

**Planning Commission
MINUTES – Regular Meeting**

**February 26, 2014
City of Hagerstown, Maryland**

Douglas S. Wright, Jr., chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., on Wednesday, February 26, 2014, in the Conference Room, Fourth Floor, City Hall. Also present were commission members M. Brubaker, D. Miller, J. Stone, and R. Thomas. 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

Mr. Coleman and Ms. Wheeler were absent.

Approval of Minutes: February 12, 2014 – Workshop Meeting.

MOTION: (Miller/Thomas) I make a motion to approve the minutes.
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Abstain – Brubaker, Stone)

Fairgrounds Park – 351 North Cleveland Avenue – Dog Park Parking Lot, Site Plan, Case No. ZS-2014-01.

Staff: This site plan is for the construction of a six-space parking lot for the newly created dog park at Fairgrounds Park. Since the lot will contain less than seven spaces, parking lot landscaping is not required; however, the City has indicated on the site plan that landscaping will be installed. This is brought to the commission since the ground disturbance exceeds 5,000 square feet, which triggers the requirement for a standard site plan, rather than a minor site plan which is approved by staff. Parking lot will be located approximately 200 feet from the nearest property line. Forest Conservation is not required.

Given that the primary review agency (Engineering) is the designer of the project and given the extremely limited nature of the proposal, staff moved this to site plan without a concept plan for storm water management. Quantity increases are addressed through an existing regional pond. Quality issue will be addressed through infiltration areas around the edges of the new parking area.

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All agencies have approved the site plan. Planning staff recommended approval of the storm water management approach and the site plan. (Mr. Stone arrived.) Technically, no landscaping is required.

Applicant/Commission Discussion: Mr. Wright questioned why the parking lot was being constructed. Tim Young of the Department of Parks and Engineering stated that his office has received requests from handicapped persons who want to use the dog park but cannot locate a parking space close enough. Two of the spaces in the new lot will be reserved for handicapped patrons. Mr. Young noted that the City’s dog park has been a big success. Mr. Bockmiller noted that the dog park is shown on the master plan for Fairgrounds Park. Mr. Wright asked why all the spaces are not reserved for handicapped patrons. Mr. Young explained that the City Engineer would like to assess the need first. Mr. Bockmiller added that converting all the spaces to handicapped spaces may result in a reduction in the number of spaces. Mr. Young said this area has always been earmarked for a small parking lot. Mr. Wright pointed out that the “Do Not Enter” sign on Sheet 2 of 4 will need a red line.

MOTION: (Stone/Miller) I move that we approve the site plan.
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Abstain - Brubaker)

West City Elementary School – Design to Relate to Hager’s Crossing Drive Streetscape.

Staff Report: Mr. Bockmiller stated that this item is a carryover from the February 13 meeting. At that time the Planning Commission requested additional information on parking requirements. David Trostle of Frederick, Seibert and Associates, engineer for the project, provided a parking comparison for similar schools in Washington County (meeting file).

Parking Plan:

Concerning the parking plan, the Zoning Ordinance requires “1 per employee; ample student and visitor parking as determined by the Planning Commission.” The plan currently shows 137 parking spaces. Based on research and experience by the Board of Education, they determined that 125 spaces would be the minimum necessary. Handicapped spaces were added near the sports fields and there is room for ten additional spaces in the future, if needed. This project will be built in phases. Phase I will provide 92 spaces (55 staff/37 visitor); Phase II will add 35 more spaces, with the potential for ten more if needed. Mr. Trostle stated that the Board of Education believes that the proposed parking plan is more than adequate. For large events in the evening, the bus loop could provide 35 additional spaces. It was noted that there are approximate 80 spaces in the Hager’s Crossing Community Center parking lot, adjacent to this site. Storm water management was designed for the entire parking lot.

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MOTION: (Thomas/Miller) I make a motion that we accept the parking.
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

Mr. Wright noted that the plan shows a crosswalk (which is tied into a sidewalk that runs between townhouse units) across Buell Court right to the water feature. Mr. Trostle pointed out that there is a very steep bank (10-13 feet) in this location. There is no requirement for fencing. Mr. Brubaker thought two crosswalks would make more sense: one at the top of the loop and one at the bottom of the loop. Mr. Trostle said they would look at that during the site plan process.

