

Douglas S. Wright, Jr., chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., on Wednesday, December 9, 2015, in the Conference Room, Fourth Floor, City Hall. Also present were commission members M. Brubaker, R. Campbell, and J. Stone. The following staff members were present: K. Maher, Planning Director; S. Bockmiller, Development Planner/Zoning Administrator; A. Rohrbaugh, Planner; and D. Calhoun, Secretary.

REGULAR MEETING

Roll Call.

Commission members D. Miller, R. Thomas, and J. Wheeler were absent.

Approval of Minutes:

October 28, 2015 – Regular Meeting.

MOTION: (Brubaker/Campbell) I'll recommend approval.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

November 18, 2015 – Regular Meeting.

MOTION: (Brubaker/Campbell) I'll move approval.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (ABSTAIN - Stone)

Mr. Wright asked for follow-up on several matters covered at the above meetings, including:

- At the Boards & Commission Appreciation Luncheon one of the property owners was not aware his property was on the Potential Landmarks List. Ms. Maher indicated that she spoke with the property owner at the luncheon and explained the implications of a property that is listed on the Potential Landmarks list and that it had been on the list since the early 1990s. The owner seemed content with Ms. Maher's explanation.
- Has there been any additional information about sidewalks at the future car wash on the Dual Highway at the intersection with Mt. Aetna Road. Ms. Maher noted that Mr. Ghattas will be submitting a second site plan to Washington County Plan Review & Permits with proposed road improvements. The intent, as staff understands it, is to install the sidewalks to coincide with opening of the car wash. Ms. Maher and Mr. Rohrbaugh are scheduled to meet with Washington County Planning on January 5, 2016, to discuss sidewalk issues and the City's Complete Streets initiative.

Development Review:

**Dr. Ali Medical Office Building – Howell Road, Re-Approval of Site Plan,
Case No. ZS-2005-17.**

At the request of the applicant's engineer, this case will be considered at the next meeting.

**501 Frederick Street – Alan Stone – Landscaping with Buffering Plan for Car Sales
Facility.**

Staff Report: (Copy of staff report can be found in the meeting file.) The applicant proposes to adapt this former gasoline service station for use as a small automobile sales facility. Automobile and/or truck sales facilities are governed under Section F.2.b.8 of the Zoning Ordinance, including landscaped buffer requirements, provision of adequate parking for both employees and customers, signage specifications, and requirements for site plan approval of the improvements.

Given the size of the site, the applicant would like the Planning Commission to consider an alternate plan which would be similar to that implemented at Crampton's car sales facility farther north on Frederick Street. Alan Stone's proposal includes the installation of raised planting beds along Memorial Boulevard and Frederick Street; and provision of two customer parking spaces in front of the building and four employee spaces along the alley on the west side of the property. A total of 11 car displays would be located along the two street frontages. Some vehicles may be stacked between the ell and the two customer parking spaces, which should not interfere with vehicular movement. A six-foot chain link fence has been installed from the building to the Memorial Boulevard right-of-way along the alley as a means of preventing pedestrian cut-through on the lot and to direct alley traffic more concisely into the paved portion of the alley.

The proposed work will necessitate the approval of the required minor site plan, and Mr. A. Stone would like feedback from the commission prior to submission of the site plan. Staff recommended that the applicant be advised to move forward with the minor site plan implementing this proposal with the following adjustments:

- An additional raised landscaping bed, consistent with the two proposed, be installed in the space between the alley to the west and the driveway entrance along East Memorial Boulevard.
- The interior planting area of the planting beds be at least two feet in width, not including the width of the masonry used to form the front and back walls of the planting beds. Plans do not show dimensions of the planter beds.

Staff originally recommended using an ornamental metal fence near the alley instead of the proposed chain link fencing since the Ordinance generally discourages or prohibits chain link fences adjacent to rights-of-way. Staff believes that chain link should not be encouraged adjacent to streets if at all possible, and the proposed section of fence is approximately 40 feet long. This would require a waiver of the design provisions of Article 5 which can be done if the commission is satisfied that the proposed plan meets the intent of the design standards. Staff believes the use of chain link does not meet that intent. Rose Hill Cemetery, located immediately to the west of this property, is fenced with barbed wire-topped chain link fencing. Since the staff report was written, however, it was brought to staff's attention that a six-foot chain link fence was installed without a permit. Mr. A. Stone indicated that when the fence was installed it was moved back about four feet to allow easier turning movements. The City Engineer did not have any concerns with the fence installed up to the right-of-way because sight distances are adequate and this alley is one-way only.

