

Meeting Minutes
State College Borough Planning Commission
August 22, 2019

The State College Borough Planning Commission (PC) met on Thursday, August 22, 2019 at the State College Municipal Building, 243 South Allen Street. Zoe Boniface, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Members Present

Zoe Boniface, Chair; Anita Genger, Vice-Chair; Scott Dutt; Jon Eich; Mary Madden; and Ron Madrid

Members Absent

Richard Kalin

Others Present

Ed LeClear, Planning Director; Greg Garthe, Senior Planner; Jenna Wargo, Senior Planner-Redevelopment; and Denise L. Rhoads, Administrative Assistant

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Dutt and seconded by Ms. Genger to approve the August 7, 2019 meeting minutes as amended. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Chair Report

Zoe Boniface, Chair, had nothing to report.

Public Hour

No comments or concerns were heard during the public hour.

Community Planning

Redevelopment Area Planning - Fairmount Civic District

Ms. Wargo gave a presentation on the Redevelopment Area Plan process, according to the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law (URA) which included:

- Invited the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) members to attend the meeting.
- It was noted a Certified Redevelopment Area (CRA) was any area of the community that the PC designated or certified as a redevelopment area.
- Discussion of the URA and what roles each of the Authorities, Boards and Commissions played included:
 - First, it would be reviewed by the PC and they would do the following: 1) complete the plan for the redevelopment area, and 2) take action to approve certification as a redevelopment area;

- Second, it would then be reviewed by the RDA and their role would include: 1) submit the proposal to the PC for review, and 2) the PC should recommend to Council to:
 - ❖ Approve the proposal, or
 - ❖ Reject the proposal, or
 - ❖ Modify with specific changes
- Next, it would be reviewed by Borough Council (BC) and their role would include:
 - ❖ Review the proposal and the PC's recommendation,
 - ❖ Hold a public hearing before its approved,
 - ❖ Approve or reject the proposal.
- Finally, the RDA, upon approval by BC, would be authorized to take action after a Request for Quotes and a Request for Proposal were issued, and the RDA selected a developer, with development contracts approved by BC.
- She stated a URA was defined as any area, whether improved or unimproved, which a PC might find to be blighted because of the existence of the conditions enumerated in section two of this act so as to require redevelopment under the provisions of this act.
- Determined an area to be eligible was to find it blighted. The seven conditions which could cause an area to become blighted, included:
 - unsafe, unsanitary, or over-crowded conditions of the dwelling,
 - inadequate planning of the area,
 - excessive land coverage by buildings therein,
 - lack of proper light and air and open space,
 - defective design and arrangement of the buildings thereon,
 - faulty street or lot layout, and,
 - economically or socially undesirable land uses.
 - Ms. Wargo stated, in order to certify a redevelopment area, the PC did not need to find all of the blighting criteria within that area; they only needed one of the criteria to justify certification.
- Ms. Wargo discussed the boundaries of the Fairmount Civic District and they were:
 - West Foster Avenue to the north, South Allen Street to the east, West Fairmount Avenue to the south and South Fraser Street to the west.
 - This location contained 23 tax parcels for a total of 12.04 acres, including public rights of way, sidewalks and alleyways.

Mr. Eich stated the boundaries might need to be redefined.

- Ms. Wargo noted staff recommended certification of this area based on the following:
 - Inadequate of planning of the area,
 - Social and economically undesirable land uses,
 - Lack of proper open space,
 - Faulty street or lot layout,
 - Defective arrangements of buildings, lots or streets, and
 - Undesirable land uses.
- Policies for redevelopment were discussed regarding the downtown vision and strategic plan from 2002 which included:
 - As part of the State College School District Master Plan, the School Board was exploring the possibility of removing the Fairmount Elementary School from active

service. There was the potential the school building would be made available for reuse.

- The school building could be converted to moderate density residential condominiums. The density of the conversion should be established through density studies at specifications based on the developers' architectural design.
- As part of a residential conversion for the school building, the Borough should require a special site plan approval and should work with the developer to create restrictive covenants that protected the neighborhood.

Mr. Eich stated staff was missing a step. He asked about the Borough's right of first refusal. Mr. LeClear stated that period was three months. He noted staff and the RDA toured the building but understood the State College Area School District needed it for another year.

- Ms. Wargo noted the 2013 Downtown Master Plan recommended an enhanced area as a civic district and infill area with an appropriately-scaled, mixed use building. Mr. LeClear stated this was step one in multiple processes.
- Potential redevelopment goals for the PC and the RDA to consider included:
 - Phase II of the Allen Street Civic District Redevelopment Area; the two districts should complement each other,
 - Expand that part of town as an art, cultural and civic hub,
 - Build on entrepreneurial activity in town by creating spaces for small business growth,
 - Create opportunities for professional and workforce housing in the core of downtown, and,
 - 19 of the 23 parcels were contributing parcels within the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB).