Streetscape Issue:

Aaron House of BFM architects was present to explain the façade treatments. Due to the substantial size of this building in an established community, BFM looked at ways to reduce the scale of the building through materials. The south elevation shows the wing that runs parallel with Hager’s Crossing Drive. The first floor will be masonry veneer and the second floor will be another material to be determined. The use of masonry patterns, textures, and colors can assist in reducing the visual scale of the structure. Mr. House stressed that at this time, no colors or textures have been decided. He stated that they are considering the use of an oversized utility brick unit for the first floor which will help to bring the scale down. For the second floor, they are contemplating the use of a cladding-type of material that would mimic the brick (not a brick material) in the way it is mounted on the building. The brick will wrap around the building to create a base. Cladding, if used, would be 15 feet or so from the bottom at the lowest point. Earthy tones will be used for the façade.

Roof structure calls for a 4/12 pitched, asphalt shingle roof. They also plan to bid an “add alternate” for a standing seam metal roof. Dormers at the top will help to hide penetrations for HVAC. The Buell Court elevation will be about 12 feet above the entrance to the building. The roof will be one color for the entire building.

Urban Partners Visit with Planning Commission.

Staff Report: Chris Lankenau of Urban Partners was present. Ms. Maher explained the scope of study Urban Partners was hired to complete. Recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan were incorporated. Urban Partners is also assisting the City in prioritizing the elements and creating market information to support the ideas. Eight projects will be selected, and Urban Partners will examine the economics of several projects to determine if they are viable projects, what the costs would be, funding sources, etc. Projects will include physical projects, programmatic ideas to supplement the projects, and short- and long-term items.

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Urban Partners is in the middle of an in-depth community engagement process, including one-on-one meetings with community stakeholders. This portion of the project is about two-thirds complete, including public and City officials, major Arts & Entertainment contacts, Downtown, development, and education contacts. Focus group meetings have been scheduled, including a group of “millennials” who might be living, working, and using Downtown. Mr. Lankenau noted that they have heard some unique comments, but mostly there has been a commonality among the groups. Urban Partners hopes to have the interview phase completed by the middle of March.

An open, public workshop is scheduled for tomorrow evening (February 27) at the Washington County Free Library. At this meeting they are looking for additional feedback. The project will wrap up by the end of June, at which point another public meeting will be held to allow public to comment on the plan.

At the request of Mr. Stone, Mr. Lankenau presented some preliminary conclusions based on the feedback Urban Partners has received to date:

Market – Urban Partners has looked at both housing sales and housing rental markets, including selling prices of homes for the last two years and defining an area of Downtown based on census tracts. They found that values have gone up slightly and identified two areas of homeownership that tend to be stronger (the northeast and southwest sections of the city). A housing survey was conducted that revealed a number of people who said they might be interested in living Downtown. The survey drilled down to whether respondents would be interested in renting or owning. Many of those said they would want to own and many of those said they would like to live in an historic property. How do we offer what is there to the people who want it. On the rental side, people who do not live Downtown are not as interested in renting, and those who do want to rent want newer properties. The people who were interested in Downtown living were in their 40s and could afford market rates or higher. Developers contacted by Mr. Lankenau said there could be a demand for housing Downtown.

From the retail side, there are many strong restaurants. The market assessment (not a market analysis) took an inventory of the retailers Downtown and looked at the competition outside Downtown. Downtown retailers consist mostly of specialized retailing that does not compete with the outlets or the mall. Downtown businesses tend to be more unique and would be supported by the Arts District. More retailing would support more residents. From an office standpoint, it depends more on retail and residential. There is not a lot of opportunity for office space right now. A shovel-ready site might entice someone.

Entertainment – The A & E District is strong—all the pieces are there. The Maryland Theatre has a capital campaign for improvements; BIFSA and University of Maryland are looking to expand. The University is considering having students live Downtown. Hotels, tourism is

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increasing; room nights are increasing which is another positive piece. There could be a need for a hotel Downtown. If a hotel was added to another room-generating facility, it would create a stronger bond. Some of the eight catalyst projects that are part of the contract may be supporting projects for this area.

Planning Commission interview – Mr. Lankenau asked the commission for its thoughts on what it sees as the city’s strengths and opportunities, including what types of projects the commission would like the City to pursue, or issues that need to be addressed in order to make revitalization successful.