Commission/Applicant Discussion: Mr. A. Stone said he has no issue with the third planting bed recommended by staff. He also pointed out improvements he has made to the property such as painting the building. The property owner told Mr. A. Stone that he is interested in constructing a glass enclosure for use by the local crossing guard to provide cover during inclement weather. Mr. Bockmiller indicated that the property owner must consult with the City Engineer regarding traffic sight distance. The shelter would also need to be shown on the site plan. Mr. Bockmiller pointed out that the back side of the sidewalk is the end of the public right-of-way. Landscaping islands would be placed right up to the edge of the 12-foot wide public sidewalk.

Mr. J. Stone made a motion to approve the plan with comments contained in the first and second bullet points above but not the comment that would require ornamental fencing since there is a chain link fence there now. Staff stated that a motion is not required; the purpose of this discussion was to provide feedback for Mr. A. Stone. Mr. Bockmiller stated that staff would prefer a decorative metal fence over the chain link. Mr. J. Stone explained that since the adjacent Rose Hill Cemetery has a chain link fence, he felt staff's comment was moot. Mr. Wright noted that the police usually recommend vertical picket metal fences because they are harder to climb. Overall, the Planning Commission had no issues with Mr. A. Stone's proposal and advised him to proceed.

Planning Commission Business:

2016 Meeting Schedule.

Mr. Wright noted that the workshop meeting in February coincides with Ash Wednesday. It was agreed that the meeting date should be changed to the first Wednesday in February (February 3).

MOTION: (Stone/Campbell) I move that we approve the schedule as modified.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

Comprehensive Plan Update: Housing and Neighborhoods Element.

Staff Report: (Copy of staff report can be found in the meeting file.) City Planning staff has been working on an update to the City's Comprehensive Plan, which was last adopted in 2008. To date, the Planning Commission has reviewed the Transportation Element (September 30th & October 28th Meetings) and the Urban Design & Historic Preservation Element (October 14th & October 28th Meetings).

Housing & Neighborhoods Element

This element of *visionHagerstown 2035* identifies goals, policies, and action steps to address housing issues within the city. Goals and action steps for the protection and revitalization of neighborhoods are also discussed. This element presents the best available data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) on income, housing values, rents, and subsidized housing and how they relate to the city's housing and neighborhood issues.

While several major action steps recommended by the 2008 Plan were implemented, many of the goals and issues are still relevant in *visionHagerstown 2035*. However, this Housing & Neighborhoods element focuses more on revitalization of existing housing stock, consistency with existing plans (2012 Sustainable Community Plan, City's Five-Year Consolidated Plan, Community's City Center Plan), the relationship between income and housing costs, and stabilization of neighborhoods.

The element also recommends establishing fixed neighborhood boundaries based on physical and geographical characteristics that can be used for creating identity for neighborhoods which could also serve as a basis for establishing future neighborhood groups. The proposed neighborhood boundaries, shown on Map 7-2, were developed by staff through an extensive review of historic subdivision plats. Code Administration plans to use the neighborhood concept and map for their neighborhood improvement plans (see Action 7-9). The Hagerstown Police Department has also expressed interest in using the neighborhood boundary concept for their activities.

Another new action recommended by the element is to develop a more detailed, citywide housing and neighborhoods plan that would identify specific recommendations to foster sustainable neighborhoods. This action has been proposed by City Community Development staff, and such a plan would be consistent with the goals and objectives of *visionHagerstown 2035*. Community Development is still in the preliminary stages.

Since housing and neighborhoods are topics that our community is very interested in, Staff solicited and received input from community groups and citizens on issues and opportunities that should be incorporated into this element. Housing and neighborhood questions were also posted to the City's

social media and engagement website, *engageHagerstown*. Much of the feedback has been consistent with the goals and issues in this draft element, such as property maintenance, foreclosures, etc.

Commission/Applicant Discussion: Mr. Stone questioned the purpose of defining neighborhoods. Neighborhood boundaries should be an organic process by interested residents of the neighborhood. City-defined neighborhoods could create another bureaucratic layer. Mr. Campbell disagreed and felt that the idea of naming neighborhoods could create a sense of pride for residents. Staff noted that the defined neighborhoods could potentially be used by Neighborhoods 1st groups and designation would not erase existing neighborhood groups. Positive feedback has been received from many of the community groups. Other commission members felt some of the neighborhoods were very small and that the “grain was too fine.” Mr. Brubaker noted that even though it is a fine grain, if the purpose is for informational or historic neighborhood purposes he would not have an issue portraying it. Mr. Rohrbaugh stated that Code Administration is already using the data for neighborhood enhancement. Ms. Maher added that some of the neighborhoods will probably be blended together. Mr. Brubaker asked for population figures for each of the neighborhoods. Mr. Campbell and Mr. Stone agreed.

