

Douglas S. Wright, Jr., chair, called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m., on Wednesday, August 25, 2021, in front of City Hall.

## **I. Roll Call**

**Also present were commission members:**

- C. Davis
- R. Thomas
- J. Wheeler

**The following staff members were present:**

- K. Maher, PCAD Director
- S. Bockmiller, Development Planner/Zoning Administrator
- R. Tissue, City Engineer
- S. Lohr, Fire Chief

**Absent were commission members:**

- J. Stone, vice-chair
- S. McIntire, ex-officio

## **II. REGULAR MEETING**

**A. Approval of Minutes:** No minutes.

**B. Development Review:** No development review.

### **C. Planning Commission Business**

#### **1. Field Trip to Walden community in Silver Spring Township, PA**

The Commission and staff departed for Silver Spring Township to take a tour of the Walden community. The purpose of the trip was to view the completed new urbanist style development to determine what qualities and design features are desirable for incorporation into the City's Land Management Code. Heavy traffic delayed arrival until about 6:30 p.m. Justin Doty of FSA joined us in Walden. Upon arrival, the tour started in the mixed-use main street area of the community, continued on foot throughout the denser residential areas near the main street area, and continued by car in the farther out areas of the community.

**Description of Community:** Walden is a 170-acre, mixed-use community developed by Charter Homes & Neighborhoods which began in 2006. All homes are completed and sold. There are 321 single-family detached homes, 293 townhomes, and 72 condos. 40% of the development is set aside in open space, including a large park at the center of the development. It has a two-block main street area at the development entrance with

mixed-use buildings with condos above storefronts and nearby single-story commercial buildings. The development uses a grid and modified grid street network with alleys and no cul de sacs, as is typical for new urbanist forms of development and is consistent with urban development patterns. There are sidewalks and street trees on both sides of streets. All of the streets and alleys are private and so maintained by the HOA. Some homes front open space features with alleys to the rear. Yard setbacks are minimal and homes often have front porches. Dwelling units that have yards mostly have very small yards. Homes along the alleys either have attached garages or detached garages with small rear yards. Only homes at the edge of the development had front-loaded garages. There is a very extensive mix of housing types and model options. Adjoining the main street area are two-blocks of townhomes with no yards with a “cobblestone” street. In the area near to the main street area there are a mix of single-family detached and townhomes all with small yards. On the edges of the development which back to other tracts of land, there are only single-family detached homes with larger rear yards. There is a community center with a pool.

The following are features that were discussed during the tour:

- a. **Main Street area** – While the edged tree pits seem small, they were surrounded by sand-set bricks which would allow water to the roots. The smaller tree pit area provides less obstruction for pedestrians. The large outdoor dining area on the sidewalk for two restaurants was quite busy and viewed as a desirable feature.
- b. **Resident opinion** – A resident of the community offered to talk to us about his opinion of the community. Tim Van Der Ploeg and his family live in one of the houses at the edge of the community which has front-loaded garages. Tim said they like living in the community – nice park areas, restaurant amenities are great, nice mix of housing types, nothing cookie cutter about the community. The other specialty businesses are not handy - would like more neighborhood serving convenience businesses. All the units are sold, but the last park is not built yet. Seems to be not much motivation to complete that feature now that the home construction and sales are done. Many of the lots are small and quirky in shape. Not handy to have the garages in the back, so a lot of on-street parking occurs. Front garage is handier. The HOA dues are \$45/month.
- c. **Pedestrian network** - Sidewalks are on both sides of the street and within open space where homes front open space. The community is very walkable which was viewed as desirable.
- d. **Open space and park features** – There is a large park feature with amenities at the center of the development and other open space features front homes. A birthday party was observed in the open space area in front of a home. Residents were using the fire pit “room” in the park. These amenities were viewed as desirable features.
- e. **Trash Collection** – Trash is collected in the alleys where there are alleys, which was viewed as very desirable.
- f. **Fire Code and Firefighting observations** – The Chief indicated it is better to have the hydrants in the middle of things rather than at the development edge.

Hardiplank cement board siding as observed throughout this development is much preferred over vinyl siding from a fire safety perspective. Prefers seeing a limited row of townhouses, such as five seen here, over the eight that is often seen in Washington County. Any large attic area is a problem because they are not sprinklered.

- g. **Public street edge of development** – This development has a bermed, buffer yard along the exterior public street, a parallel community street, and then townhomes facing the interior street across from the buffer area. By contrast, in our county we often see the backs of houses oriented to exterior public streets. Our code discourages the backs facing streets. It was observed that it would be preferable to front the open space than to front the exterior public street and the very different housing types outside the development.
- h. **Rear garages** – When the development has no on-street parking options near the homes, it seems to force use of the garage for parking. In areas where on-street parking is available at the front of the homes, it was observed that some garages are used for storage and there was use of the street for parking. Need to assess the firefighting implications of the detached “townhouse” garages where 4-5 are attached along the alley. Staff observed that there are gates in the sideyard fences in these situations which would allow firefighter access to the rear of homes. For the garages attached to homes, our code would have to be amended to allow much smaller rear yard or alley setbacks.
- i. **Street and Alley width and clearance** - This development had a 30-foot wide, two-way street with parking on both sides that reduced the clearance area to 15 feet when both sides are parked. When parked up, two-way traffic is not possible which certainly calms traffic. The Chief said you need 20 feet clearance for fire truck and firefighting. The alleys are 15 feet wide and two-way for traffic. The garages have short aprons onto the alley. When Steve spoke with the town planner, he said the township is not satisfied with the high Belgian block curbs and they feel the alleys are too tight for two-way traffic if a large vehicle such as a trash truck is involved.
- j. **Two-legged intersections** – This development includes two-legged intersections perhaps as a traffic calming measure. The Chief observed that it would be important to ensure that ‘no parking’ is established near the intersection to ensure adequate turning radius for fire trucks.
- k. **Dwelling units fronting a park** – In some areas, houses had an alley in the rear yard and open space for their front yard. This was viewed as very desirable. Our code would need to be amended to allow units to front open space rather than a street. It was noted that it would be better if the curb was mountable and the sidewalk area in front of the units was drivable for emergency vehicles. Reinforced sod or permeable pavers would be options for the emergency access area. Would need to ensure any trees would not grow up to block emergency vehicle access in these areas.
- l. **Terminal vistas** – As our code recommends, this development has terminal vistas at the ends of streets – either houses or the community center.

- m. **Extensive mixture of housing types and models** – This was viewed as very desirable.
- n. **Street lights** – There are no street lights in this development, just lampposts in front of the homes. Some of the lights were on and some were not. Because it was dusk, it was not clear if these lights come on automatically or if the homeowner has to turn them on. Having a development so dark at night is not typical in Hagerstown.

**Additional Feedback from Town Planner** – Planning staff have a phone call scheduled for September 3<sup>rd</sup> to allow us to follow up with questions raised on the tour and to gain any additional feedback we can from the Town planner.

**D. Other Business** – no other business.

**III. ADJOURNMENT** – 9:30 p.m.

9/1/2021  
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Date

  
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Kathleen A. Maher, Director of PCAD