

Submitted November 10, 2021

Approved November 10, 2021

**MINUTES OF THE ROCKVILLE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING NO. 18-2021
Wednesday, October 27, 2021**

The City of Rockville Planning Commission convened in regular session
via WebEx at 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday, October 27, 2021

PRESENT

Suzan Pitman - Chair

Anne Goodman John Tyner, II
Charles Littlefield Sam Pearson

Absent: Andrea Nuñez

Present: Nicholas Dumais, Senior Assistant City Attorney
Jim Wasilak, Chief of Zoning
David Levy, Assistant Director, Planning and Development Services
Clark Larson, Principal Planner
Larissa Klevan, Principal Planner

Chair Pitman opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m., noting that the meeting is being conducted virtually by WebEx due to the coronavirus pandemic. Rockville City Hall is closed until further notice to reduce the spread of the virus, based on guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and state and local officials.

I. DISCUSSION

A. Discussion of Comprehensive Plan Implementation Strategy

Mr. Wasilak introduced Mr. Larson and Mr. Levy to lead in the discussion of the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Strategy formulated by staff. Mr. Larson noted that staff had been collecting all of the policies, action items and other implementation items included in the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan in order to structure such items into a digital spreadsheet. Such spreadsheet would form an implementation tracking matrix to further structure the many items and goals included in the Comprehensive Plan and further assist the Commission on its overall implementation strategy for the Plan going forward. He noted that such efforts were ongoing and that the purpose of tonight's discussion was for staff and the Commission to begin to layout how it would want to implement the Comprehensive Plan in the next several years and begin to identify near term goals and implantation actions, particularly due to the city's upcoming annual budget deliberations for the Fiscal Year 2023.

Mr. Larson then presented on several implementation priorities covering several different categories including the land use, transportation, recreation and parks and other elements outlined in the Plan. Mr. Levy added that this list was developed among relevant staff from several city departments, but noted that while the Commission is tasked with creating and maintaining the Comprehensive Plan, ultimate implementation of the Plan would be within the Mayor and Council's purview. He also added that while the categories presented tonight set the framework for implementation, staff will also focus on and looks forward to discussion of the Planning Areas with the Commission.

Commissioner Tyner noted that given the many elements and the scale of the Comprehensive Plan, the Commission should be cognizant of the significant effort it will take by staff to organize such information and strategies. He also noted the need to fill current and upcoming vacancies on the Commission so that the Commission could serve to its fullest potential. Commissioner Tyner and Chair Pitman also emphasized the importance of updating the Zoning Ordinance as a near-term goal in the Plan's implementation. Mr. Larson and Mr. Levy noted that if staffing would be a concern in implementing any component of the Comprehensive Plan, the Mayor and Council could be presented with such information to decide if additional resources would be needed, such as contracting services.

Commissioner Littlefield commented that it may be helpful to prioritize the various elements based on their cost and what budgetary resources might be needed in order to complete certain projects. Mr. Larson commented that staff could reach out to other departments to obtain such information in order to further develop the priorities list.

Land Use Element

Commissioner Goodman inquired as to why Town Center was selected as the highest propriety planning area to be addressed and also asked if there were any other area plans that needed to be updated. Mr. Larson responded that Town Center was probably the most dynamic of the City's planning areas as far as changing and needing to be addressed in a new context. He added that he was not aware of any other areas or neighborhoods that were anticipating an update to their neighborhood plan other than the Montgomery College area, as the college is currently updating their facilities plan, with the City working in concert. Mr. Levy added that Town Center was the oldest of the neighborhood plans and the area is clearly a focus of the community for its continued vibrancy. Thus, updating both the planning area and Town Center master plan would be beneficial for the City. He further advocated for, and Commissioner Littlefield concurred, developing a planning schedule for the updating of the City's neighborhood plans so that all could be current and provide clarity in one document for each area.

Commissioner Tyner noted the importance of the Commission addressing future changes in neighborhoods such as the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) site on North Stonestreet Avenue and the expansion and implementation of the County Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system along Rockville Pike. Commissioner Pearson indicated his support for the land use element priorities identified by staff. Chair Pitman advocated the importance of updating the Zoning

Ordinance and Zoning Map to fully implement the vision of the Comprehensive Plan along with putting resources and creativity towards updating plan for the Town Center planning area.

