

CHATHAM COUNTY-SAVANNAH METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

MPC PLANNING SESSION MINUTES

**ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM
110 EAST STATE STREET**

May 8, 2007

1:00 PM

Members Present: Stephen R. Lufburrow, Chairman
Robert Ray, Vice Chairman
Jon Todd, Secretary
Susan Myers, Treasurer
Russ Abolt
Douglas Bean
Michael Brown
Lacy Manigault
Adam Ragsdale

Members Not Present: W. Shedrick Coleman
Ben Farmer
Timothy S. Mackey
Lee Meyer

Staff Present: Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP, Executive Director
Harmit Bedi, AICP, Deputy Executive Director
Jim Hansen, AICP, Director, Development Services
Charlotte Moore, AICP, Director, Special Projects
Beth Reiter, AICP, Director, Historic Preservation
Dennis Hutton, AICP, Director of Comprehensive Planning
Debbie Burke, AICP, Development Services Planner
Lynn Manrique, Administrative Assistant

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chairman Lufburrow called the meeting to order and asked everyone to stand for the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Notices, Proclamations and Acknowledgements

A. Notice(s)

The next scheduled MPC Meeting will be May 15, 2007 at 1:30 PM in the MPC Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room.

III. Approval of the March 13, 2007 MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes

Mr. Ray moved to approve the March 13, 2007 MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes. Mr. Todd seconded the motion.

MPC Action: The motion to approve the March 13, 2007 MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes was carried with none opposed. Voting were Mr. Lufburrow, Mr. Ray, Mr. Todd, Ms. Myers, Mr. Abolt, Mr. Bean, Mr. Manigault, and Mr. Ragsdale.

IV. Old Business

A. Zoning Board of Appeals requested ordinance text amendment regarding Child Care Facilities

Mr. Jim Hansen reported that this request concerns special use approval for child care centers in certain districts, mostly in R-6 which is where most requests for child care occur. He reviewed for the Commission the current standards and criteria used to make decisions. The Zoning Board of Appeals has found discrepancies, and they would like to correct these. The current ordinance allows for a maximum of 75 children in a day care center in a residential district. The Zoning Board of Appeals is proposing to change this maximum number of children to 18. Exceptions could be made if such a center is associated with a church or school. A second item concerns buffering and screening. The Zoning Board of Appeals proposes that there be opaque fencing not less than six feet tall. The third item the Zoning Board of Appeals would like to clarify is that the child care center must be an accessory use when established in a residential area. The state requirement about child care is: local governments can adopt laws that are stricter than state requirements, but not less restrictive. The Zoning Board of Appeals would like to bring this forward to the Board as a text amendment at a full hearing to be decided by this body and then passed on to the Mayor and Alderman.

Mr. Lufburrow and Ms. Myers commented on the importance of protecting the neighborhoods with such policy and would like to see it move on.

V. Regular Business

A. Special Study for area bounded by Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, Gaston Street, Barnard Street and Liberty Street regarding land uses, density, transit, traffic flow and parking.

Mr. Hansen reported on this study. He noted that there have been several requests for re-zoning in this area to re-zone property from either RIP or BC zoning classification to a BC-1 zoning classification. Two motions were acted upon by the Commission, a third was continued, and a fourth will be coming before the Commission next week. At the time of the first two, both on Harris Street, the City Manager requested that the staff look at the land uses and general plan to do a quick study of the area and what would be considered appropriate land use and density. Mr. Hansen presented a visual presentation which outlined the different land use for the area in question. He identified parking issues and pointed out the current zoning for specific locations. He pointed out that by definition, the traditional commercial classification and traditional neighborhood classification both allow for commercial and residential uses. The traditional commercial emphasizes commercial and the traditional neighborhood emphasizes residential. Parking requirements are essentially the same for both. BC-1 requires no parking at all. Ms. Myers is concerned with Tattnall Street and the lack of off-street parking. Mr. Hansen commented that each case should be reviewed individually. Mr. Hansen does not believe that whole-sale changes are warranted. He believes it can still be handled on a case by case basis. The property coming before the commission next week will probably be presented with a staff recommendation to re-zone to BC-1.

Mr. Manigault expressed concern about where to draw the line for BC-1 designation. Mr. Hansen does not anticipate a problem like Mr. Manigault described since there is no major incentive for these properties to change to BC-1.

Ms. Myers noted her concern about the traffic flow on Tattnall, a street which she believes is not equipped to handle it. She doesn't want to continue channeling traffic off of Liberty onto Tattnall. She does not want to sacrifice parking for the sake of traffic flow. Mr. Hansen commented that he is not aware of any measure to use Tattnall as an arterial. Mr. Brown confirmed that there is no plan to change the nature of Tattnall.

Mr. Brown commended staff for the study of land use and zoning. Now the need is to incorporate some traffic counts along these streets and what can be done to discourage cut-through traffic and to keep traffic on the main arterial of Montgomery and the secondary arterial of Jefferson. He believes there was a study already done, possibly five years ago. The parking space deficit needs to be determined for zoning and site planning purposes.

B. Tri-centennial Plan – Unified Zoning Ordinance Update

Ms. Charlotte Moore reported to the commission on this update. Finalizing of the report should be completed by next week. She is working with the consultant to place information from the technical committee on the web site. Last Friday they met with the MPC Builders Committee. They will be speaking with the Engineering Developers Council and the Planning Academy. The next technical committee meeting is next week. They are in the process of scheduling workshops with the County Commission and City Council. June 8th is the proposed meeting date with the County Commission. The first component is finished. The next component is on the administration process. This includes the review processes, i.e. administration, public notification, appeals, and enforcement.