Regarding home ownership statistics, Mr. Stone was concerned about the lack of progress on increasing the percentage of owner-occupied housing. The City needs to develop strategies for driving that percentage up. Staff reported that the national average for home ownership is 66%, down from 67%. Mr. Campbell observed that many young people (Millenials, GenXers) are less interested in home ownership and prefer living in urban areas. Mr. Stone requested data on how Hagerstown compares to other jurisdictions in Maryland with regard to the percentage of homeownership vs. rentals. Annexation is still an important tool for increasing home ownership. It was noted that housing in the urban core typically requires much renovation, sometimes equal to the cost of the house. Housing quality overall needs to be upgraded.

Concerning the Policies and Action Items, not many changes were made to the Policies section. Commission members had comments on some of the Action Items:

Action Item 7-7 – Based on the earlier conversation about neighborhoods, remove the word “fixed.”

Mr. Campbell stated that language should be added about education facilities and how those types of uses reshape neighborhoods. Mr. Brubaker suggested that language could be added to promote access to community facilities in neighborhoods. Mr. Stone stated that the City needs to have the educational hub downtown. Language emphasizing an academic hub should be added to the Community Facilities section.

Mr. Rohrbaugh will make the adjustments discussed and bring the revised chapter back for the commission to review.

City of Hagerstown Sidewalk Policy.

Staff Report: (Copy of staff report can be found in the meeting file.) During review of the draft Transportation Element for the Comprehensive Plan Update, the commission recommended that the City's Policy on "Curbs and Sidewalks" be reviewed, in particular the "Sidewalks Not Recommended at Following Locations" section. Per the Planning Commission's request, staff provided a copy of the "Policy on Curbs and Sidewalks" adopted by the Mayor and City Council in September 2003. Section B.3 recommends that sidewalks not be added at the following locations:

- Hagerstown Industrial Park (off Frederick Street);
- Residential subdivisions built with open drainage (e.g., Londontowne) and annexed into the city; and
- Locations where installation would be impractical or a prior agreement exists.

Commission/Applicant Discussion: Rodney Tissue, City Engineer, stated that a condition of some annexations included a provision that allowed private streets and open section roads. Mr. Wright indicated that his concern was that when it was feasible to require sidewalks on raw land, the commission became aware of it too late in the process for the Harbor Freight site plan. Mr. Wright felt that the City is interpreting Section B.3.c. too loosely. Citing the Harbor Freight case, he stated that people walk along Wesel Boulevard in that area frequently. If it was known by the developer from the beginning the retaining wall along Wesel Boulevard could have been designed further back from the road to accommodate a sidewalk. The area is a major employment area and pedestrians are exposed. Mr. Bockmiller stated that the ordinance has been amended since that site plan was reviewed to require sidewalks to be constructed. Mr. Wright stated that the City needs to watch interpretation, especially when there is a "blank canvas" on an arterial road. It was also pointed out that the City has outlawed private roads and open section roads.

Mr. Tissue explained that when a street is paved, curb and sidewalk notices are sent to adjacent property owners. The policy was put together to require property owners to install sidewalks where there are none. Some streets have historically only had a sidewalk on one side of the road. Mr. Wright indicated he is mostly concerned about the "blank slates." With regard to Harbor Freight, Mr. Tissue stated his office did not require sidewalk because there was no sidewalk anywhere in the area. If there had been sidewalk within a half mile it would have been required.

Commission members recommended that in the Introduction, strike "for school children" in the first sentence. No changes were recommended for the Subdivision policy.

A C & T – Garland Groh Boulevard.

Mr. Bockmiller brought to the commission's attention an issue that has come up at the AC&T site on Garland Groh Boulevard. All the locations where the site plan called for "landscaping" the developer used river rock instead of grass. Technically that is a violation of the approved site plan. Mr. Bockmiller indicated that he has told the developer that they need to replace some of those areas with grass. He asked the commission for advice on how stringent he should be. Commission members advised that there should be grass on the perimeters where there will not be as much foot traffic. Areas where customers might be cutting across islands could be river rock.

This might be something that should be evaluated during the next round of text amendments. In the meantime, Mr. Bockmiller will photograph the areas in question and forward the pictures to the Planning Commission for discussion at the next meeting.

Adjourn. It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn (8:45 p.m.)

Approved

Debra C. Calhoun - Secretary