PC's comments:

- Mr. Eich stated since 90% of the parcels contributed to the HARB did Housing Transitions, Inc. have homes in that area. Mr. LeClear stated there were a number of human service agencies in that area. Mr. Eich suggested to staff that they could bring a number of human service agencies together with this project and suggested staff add this to the other considerations.
- Mr. Eich also suggested allowing work space, gallery space, etc. but that would take an adjustment of our zoning ordinance. Mr. LeClear stated more work was needed regarding the zoning rewrite.
- Ms. Boniface stated she liked a number of the ideas for this plan but funding those ideas should be taken into consideration.
- Mr. Madrid asked what the current zoning of those parcels were. Ms. Wargo stated Commercial and ROA.
- Ms. Boniface stated it was not a high-risk project and Mr. Madrid noted the path was not clearly defined.
- Mr. Madrid asked what the sole statement was that was driving the process. Mr. LeClear stated staff/members would go through their own process to flesh it out.
- Mr. Eich stated this study would have a long shelf life. He noted it was not market dependent on the school taking action within 12 months. The situation would remain the same for a number of years and wanted to add to the list of considerations the adaptive reuse of the buildings already there. Mr. LeClear suggested a compromise and to plan for multiple scenarios.

- Ms. Madden stated this project should be looked at more holistically. Secondly, some of the blight criteria might be at cross purposes with each other.
- Ms. Boniface stated she was not concerned about acting prematurely on the decision about what happens to Fairmount School.
- Ms. Genger wanted to clarify that the Borough wanted to move forward with having an engineering study to find out the cost of such a project to be prepared in case the school district wanted to sell the building. Mr. LeClear stated the RDA, a separate entity, set aside funds this year to hire a design team to do a feasibility analysis of the building, looking at what uses they could test the market on. Ms. Boniface noted the RDA Chair, Sally Lenker, stated the RDA agreed with staff.

Albert Drobka, resident and architect stated the Fairmount building had no parking and could not be made 100% into a pedestrian-oriented area. He noted this project was challenging.

- Mr. Madrid noted the presentation was weak on the requirements and the pros and cons should be listed.
- Mr. Dutt stated the members should discuss how many criteria could apply.
- Mr. Madrid stated the cost benefits for the tax payers should be looked at as well.
- Ms. Madden asked for clarification of what the Borough's idea of this area was going to be: 1) redevelopment with more direction from the PC, or 2) was the Borough concerned if they did not take action, the area could become more blighted. Mr. LeClear stated it would be a combination of both and the Borough had an obligation to be prepared for whatever might occur.

Official Reports and Correspondence

Borough Council (BC): Mr. LeClear had nothing to report.

Zoning Hearing Board (ZHB): Mr. Garthe reported on the following:

- Variance - 235 Ridge Avenue
On August 13, 2019 the Zoning Hearing Board (ZHB) heard a request for a variance from Ch. XIX, Section 603.a: "Height, Dwellings not to exceed 25 feet, 2 stories." The property owners wish to remodel the attic of their two-story home to create more living space. The property is located in the R-2 zoning district. A decision is expected at the August 27, 2019 ZHB meeting.
- Special Exception - 129 South Sparks Street
On August 27, 2019 at Noon, the ZHB would hear a request for a special exception to allow an expansion of an existing office use located at 129 S. Sparks Street Per Ch. XIX, Section 965: Mixed Use District of the zoning ordinance, the ZHB was authorized to grant special exceptions in the mixed-use area of the R-3H district.
- Variance - 230 South Gill Street
On September 10, 2019 the ZHB would hear a request for a variance concerning encroachment into a side yard setback. Applicants propose to construct a side porch on a very narrow lot. The property was located in the R-2 zoning district.

Upcoming Land Development Plans: Mr. Garthe reported the PC would review a preliminary/final land development plan for 142 East College Avenue and a final plan for the James Building on Burrowes Street.

Staff Updates: Mr. LeClear stated the Borough hired Isabel Storey for the vacant planner position. Ms. Storey came from Ohio State with a housing background and would start in September. He also shared Ms. Wargo had accepted a Planner position at Ferguson Township. He thanked her for all of her hard work she accomplished for the Borough.

He also reported staff was still working on the zoning rewrite. He noted two areas of the ordinance that needed to be updated were the sign and inclusionary housing ordinances. He stated the process would be for the Zoning Revision Advisory Committee to approve, then PC, and lastly BC.

Centre Regional Planning Commission (CRPC): Mr. Eich reported the CRPC met on August 1, 2019 and reviewed copies of the Ferguson Township subdivision and zoning ordinances. He noted they were working on a bus tour this fall with the date to be determined with November 2, 2019 as a top choice. Some other areas they were considering looking at the was Northland area mobility study that Ferguson Township was carrying out, one of the student housing projects as a case study, and a mixed-use case study at the Patton Township crossing development. He noted they received information for three proposals for changes to the regions Act 537 sewage facilities plan: 1) done by PSU which would define the service area of their sewage treatment plant, the other two were being proposed by the University Area Joint Authority (one was for a new pump station at Meeks Lane that by would replace a number of other pump stations in Patton Township, and it was outside the regional growth boundary, and the other one would be for Scott Road in Ferguson Township to upgrade the existing sewage pumping station). He noted the final presentation was on the Musser Gap Tri-Valley lands study.

Upcoming Meetings

Wednesday, September 4, 2019 at Noon
Thursday, September 19, 2019 at 7 p.m.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Madrid adjourned the meeting at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise L. Rhoads
Administrative Assistant