Mr. Brown asked Ms. Moore for any examples that could be used to illustrate to neighborhoods that a change in zoning will not be that radical nor will it be injurious to them and their property value. Ms. Moore replied that a chart will be available highlighting the current zoning and the new zoning. The land use map should prove to be useful since this has already been worked out. Mr. Brown stressed the importance of overcoming the fear of individual property owners and asked Ms. Moore to think on ways to do this.

Ms. Myers asked if there would still be grandfathered uses. Ms. Moore confirmed there would be.

Ms. Moore noted that there are currently 126 zoning districts. There will be some combining & renaming, adding, reducing, or eliminating of districts but she doesn't know yet how it will fall. Mr. Manigault reminded everyone of the difficulties in explaining these changes to the Thomas Square residents. He recommended limiting the number of eliminations in an effort to convince the neighborhoods that these changes are for the better.

C. Board & Staff Verbal Reports on National American Planning Conference

Mr. Robert Ray began the report of the conference held in Philadelphia. He attended the following sessions:

- First-timers orientation
- Dealing with hostile audiences
- Training for commissioners & planning board members
- African-American luncheon
- Breakfast for elected & appointed officials

He thanked Mr. Thomson for providing the training and information that our Commissioners receive. He found very few fellow Commissioners around the country as prepared for the job as the Commissioners in Chatham County/Savannah.

Ms. Beth Reiter attended fifteen sessions and reported on four:

- Listening and communications
- Site plan workshop
- Enforcing Ordinances and Implementing Conditions.
- Density and Regulated Design

Mr. Harmit Bedi attended traditional sessions on zoning, environment, transportation, affordable housing, urban design. He also took in some innovative sessions including:

- Understanding China
- Designing Active Communities relating to Health
- Diversity

Mr. Todd mentioned that International Paper has made an effort to improve the facades of warehouses in West Chatham giving it a more pleasing look. Some developers are using some forethought in these matters.

Mr. Dennis Hutton has been working with the short term work program of the Comprehensive Plan. He has noticed that the citizens stress the environmental protection in every category. Therefore, his goal for the conference was to find some quantitative measures he could use here. He attended the following:

- The Green Area Ratio
- Reuniting public health and planning
- Parking was a hot topic at the conference. He attended about six sessions on this topic.

Mr. Thomson thanked the commission for supporting training for the staff. He referred the commission to the handout that listed the sessions and who attended each one.

Mr. Thomson attended:

- Trenton by Trolley tour - to see the ridership on the line and also what services and improvements developed around the trolley stops.
- Land Value Taxation. The concept was not to tax the value of the land & improvement, but to tax the value of the land alone. The tax would be similar whether the land was vacant or developed, thereby providing incentive to the owner to develop the land. This may be a good concept for parts of Savannah.

Mr. Thomson had the opportunity to highlight Savannah and the Connecting Savannah project.

D. Executive Director's Report

Mr. Thomson presented the Executive Director's report. This included accomplishments, updates on projects underway, and highlights from the various departments. Items mentioned included:

- WTF ordinance is moving forward.
- Gated community access items will be on the May 15th agenda.
- Office recycling program is going well.
- Earth Day was a huge event and very successful.

Ms. Myers raised the question about having a permanent place for disposing of old paint cans.

- West Savannah zoning went through the City and is complete.
- The software program with the county to log development and to communicate between the MPC and the county has been very labor intensive. The new program goes live on June 1st. This program tracks the process from the beginning of the application to the completion.
- Downtown Master Plan – public meeting May 23 and 24.
- Comprehensive Plan will probably be published later this month.
- The Chairman had his first Chairmen's meeting with other boards that are part of the MPC.
- Citizens Planning Academy - well attended and successful thus far
- SAGIS Board meeting will be on May 23, 2007. Mr. Thomson would like to introduce the SAGIS staff at the June 5th Planning Meeting and have the SAGIS Director report to the Commission.
- Master Address Database – two people in the field full time for 3-4 months verifying addresses. City of Savannah is completed. Unincorporated Chatham County is nearly finished. Tybee Island, Port Wentworth, Bloomingdale are in process. Meeting with the police chief soon because the 911 system issue is out there. We are working to make the master address database correct for all the other uses.

Mr. Lufburrow spoke with Chief Berkow to discuss similar and repetitive addresses within the various municipalities in Chatham County. There appears to be a desire by all communities, not just the ones in the unincorporated county, to allow the MPC to act as a clearing house for street naming in new developments in an effort to regulate the master address database. Mr. Thomson is optimistic that the communities will cooperate. This is a major project for SAGIS.

- Web page development – adding a feature (a blog) that will be used for the Unified Zoning Update. It will allow citizens to interact with the MPC. Once it's operational for the Zoning, another one will be set up for the Citizens Planning Academy.
- Finance committee – reviewed quarterly budget.

E. Other Business

Earlier in the meeting Mr. Manigault raised the question of the parking lot on Abercorn where the new Publix will be built. Mr. Hansen explained the status of the Publix project. He pointed out that it had been approved by staff in February 2007. It did not need to be brought before the MPC. There is no change in their footprint. Regarding parking, they are not required to do anything different, but they are putting in additional tree islands near Abercorn. Mr. Manigault believes it was an omission on the Commission's part not to require them to improve the parking lot. Mr. Hansen mentioned that lighting and more planting islands were going to be added, but as the ordinance now stands, there was nothing the staff could require Publix to do with the parking lot. They meet all the requirements of the code. If it had not conformed, then it would have been presented to the Commission.

Mr. Bean asked fellow Commissioners to be more patient before calling the question for a vote. He felt that discussion and questions were cut off pre-maturely in some instances.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the May 8, 2007 MPC Planning Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP
Executive Director