

CHATHAM COUNTY-SAVANNAH METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

MPC COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING MEETING MINUTES

**MPC CONFERENCE ROOM
110 EAST STATE STREET**

December 9, 2008

1:00P.M.

Members Present:

Jon Todd, Chairman
Shedrick Coleman, Vice Chairman
Susan Myers, Treasurer
Russ Abolt
Doug Bean
Ben Farmer
Lacy Manigault

Members Not Present:

Adam Ragsdale, Secretary
Michael Brown
David Hoover
Stephen Lufburrow
Timothy Mackey
Robert Ray

MPC Staff Present:

Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP, Executive Director
Jim Hansen, AICP, Director, Development Services
Charlotte Moore, AICP Director Special Projects
Melony West, Director Finance & Systems
Beth Reiter, AICP, Director Historic Preservation Planner
Dennis Hutton, AICP, Director of Comprehensive Planning
Amanda Bunce, Development Services Planner
Sarah Ward, Preservation Planner
Sabrina Finau, Administrative Assistant
Constance Morgan, Administrative Assistant

I. CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

Chairman Todd called the meeting to order at 1:05 P.M. and asked that everyone stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation. He explained the agenda for the benefit of those who were attending the meeting for the first time.

II. NOTICES, PROCLAMATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A. Notice(s)

On December 16, 2008, the Public Information Center will be dedicated in honor of the late Lee Meyer, former MPC Commissioner. The dedication will be at 1:00 PM in the Public Information Center located at 110 East State Street.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A. October 14, 2008 MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes

Ms. Myers **moved** to approve the October 14, 2008 MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes as submitted. Mr. Coleman seconded the motion.

MPC Action: The motion carried with none opposed. The motion was to approve the October 14, 2008 MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes as submitted. Voting were: Mr. Todd, Mr. Coleman, Ms. Myers, Mr. Abolt, Mr. Bean, Mr. Farmer, and Mr. Manigault.

Chairman Todd stated that due to the lack of a quorum this vote will be ratified at the next MPC Planning Meeting.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

None

V. REGULAR BUSINESS

A. Demolition Issues

Beth Reiter, Director of Historic Preservation, gave a brief presentation on the City's inaugurated Project Enforce. This project focused on a series of 100 worst building lists identified by Property Maintenance. The City of Savannah is seeking to have these properties rehabilitated, secured or demolished. She described the use of preservation as a strategy to eliminate blight, and outlined several partnerships that are available to help the City Council achieve the goal of increasing affordable housing stock. The areas discussed were the Victorian District and the Thomas Square Trolley District and Cuyler Brownsville Neighborhood.

Ms. Reiter added that once these properties reach the MPC for review, the historic structures have been through the City's legal process thus, the time line has virtually run out to save them. The dilemma then becomes a conflict between eliminating blight and retaining neighborhood character. With effort and coordination, both goals can be met and demolition of historic property can become an action of last resort.

Discussion

Mr. Farmer askeded who would be involved in this process and if there was a timeline.

Ms. Reiter replied that it would be a joint action. MPC preservation staff will work with Ms. Juanita Simmons of Property Maintenance, and the new Director of the Historic Savannah Foundation who will be coming on board next week. This process has already begun. If this is not moved forward 75 buildings will

be lost and of the 300 worst buildings 25% are historic.

Ms. Myers asked if there was a role for the MPC Board in this process. She also voiced concerns regarding taxation and property liens.

Ms. Reiter replied that MPC staff is working to become involved in the process earlier so that if something does reach the Board it will be because staff has exhausted every opportunity. Taxation of demolition by neglect is enabled under the Blighted Buildings Act and that there are ways to relieve the liens.

Mr. Abolt requested that the MPC Board not undermine enforcement staff.

Mr. Manigault asked Ms. Reiter to recap or clarify the concerns regarding taxation.

Ms. Reiter answered that under the Blighted Buildings Act a fine could be charged or a higher tax on a building that is blighted. When the building is repaired the tax would be lowered.

Mr. Bean congratulated Ms. Reiter and her staff on their involvement.

Chairman Todd requested that Ms. Reiter follow up on the City's availability to attend future meetings in order to provide further clarity on the matter.