- Mr. Wright suggested focusing on the immediate two blocks on either side of Public Square, including the rundown housing stock on East Franklin Street. Also, there are some “doable” units in the third block of South Potomac Street, and possibly offering incentives for the East Franklin Street blocks. This could be a kick-starter project. Regardless, the project should be a manageable size.
- Mr. Wright suggested decoupling land values from building values in such a way to force people to focus on redoing their structures to get a return on what they have to pay in taxes (i.e., higher tax rates for land, and lower rates for buildings). This might not be something that can be handled locally, though.
- Mr. Wright noted that Hagerstown has a good infrastructure. He added that something needs to be done to address all the vehicles. Need to focus on parking as close to destinations.
- Mr. Thomas noted that with all the shopping centers and malls in the region, retail uses are moving out of town. Everyone wants to restore the retail element Downtown. Mr. Thomas believes the area is better suited for entertainment, professional uses, and educational uses. Mr. Lankenau said there is a trend to more of a main street shopping experience. There will be a limit as to what kinds of retail uses will be successful Downtown. The ones that usually do well are the uses that do not have competition at the malls. Not suggesting a grandiose scale of retail. Taxes are a common concern/complaint. A cost of the urban lifestyle.
- Mr. Miller asked if Urban Partners has talked with representatives of Discovery Station. They are looking for a new location, but the City should make every effort to make sure they stay in the Downtown.
- Following up on Mr. Thomas’s observations, Mr. Stone noted that there is a fair amount of underutilized office space. The Downtown is now the center of government and various entertainment activities. There has been an exodus out of Downtown by professionals. Downtown used to be the center of professional life (lawyers, investment advisers, accountants, etc.). This plan needs to address how to attract small- to medium-size businesses. The study needs to find out why smaller businesses are leaving and address those issues. It should also focus on commercial and professional business development, which will attract residents to Downtown. The Maryland Theatre or Blues

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Fest has not done anything to stimulate growth of Downtown business. Businesses need an independent reason to be Downtown. The businesses that have moved out have done so because their customers want nearby, free parking.

- Mr. Thomas pointed out that a major conference/convention center that will draw meetings, fairs, swap meets, is something that can be run all during the year that will draw people to Hagerstown. Mr. Wright said the problem with big events is that they only happen once a week and most everyone who works in that business only earns close to minimum wage.
- Mr. Brubaker agreed with Mr. Stone's comments. When three of the Downtown banks moved out recently, it was because their employees wanted to park next to the building. He said the city needs an outside, private firm that has confidence in the Downtown to locate here. That could bring some of the ones that left back. Incentives will be necessary. A marketing blitz will be necessary to overcome the perception of no parking. There are numerous parking lots and decks around the Downtown.
- Mr. Stone asked how do you recruit office/back office tenants. Revitalization will depend on many small- and medium-size businesses. The city should not just focus on one big business.
- Mr. Thomas observed that with the density Downtown, it will be difficult to satisfy the "front door" aspect. He added that with technology, many people now work from home and don't need an outside office.
- Mr. Wright said the City needs to attract diverse small- and medium-sized businesses, especially home grown or regionally grown.
- Mr. Stone suggested contacting RBC Wealth Management in the first block of South Potomac Street. Most investment firms have moved out; however, RBC moved to another location on South Potomac Street. Something must have made them want to stay Downtown.
- Commission members agreed that excessive truck traffic Downtown is not a rational argument. Businesses need truck deliveries; most trucks Downtown are making deliveries to businesses in City Center.

Mr. Lankenau invited the commission to attend the public meeting. He said Urban Partners agrees with everything said. The plan will most likely recommend a combination of residential and business. Mr. Miller asked if these projects will be realistic, doable projects. Mr. Lankenau said they will only suggest doable projects. Mr. Miller noted that the Mayor and Council is addressing the rental housing issue. Mr. Lankenau said the rental housing issue will be addressed in the plan, including strategies addressing problem landlords.

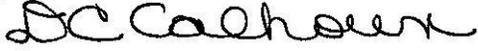
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Adjourn: It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn at 8:40 p.m.

4/9/2014

Approved



Debra C. Calhoun - Secretary