Chair Pitman also inquired about the staff resources needed to complete the ongoing Rockville Metro Station Community Visioning and Concept Design Study. Mr. Larson responded that such study was primarily led by WMATA and its design consultant. He added that the City has worked with WMATA as one of its community partners to advise and relay options to the Mayor and Council of prospective designs for the station in order to provide feedback to WMATA on further development and recommendations. He added that late spring of 2022 would be a probable end date for the study so that WMATA could move forward on working with developers to design and construct improvements on and around the station site in their redevelopment efforts.

Commissioner Littlefield inquired if there was a financial scope to which the study and redevelopment would take for the Metro station. Mr. Larson responded that there was not an unlimited budget for such study, but also added that WMATA had been flexible in considering various alternatives to potential station design schemes. Mr. Levy added that the City could also do an analysis and put forth additional resources to alternatives that it feels would be a desirable option for the station. He added that it was his impression that WMATA would be welcoming of alternatives that included redevelopment of the station site due to the increased ridership that it could potentially generate.

Transportation Element

Mr. Larson and Mr. Levy noted the ongoing development of the City's Pedestrian and Bikeway Master Plans, led by the Department of Public Works. They noted that such plan was being anticipated to be introduced to the Planning Commission sometime in late spring or early summer of 2022 for its input.

Commissioner Goodman noted that she would like more emphasis placed on Policy 12 in the Transportation Element, "to evaluate standards and methodology for measuring adequate capacity of roads." She added that during her tenure on the Commission, she thought that the Commission should look at alternative ways of measuring traffic congestion in the City and Actions 1, 3 and 6 of such Policy 12 should be prioritized as a near-term actions.

Recreation and Parks Element

Commissioner Littlefield emphasized the importance of identifying and acquiring properties for use as parks as the top priority in implementation of the Plan. He noted the challenges that the City may face in terms of cost and time in acquiring such properties, but also explained that such priority should continue to be viewed by the City as an urgent matter in relation to other Plan actions. Chair Pitman concurred with Commissioner Littlefield on the importance and aggressive stance that the City should take in acquiring properties for park space.

Commissioner Goodman inquired on how resources could be generated for park acquisition by amending the Zoning Ordinance. She also commented that if a fee-in-lieu contribution was considered, it should be specified as to what purpose or project such fees would be applied to. Mr. Larson responded that the Comprehensive Plan alludes to Commissioner Goodman's position that the fee-in-lieu program need to be further developed to specify how such funds would be used, through a variety of options. Mr. Wasilak added that a text amendment was being developed to consider options associated with fee-in-lieu, including parkland dedication to further provide park space within the City.

Upon request from Chair Pitman, Ms. Klevan gave an update on the development of the RedGate Park plan. She noted that staff recently presented an update to the Mayor and Council, noting the work which had done with the Community to identify existing conditions and amenities and programs that the community would like to see at the park in the future. She added that staff was planning to present three conceptual plan alternatives to the Mayor and Council in January of 2022, and then follow up such presentation with outreach to the community to receive their feedback on the alternatives.

Community Facilities Element

Mr. Larson gave an update on the City's ongoing efforts to complete the Space Master Plan for the uses of the facilities at 6 Taft Court. Mr. Levy added that the Mayor and Council has directed City staff to move forward to establish an emergency operations center as well as distribute space for City employees that should be located at this location. He added that the Department of Public Works would be developing this plan in conjunction with other City staff.

Commissioner Goodman commented that the City should aggressively pursue relocation of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and Montgomery County Government facilities on North Stonestreet Avenue. Mr. Levy detailed the challenges to relocation of such facilities in that the County needs the sale of such properties to finance the relocation and establishment of the facilities at another location. He added that given the recently implemented rezoning of the area, the City had done all within its control to facilitate relocation and would supplement such efforts by the Mayor and Council offering testimony at the upcoming MCPS discussion on its capital improvements.

Environment Element

Mr. Larson noted that the development of Climate Action Plan was ongoing and that environmental staff could be made available to present progress on the plan to the Commission. He added that the City had completed projects to install high-efficiency lighting at certain City facilities, and noted that such efforts were ongoing.

Commissioner Littlefield inquired if water quality was addressed in any of the environmental priorities. Mr. Larson responded that water quality, while included in the environment, was more focused on the water resources element by which the priority was on the provision of drinking water, waste water treatment and stormwater management.

