

Meeting Minutes
State College Borough Planning Commission
January 8, 2020

The State College Borough Planning Commission (PC) met on Wednesday, January 8, 2020 at the Municipal Building, 243 South Allen Street. Ed LeClear, Planning Director, called the meeting to order at Noon.

Members Present

Zoe Boniface, Anita Genger, Jon Eich, Mary Madden, Mallory Meehan, and Ron Madrid

Members Absent

Scott Dutt

Others Present

Ed LeClear, Planning Director; Greg Garthe, Planner/Zoning Officer; John Wilson, Zoning Officer; Isabel Storey, Planner; and Denise L. Rhoads, Administrative Assistant

Mr. LeClear introduced Mallory Meehan, the newest member of the PC.

Ms. Meehan stated she was from the Pittsburgh area and had lived in State College for the last 14 year. She noted she spent eight years at Pennsylvania State University as an undergraduate in Marketing and Finance with a joint JD/MBA. Following that, she started a career in commercial real estate and transitioned back into the academic setting where she spent the past the last three years as a Clinical Assistant Professor of real estate and was now the Assistant Director of their Institute for Real Estate Studies at Smeal College.

Election of Officers

A motion to nominate Ms. Boniface for Chair was made by Ms. Genger and seconded by Mr. Eich. The vote was unanimously in favor.

A motion to nominate Ms. Genger for Vice-Chair was made by Ms. Boniface and seconded by Ms. Madden. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Eich and seconded by Ms. Madden to approve the December 4, 2019 meeting minutes as amended. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Chair Report

Ms. Boniface, Chair, welcomed Ms. Meehan to the PC. She also expressed her appreciation of Mr. Kalin's service with the PC and noted he would now be on the Zoning Hearing Board.

Public Hour

No comments or concerns were heard during the public hour.

Community Planning

Proposed Glennland-McAllister Certified Redevelopment Area

Mr. LeClear stated the Planning Department was proposing a new site for a Certified Redevelopment Area (CRA) in downtown State College and his brief overview included:

- A parking analysis would be finished sometime in the spring.
- Because land value was very high, it would make it hard to acquire new property downtown.
- Looking into public involvement electronically for future additional input.

Ms. Storey discussed:

- Expansion of pedestrian-centered infrastructure had numerous benefits which included:
 - Reduced carbon emissions.
 - Reduced mental and physical health risks.
 - More opportunities for various business development.
 - More accessibility of local amenities.
 - Increased social and economic cohesion.

Next discussed: The Urban Redevelopment Act (URA) of 1945

- The URA was guidance for redevelopment of blighted areas according to community objectives and plans while also providing legal and financial tools to carry out projects.
- Required PC's to prepare a plan for any CRA.
- 7 Conditions for Blight:
 - ❖ Unsafe, unsanitary, or over-crowded conditions of the dwellings.
 - ❖ Inadequate planning of the area.
 - ❖ Excessive land coverage by the buildings therein.
 - ❖ Lack of proper light, air, and open space.
 - ❖ Defective design and arrangement of the buildings thereon.
 - ❖ Faulty street or lot layout.
 - ❖ Economically or socially undesirable land uses.

While only one condition was necessary for classification, staff suggested the four below.

- Lack of proper light, air, and open space – several dark sections, lack of openness to downtown, and lack of greenery throughout streets.
- Excessive land coverage by the buildings therein - lack of outdoor pedestrian space, the open eating area on McAllister was not inviting, and need to expand upon public art.
- Inadequate planning of the area – lack of pedestrian-oriented infrastructure outside of Beaver Avenue.
- Faulty street layout – narrow sidewalks along Calder Way and no sidewalks along Humes Alley (goal would be to balance the needs of both pedestrians and vehicles).

Ms. Storey noted within the CRA there were 10 tax parcels, 44 addresses, and 3.95 deeded acres. The area was bounded by Humes Alley, McAllister Street, East Calder Way and Beaver Avenue. She stated the inner streets were South Pugh Street and McAllister Alley.

Ms. Storey noted in the 2013 Downtown Master Plan the long-term vision for Calder Way included:

- Noted as one of four streets with the most potential for enhancement.
- Emphasize pedestrian-centered, funky character.
- Service and infrastructure alley.
- Attractive storefronts and public art.
- Expand pedestrian-oriented infrastructure for a “shared space”.

Ms. Storey discussed the redevelopment goals which included:

- Expand upon existing pedestrian-oriented infrastructure and assets to cover the entire District and ultimately to other alleys and the rest of Calder Way.
- District had a lot to offer in terms of variety of businesses to users.
- Bring balance to Calder Way as a street for everything: pedestrians, cyclists, motor vehicles, service trucks, and infrastructure.
- Make it a “complete street”.

