

Meeting Minutes
State College Borough Planning Commission
December 2, 2015

The State College Borough Planning Commission (PC) met on Wednesday, December 2, 2015 in the State College Municipal Building, 243 South Allen Street, State College, PA. Chairman Roeckel called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

Members Present

Michael Roeckel, Chairman, Anita Genger, Vice-Chair; Zoe Boniface, Charles Dumas, Scott Dutt, Jon Eich and Richard Kalin

Also Present

Ed LeClear, Planning Director; Anne Messner, Planner/Zoning; Denise Rhoads, Staff Assistant and Sarah Klinetob, Borough Council member

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the November 19, 2015 minutes as amended by Ms. Boniface and seconded by Mr. Kalin. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Chair Report

Chairman Roeckel had nothing to report.

Mr. Eich reported he has continued looking at Peer Communities and Auburn, AL has a community developed by CA Ventures. The building has five floors of apartments with four rooms in each apartment, two sub-levels of parking with parking on two other floors, and a full deck with an outdoor theatre. Mr. Eich noted it is required, at this site, to have one parking space per bed. He noted if CA Ventures can do that type of building in Auburn they can do the building they proposed here with one floor less and still be profitable.

Public Hour

No one was in the audience who wished to discuss items not on the agenda.

Community Planning

Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment for the Student Home Definition

Ms. Messner noted during the November 2, 2015 Borough Council meeting, Council member Sarah Klinetob, asked Council to consider an exemption to the definition of student, for Ph.D. candidate students in the State College Zoning Ordinance. Council moved this proposal to be forwarded to the State College Planning Commission (SCPC) for review and recommendation. Council has indicated they will receive the Planning Commission recommendation and hold a public hearing.

Ms. Klinetob's presentation included a brief overview of the current zoning that states all part- and full-time undergraduate and graduate students are defined as students in the Borough. She also noted the definition of "student" was first codified in 1997. Ms. Klinetob stated several years ago a proposal was brought before Council to remove "graduate students" from the definition of "student". She stated it was her understanding that the proposal was voted down

due to the belief that graduate students did not meet the neighborhoods' need for long-term residents.

Ms. Klinetob proposes that persons enrolled in part- or full-time doctoral programs be exempt from the Borough Student Home Zoning Regulations. She stated they are more like young professionals and young families than regular students

Ms. Klinetob discussed the following in regards to graduate students: 1) maturity, 2) longevity and 3) income.

She noted the methods she used to gather data for her proposal and they are: 1) questions to the Penn State Graduate School and 2) a 38-question online survey.

Some of Ms. Klinetob's information included:

- There are 4,200 persons enrolled currently in Ph.D., D.M.A. and D.Ed. programs at Penn State University (PSU).
- They are most likely to be 24 to 34 years old.
- The length of time it takes to complete a Ph.D. program at the Penn State Graduate School is approximately five years and the majority of persons completing a Ph.D. program stay at their job and in the community longer than most professionals of the same age group.
- She noted "almost all" persons enrolled in a doctoral program have some form of stipend.
- Ms. Klinetob noted most of these types of students live with significant others and seven percent of those have children.
- Ms. Klinetob stated, according to the survey, nine percent currently own their own homes with 17 percent of those homes being in the Borough.
- State College Borough has the highest percentage of persons enrolled in graduate programs living within the Borough.
- She noted that the Borough has less affordable housing than the surrounding municipalities.
- She stated that approximately 16 percent of persons enrolled in doctoral programs would ideally like to own a single-family home.
- Ms. Klinetob also stated the crime rates for these groups of person are low compared to other types of persons enrolled at PSU.
- She noted they are Earned income Tax payers.

Ms. Klinetob also noted through this survey they found several complications in the current Borough Student Home Zoning Regulations which includes: 1) the definition of student home, 2) student status of significant others and 3) how "student" status affects persons who have non-assistantship enrollment.

Finally, Ms. Klinetob stated this change is vitally important to appropriately providing expanded housing opportunities to this group of professionals and families with the Borough of State College.

Commissioners' comments:

- Mr. Dumas stated that since the MFA is a terminal degree it should be included.
- Mr. Eich noted when discussing the criminal data Ms. Klinetob might want to change it to a degree per thousands.
- He also noted she should look at other students other than doctoral students such as veterans and other returning adult students.
- Mr. Kalin stated this proposal should be looked at regarding the rationale of the original

ordinance. He noted he is concerned about the time and effort and the enforceability of it.

- Ms. Genger stated that what is proposed for graduate students would be really bad for affordable housing and mixed uses.
- Chairman Roeckel noted that a definition of students should be solidified.
- Ms. Boniface stated the questions we should be asking are why we would want young professionals to live in the Borough and what are we getting from them. She stated she believes they will bring their school age children, spending patterns and value of a diverse community.
- Mr. Dumas' comments included: 1) "student elsewhere" should be included in the definition, 2) senses that this proposal is not to exclude young professionals, 3) some weight should be given to outside agencies that teach.
- Mr. Dutt stated he is confident that landlords in town have the cash to buy homes from the older generation. He noted in the long run there will not be people aging out of their homes. He noted he would not support this proposal.
- Mr. Kalin stated the Borough has policies that are in conflict regarding encouraging the value of housing in the neighborhoods and are also in conflict with the Borough's goals on affordable housing.
- Mr. Eich referenced what the surrounding municipalities are doing. He discussed the size of the Borough which is only five square miles.
- Ms. Boniface noted that millennial generations are less interested in buying a home. She noted that persons who have inhabited their home for a long time do not like any kind of change.
- Chairman Roeckel stated he thinks the current issues with students is because of the havoc they cause.
- Ms. Genger noted there are currently plenty of graduate students sprinkled throughout the entire Borough.