Water Resources Element

Mr. Larson noted that a priority for water resources would be to prepare a flood resiliency plan. He noted that many of the actions of the Water Resources Element are ongoing or apply at the time of annexation, development review, or other changes to the City's water systems.

Commissioner Tyner inquired if there were any resources available to the public to identify where potential flood areas may be. Mr. Larson responded that City has published on its website FEMA 100 and 500-year floodplain maps. He also added that there are also considerations during the development review process to identify steep slopes and other environmental issues to mitigate or prevent flooding incidents.

Commissioner Littlefield recommended that Policy action 11.3 be elevated to a priority on the Water Resources Element to identify water pollution hotspots in the City in order to further prioritize and take action on such areas that need immediate attention. The other present Commissioners concurred with this recommendation.

Economic Development Element

Mr. Larson gave an overview of the various economic development actions in progress, highlighting the recently adopted FAST initiative reforms to the development review and permitting process to allow for streamlined review for certain types of development applications.

Commissioner Tyner commented that the various actions included in the Economic Development Element are items which are the primary focus of the City's Chamber of Commerce, and the City should consider ways in which it might coordinate its efforts with the chamber to further foster economic development in the City. Mr. Levy concurred with Commissioner Tyner, noting the City's collaborative efforts with the Chamber of Commerce on assisting businesses during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and during development of the Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Tyner noted that he was a member of the Chamber of Commerce.

Housing Element

Commissioner Goodman commented that she was in agreement with the priorities set forth by staff for the housing elements, especially its focus on the provision of affordable housing. Mr. Levy also noted that an update of the MPDU program was ongoing with Housing staff and the Mayor and Council.

Historic Preservation Element

Mr. Levy noted that the City was in the process of developing the Historic Resources Management Plan Work Program as a long-term guide for actions towards Historic Preservation.

Commissioner Tyner inquired if such work program incorporated recommendations from a Professor Senkovich. Mr. Wasilak noted that those recommendations were implemented in the adopted design guidelines for historic districts which the City had implemented with the initial Historic Resources Management Plan.

Municipal Growth Element

Commissioner Tyner noted that annexation and thus growth of the City's municipal boundaries would be contingent on the actions of private property owners. Mr. Larson responded that the Comprehensive Plan anticipates conditions where the City can compel a property owner to annexation, although he added that he thought such occurrences would not be widespread across the City.

Mr. Larson inquired if the Commission would like staff to bring forth to the Commission a similar set of priorities focused on the Planning Areas. The Commissioners responded that they would like to defer consideration of the planning areas at the current moment in order to focus on updating the Zoning Ordinance while also allowing communities to advocate for their own priorities through the Mayor and Council budget consideration discussions.

Upon questioning by the Chair, Commissioner Tyner made a motion for staff to incorporate comments made by the Commission at tonight's meeting into a memorandum to be reviewed and approved by the Chair before being transmitted to the Mayor and Council, with the exception that if substantive changes were proposed, the Chair would direct staff to present the changes at the next meeting before transmitting to the Mayor and Council. Commissioner Goodman seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-0, with Commissioner Nuñez absent.

II. COMMISSION ITEMS

- A. Staff Liaison Report** – Mr. Wasilak reported that the next Planning Commission meeting would be on November 10. He noted that after the next meeting, there would be one additional meeting in the calendar year in December. Mr. Wasilak noted that waiver request would be presented to the Commission at the next meeting for locating additional rooftop equipment on a building located in King Farm which proposes a change to a life-science use. He also noted that a site plan application for the proposed Chase Bank in Town Center would be coming to the Commission for review, dependent on a pending decision over historic designation of the site's existing building.
- B. Old Business** – None
- C. New Business** – None.
- D. Minutes Approval**

Chair Pitman asked if there were any changes needed to the minutes for the Commission's October 13, 2021 meeting. Commissioner Littlefield noted a correction needed to confirm his attendance at the meeting. Commissioner Littlefield then made the motion to approve the October 13, 2021 minutes with the noted correction. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Tyner. The motion carried unanimously 3-0, with Commissioners Goodman and Pearson abstaining and Commissioner Nuñez absent.

E. FYI/Correspondence –None

III. ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission, Commissioner Littlefield moved, seconded by Commissioner Goodman, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:02 p.m. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,



Commission Liaison