Jessica Pedigo, Historic Savannah Foundation, explained assistance programs that are available through HSF. She explained the process to show clear property titles.

Virginia Brown, Executive Director for Habitat for Humanity, stated that their only obstacle for working in the Historic District is financing. She stated that first and foremost the objective of Habitat is to provide safe, decent, affordable housing. Applicants for Habitat for Humanity houses are allowed to have a maximum of \$20,000 a year total income. The property in the Historic District far exceeds this amount. She explained the Habitat criteria for rehabilitation and property development.

B. Historic Ordinance Revisions Status Report

Sarah Ward presented the Board with a status update on the Historic Ordinance Revisions. A 19 member committee was appointed to review the current ordinance and recommend amendments, taking into consideration the recommendation of the Downtown Master Plan, the Tricentennial Comprehensive Plan, and issues that have been problems with implementing the ordinance. The Historic District Revisions Committee considered three key components: height, lot coverage, and large-scale development when suggesting changes to the ordinance. All meetings are open to the public and a public comment period is provided each week. All information provided at the meetings is available on MPC website.

Jerry Lominack, HDRC Member, stated staff has done an incredible job while dealing with the public. He hopes that once the ordinance is adopted that the proposals made by the committee will be approved and that they will vastly improve the Historic District Zoning Ordinance.

C. Unified Zoning Ordinance Status Report

Charlotte Moore gave a brief PowerPoint presentation relating to the status of the Unified Zoning Ordinance. She identified the work that is presently underway: 1) analyzing lot sizes and housing types in urban predominately residential neighborhoods in order to develop Traditional Residential zoning districts; 2) working with the City and County to develop an open space requirement for small-lot single family development; 3) developing a functional roadway classification and access management system; 4) preparing a lighting ordinance; 5) preparing an outdoor storage and display ordinance; 6) working with the City and County Public Information Offices to produce material, including a video to inform the public about the Unified Zoning Ordinance.

Amanda Bunce briefly highlighted the results of the newly created conversion zoning maps. The map shows the existing zonings and how it converts to the new zoning districts. She explained the possible approaches: 1) rezone to the most equivalent district; 2) revisit after UZO adoption to correct persistent problems; and 3) rezone the property to the most appropriate district at the time the UZO is adopted. She also gave examples of district conversions along with the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Mr. Coleman commented that he hopes that staff goes in the direction of the remapping instead of the rezoning.

Ms. Myers questioned how the decision would be made between rezoning or remapping.

Charlotte Moore replied that staff has been receiving feedback from the elected officials during workshops. Their response is to go with the remapping.

Ms. Myers commented that the MPC website should be made very user friendly. It is one of the biggest tools that will be used to inform the public.

Mr. Thomson explained that Noel Perkins, Director of SAGIS, is presently working to achieve this objective. He added that for those that do not have access to a computer the MPC has a Public Information Center (soon to be dedicated as the Lee Meyer's Public Information Center) where they can have computer access and a member of staff is available to assist them.

D. Hunter/Ft. Stewart Memorandum of Understanding

Dennis Hutton presented an updated study on the Hunter Army Airfield /Ft Stewart Comprehensive Plan Text Amendment and Memorandum of Understanding. The study contained several recommendations intended to establish and maintain open communications between the military, local governments, and citizens. The joint staffs also prepared a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Chatham County Commission-Savannah City Council and Hunter Army Airfield-Fort Stewart in which the entities agree to maintain open and effective communication regarding proposals for projects that may affect each other's operations.

E. Executive Director's Report

Tom Thomson gave a brief summary on questions presented to Department Heads of their vision for their Departments during the November Department Head Meeting. The questions were: 1) what are the three to five most important items you believe your department should be doing; 2) what are the three to five impediments that hinder you in accomplishing these items; and 3) what is the five year vision for your department. He stated that key MPC accomplishments for the year were also available online. He touched on accomplishments such as the Stormwater Manual by Jackie Jackson and Bethany Jewell of MPC Natural Resources Department and Transportation Department's Car Pooling, Non-Motorized Cyclist, and the CAT Teleride Manual.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business to come before the Commission the December 9, 2008 Regular Meeting adjourned at 3:40 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

Note: Minutes not official until signed.

/cm