PC's comments

- Ms. Genger asked about West Penn Power (WPP) and their utilities. Mr. LeClear stated WPP refused to bury the utilities because they considered State College to be rural and would require the Borough to pay for burying the lines.
- Mr. Eich asked what the major structures were surrounding this area. Mr. LeClear stated the Pugh Street garage, Glennland building, Calder Square and the other Friedman properties, along with McAllister deck, The Brewery, and residential properties owned by Rodney Hendricks.
- Mr. Madrid asked what the original intent was for Calder Way and what the cost would be to the residents. Mr. LeClear stated the original intent was for a service alley to provide access for some properties in the back and to provide a utility corridor. He also stated staff received a lot of feedback regarding a more pedestrian structure. Mr. LeClear stated the Downtown Master Plan understood the need for balance in this area regarding services and pedestrians.
- Ms. Madden stated she hoped both the physical design and the management side would be looked at closely. She noted she was concerned about vacant shop fronts in the downtown and the market/economics of this area.
- Mr. Madrid pointed out the commercial entities that would front this CRA should note what their contribution to this effort would be. He noted there would be a significant improvement to the properties and wanted them to share the cost with the residents of the Borough.
- Mr. Eich asked if it was possible to have the alley remain one-way for vehicles and two-way for bicycles. Mr. LeClear stated staff would look at this.
- Ms. Boniface stated she was looking forward to hearing from the businesses that faced Calder Way and what the Downtown Improvement District had to say.

Eric Boeldt, 400 South Gill Street, and Chair of the Design Review Board (DRB), noted after the DRB meeting, it was discussed what would happen if the Borough built up to the zoning limit would there be enough utilities. Mr. LeClear stated, two years ago, Public Works entered

into a contract with Gannett Fleming to upgrade the sewer system. He noted the Borough also received tapping fees from developers when they applied for permits.

- Mr. Eich stated from the perspective of the water authority from the Municipal Planning Organization, step one of the Atherton Street improvements from Park Avenue to South Atherton Street would be rebuilding the water line for additional capacity. Mr. LeClear noted there would be conduit, water/sewer, fiber, electrical, and storm water needs, and the Borough wanted to do the design comprehensively.

2020 Work Program

Mr. LeClear's overview included:

- Every year a draft work program was prepared by staff for review by Council
- He discussed, briefly, the mandatory items.
- He noted staff would be focusing on a meeting in the second quarter with neighborhood leadership.
- He stated staff would be combining some tasks regarding the zoning rewrite. The Zoning Revision Advisory Committee would meet late spring and summer spending time on revisions then forwarding on to the PC in the third and fourth quarter with something for Council to review in 2021.
- He noted staff was looking at a zoning ordinance for Airbnb, tourist homes, etc.
- There would be in-house revisions on the sign ordinance, and an Inclusionary Housing ordinance review later in the year.
- Mr. LeClear also noted the fraternity issues would be a priority in 2020.

PC's comments

- Mr. Eich suggested adding an extra PC meeting September through November and devote one strictly to the zoning ordinance. Mr. LeClear stated staff would need to check with Administration and also look at their fall schedule.
- Ms. Madden asked if the term "tourist home" was a Supreme Court term or our local ordinance term. Mr. LeClear stated it was in our local ordinance.
- Mr. Eich suggested some changes to the Work Program information.
- Mr. Madrid suggested staff should meet with the Neighborhood Coalition in the first quarter instead of waiting until the third quarter in order for them to have an opportunity to review the information.

A motion to approve the 2020 Work Program as amended was made by Mr. Eich and seconded by Ms. Genger. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Official Reports and Correspondence

Borough Council (BC): Mr. LeClear reported BC reorganized this past Monday with Jesse Barlow elected as Council President. It was also Mayor Ron Filippelli's first meeting. He noted the temporary closure of Allen Street was asked to be put back on the agenda and would be discussed at the meeting on January 13, 2020. Mr. Garthe stated the conditional use hearing for the Core Spaces would be heard on January 13, 2020 as well.

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

1. Variance - Foxdale Village

On November 26, 2019, the ZHB heard a request for a variance to allow paving, curbing, sidewalks, and plantings within a utility easement area on property Foxdale Village intended to purchase. Per Ch. XIX, Section 2001(b)(7) of the zoning ordinance, structures and other obstructions were prohibited within utility easements. The variance was granted at the December 10, 2019 ZHB meeting.

2. Appeal of Zoning Officer's Determination - 704 McKee Street

On December 10, 2019, the ZHB heard an appeal of the Zoning Officer's determination. The Zoning Officer determined a recently constructed fence had a slight encroachment into the public right-of-way. A decision was expected at the January 14, 2020 ZHB meeting.

Upcoming Land Development Plans: Mr. Garthe reported on the items below:

- Final for 706 and 708 South Atherton Apartments (formerly 430 W. Irvin Avenue)
- Final for Pennsylvania State University (PSU) West Campus Substation
- Preliminary for PSU West 2 Building

Ms. Genger noted PSU was closing off some parking on campus already and asked where those spaces would be moved to. Mr. LeClear stated Rob DeMayo, PSU Transportation Director, would be able to answer the question.

Staff Updates: Mr. LeClear reported the Senior Planner-Redevelopment Specialist position was still open.

Centre Regional Planning Commission (CRPC): Mr. Eich had nothing to report.

Revised 2020 Meeting Calendar: A motion was made by Mr. Eich and seconded by Ms. Genger to approve the revised 2020 meeting calendar. The vote was unanimously in favor.

2020 Conflict of Interest Memorandum & Policy: Mr. LeClear noted the policy was required to be distributed at the beginning of every year for informational purposes.

Upcoming Meetings

Thursday, January 23, 2020 at 7 p.m.

Wednesday, February 5, 2020 at Noon

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Madrid adjourned the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise L. Rhoads
Administrative Assistant