm water flooding, water & sewer, sea level rise, enhancing bike and pedestrian connections, and other sustainability- and resiliency-related items.
- Mr. O’Neill stated that the City Charter is a critical document and recommended that the Commissioners review it.

- Mr. O'Neill explained the State Strategies Land Use Map and the relationship between the State Strategies Land Use Map and the local Comprehensive Plan.
- Mr. O'Neill explained the difference between the Current Land Use Map and the Future Land Use Map and the importance of those two documents as they relate to Zoning; noting that the Zoning Map must align with the Future Land Use Map per State law.
- Mr. O'Neill explained the PLUS review process as it relates to the Comprehensive Plan. In response to a question from Mr. Lovlie, Mr. O'Neill noted that PLUS comments are typically recommendations, noting that it is generally good practice to address as many of the comments as possible. He added that if a recommendation is not addressed, justification of why a recommendation is not being addressed is required. Mr. Rogers added that PLUS also reviews development plans over a certain size.
- Mr. O'Neill recommended that the Planning Commission review the State Planning Report when preparing the Comprehensive Plan Annual Report.
- A review of the Comprehensive Plan is held every five years, and it is updated every 10 years. Mr. O'Neill noted that the 5-year review can be minimal and the 10-year update is more comprehensive. Councilperson Zeltt, who was attending as a member of the audience, asked if the City could obtain Annual Reports from other municipalities. Mr. O'Neill stated he was unsure if every municipality's Annual Report was published, but opined that information could be obtained from the Office of State Planning.
- In response to a question from Councilperson Zeltt regarding the appropriateness of 1.5 parking spaces per apartment unit, Mr. O'Neill stated that calculating the number of parking spaces per unit is a complicated issue. He noted that most developments in the last 40-50 years have been over-parked, and there has been a movement to plan for less parking for most developments; adding, however, that it does depend on the details of the development. Mr. Rogers explained that 1.5 parking spaces per unit is required in the DG zone, which promotes mixed use and multi-family, and 2 spaces per unit are required in other zones per the City Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Reign asked about the Ready in 6 legislation and how it would impact New Castle. Mr. O'Neill opined that perhaps a month or two could be saved if the legislation passes. Mr. Rogers noted that recent matters the Commissioners have dealt with are anomalies, and by-right matters generally move more quickly. Mr. O'Neill added that it is also specific to the Code.

Ms. Stoner asked if there was a checklist, timeline or milestones that would help the Commissioners in planning meetings and moving toward the goal of reviewing or updating the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. O'Neill noted that for the 5-year review it would be approximately a 5-6 month process; whereas, the 10-year update would be approximately an 18-month process. He added that in general it is a good idea to have a thorough understanding of what the Comprehensive Plan and City Charter say, as well as the Zoning regulations are. Mr. O'Neill added that when giving an opinion it is good policy to reference the City Code to justify the reasoning behind that opinion.

In response to a request from Mr. Gross, Mr. Lovlie granted him permission to ask for clarification of a matter. Mr. Gross asked how multi-family and mixed use developments would

be defined relative to density. Mr. Rogers recommended that discussion be avoided, noting that Mr. Gross' question appeared to be specific to a project that may come before the Planning Commission. Mr. O'Neill responded in general terms that density is defined in the zoning and it depends on the details of the zoning district. He added that the question is very specific to the City's Zoning Code and deferred to the City Solicitor if further clarification was necessary.

In response to a question from Ms. Reign, Mr. Rogers stated that the Annual Report is due in July 2023. Mr. O'Neill reiterated that the 5-year review is due in 2025, and the 10-year update is due in 2030. He opined that work on the 5-year review would begin in the fall of 2025. Mr. O'Neill repeated his recommendation that the Commissioners review the City Charter, be up-to-date and clear on the major elements of the Comprehensive Plan, and well-versed with the Zoning Code.

### **Miscellaneous**

In response to a question from Ms. Reign, Mr. Rogers stated that it will take a few meetings to go over the form for the Annual Review. Mr. Rogers will provide a copy of the last Annual Review to the Commissioners. Mr. Rogers will also research the procedure to follow in the absence of a Mayor.

### **Next Meeting Agenda Items**

- Approve April Minutes
- Annual Report Discussion

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Lovlie adjourned the meeting at 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich  
City Stenographer