Mr. LeClear stated this is a healthy discussion between the applicant and the PC. He noted we have already reached out to PSU to meet with the graduate school to talk about programs. He stated staff is working with the Real Estate Advisory Committee (REAC) on the Home Investment Program (HIP) to provide some additional information on the discussion of affordability and the housing market.

He would like to bring this discussion back to the PC after the Real Estate Advisory Committee (REAC) and the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) have their meeting and that would be sometime in January 2016.

Public Comments:

Noah Coleman at 301 S. Garner Street stated he is concerned that our Borough's current zoning is adding current pressure to homeowners. He noted we should want to attract doctoral program students. He stated this proposal is a great idea.

Susan Venegoni at 323 W. Fairmount Avenue stated she does not have a problem with this proposal only the execution of it. She noted that decisions should be made because of the vision of the Borough and not base them on how many children or how old a person is. She also asked what the Borough is doing to attract any type of homeowners.

Eric Boeldt 400 S. Gill Street stated the Borough could make it so that people with student permits would be allowed to rent to non-students and still maintain their student permit status.

Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Fence Requirements

Mr. LeClear stated the PC considered a request to amend the fence requirements in the zoning ordinance in June of 2012 as a result of the May 16, 2012 Nuisance Property Task Force meeting. At that time, a discussion developed regarding the current fence ordinance for residential uses that have front yards. There was concern expressed that the current fence ordinance creates difficulty in assessing nuisance assessments that range from police evaluations to refuse. A suggestion was made, during the meeting, to amend the fence ordinance to reduce fence height to allow for improved visibility and regulate temporary fences to eliminate screening.

Mr. LeClear stated the amendment would work towards Borough goals to improve communications between neighbors but, also provide safe pedestrian access along Borough sidewalks and assist in Police and Ordinance Enforcement evaluations.

Ms. Messner stated staff has come up with some proposed requirements to consider and they include: 1) fences and walls may be erected, altered and maintained in the context of the following provisions: 1) any fence or wall in the front yard between the front façade of the main building and the front lot line shall not exceed four feet in height. Fences within front yards shall contain openings equal to 50 percent of the area. Midblock and corner lots must comply in both front yards as depicted below.

She discussed corner lots and trying to create a clear area of site. She did note this would not address the rear of the property.

Ms. Messner noted an exception would be that split rail fences may be in the front yard, but may not exceed five feet in height. She also discussed an alternative concept which is to consider to permit fencing of 6.5 feet in the front yard as long as 50 percent of the face of the fence area is left open. Mr. LeClear stated staff can remove the vegetation requirement from this proposal.

Commissioners' comments:

- Chairman Roeckel noted in his neighborhood he found shrubs are used as fencing mostly along alleys.
- Mr. Dumas asked if present fences would be grandfathered in. Ms. Messner stated yes. He noted he would not be in favor of this proposal because specifically on North Atherton Street, a major thoroughfare, the higher height would help block out the noise and the visibility into homes.
- Chairman Roeckel stated we should not regulate the side fences only the front fences.
- Mr. LeClear stated staff has had some conversations with our police department as to what their concerns are. Those concerns are not being able to see into a yard for safety issues.
- Ms. Boniface stated there is another issue of having a fence along the street side of the house. She noted they affect the public character of the community.
- Mr. Eich agrees with not including hedges in this proposal. He noted there should be a safe sight triangle at those properties that are a corner lot.

2016 Meeting Calendar

Mr. LeClear discussed the proposed 2016 Meeting Calendar. He noted we will be having only two meetings per month in 2016.

A motion was made to approve the 2016 Meeting Calendar by Mr. Eich and seconded by Mr. Dutt. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Official Reports and Correspondence

Borough Council (BC): Mr. LeClear reported conditional use hearings for the 532 & 538 East College Avenue property and the municipal budget will be on December 7. There will be a number of upcoming budget meetings.

Redevelopment Authority (RDA): Mr. LeClear reported the HIP still has three properties listed that have not been sold and they will be on the market through the middle of December 2015.

Centre Region Planning Commission (CRPC): – Mr. Eich stated they had three meetings: 1) the first meeting was on the implementation plan for the Comprehensive Plan for 2016, 2) the second meeting was regarding rezoning the Shiloh Road area in College Township and 3) the third meeting will be looking at a report on Centre Area Transportation Authority's (CATA)'s role in the land development process.

Upcoming Meetings are:

After a brief discussion, it was decided to cancel the December 10, 2015 meeting.

The next scheduled meeting is Thursday, December 17, 2015 at 7 p.m.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Dutt made a motion to adjourn this meeting at 1:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,
Denise L. Rhoads, Staff Assistant