

**Planning Commission
MINUTES - Workshop Meeting**

**April 9, 2014
City of Hagerstown, Maryland**

James W. Stone, vice chair, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m., on Wednesday, April 9, 2014, in the Conference Room, Fourth Floor, City Hall. Also present were commission members M. Brubaker, C. Coleman, R. Thomas, and J. Wheeler. The following staff members were present: K. Maher, Planning Director; S. Bockmiller, Development Planner/Zoning Administrator; A. Rohrbaugh, Planner; and D. Calhoun, Secretary.

Approval of Minutes: February 26, 2014 – Regular Meeting.

MOTION: (Brubaker/Thomas) I move approval.
DISCUSSION: None.
ACTION: APPROVED (ABSTAIN – Coleman, Wheeler)

Younger Auto Group – 212 All Star Court (Lot 1), Site Plan, Case No. ZS-2013-07.

Staff Report: (Report in meeting file) This site plan is for the construction of a 121-space parking area for the storage and display of for-sale motor vehicles and customer parking at an adjacent car sales facility. The concept plan for stormwater management was approved by the Planning Commission on October 9, 2013. Discussion included the need for constructing public sidewalk along All Star Court, and the Planning Commission’s consensus was that the sidewalks should be installed.

The applicant requested waivers to the following landscaping requirements: 1) Parking lot landscaping hedges along the north and east sides of the parking lot (see attached memo in meeting file); and 2) Providing a sidewalk along All Star Court. The plans have been modified to show the sidewalk, but it is staff understands that the applicant may also ask for a waiver on the sidewalks (memo attached to staff report).

Forest conservation for this property was met with a state-administered forest conservation plan when the area was subdivided in the late 1990s. All review agencies have recommended approval, with the exception of Planning and Code Administration Division. Planning staff generally approved the site plan, subject to a condition that the proposed use not include the storage of wrecked vehicles or those awaiting removal, or long-term storage awaiting repair. New facilities that include storage of such vehicles are now subject to ordinance requirements for opaque fencing and screening requirements. Those requirements do not extend to transient parking and the storage and display of for-sale motor vehicle inventory. Also, the number of shrubs along the west and south sides of the lot do not meet ordinance requirements, which require one every four feet.

Planning staff recommended approval, contingent upon Planning comments concerning the use and also that the site plan be revised to reflect the minimum number of shrubs per the ordinance.

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Staff had no objection to the requested landscaping waivers, but asked that the waiver affecting the installation of public sidewalk along All Star Court not be granted.

Applicant/Commission Discussion: Tony Taylor, of Frederick, Seibert & Associates, project manager, was present on behalf of the applicant. When All Star Court was constructed it was approved with sidewalk on one side of the street. There are missing sections of sidewalk along All Star Court. Several years ago, Lot H was approved for additional parking, and the Planning Commission did not require that sidewalk to be installed at that time. To the north there is no sidewalk (property also owned by Mr. Younger). This lot is intended to be used by auto dealership employees only—there will be no customer usage of this lot. Mr. Taylor said Younger does not expect pedestrian traffic on this stretch of All Star Court since there are no “destinations.” Randy Cohen, the original owner, still owns several lots at the end of the cul-de-sac. Mr. Bockmiller added that he has been in discussions with Mr. Cohen about potential developments on some of the vacant lots on All Star Court.

Mr. Bockmiller stated that Planning staff believes that whenever sidewalks can be installed they should be for the sake of complete streets. Ms. Wheeler noted that the commission has discussed this extensively with the idea of Mr. Cohen potentially developing more lots. Mr. Thomas recalled that at the other end of All Star there are grade differences that might make it difficult for sidewalk to be installed the full width without building up the area. Brandon Younger of Younger Motorcars, said sidewalk could be installed the full width, but he was concerned about erosion. At the cul-de-sac portion, Mr. Younger was not in favor of full traffic in that area at night since Younger will be storing vehicles on the lot. If there were other developments at that end of All Star Court, it would make sense for the sidewalk requirement.

Mr. Brubaker stated that he drove All Star Court recently and agreed there are issues with requiring sidewalk installation at this time given the current use. He proposed that the commission exempt the sidewalk for the current use only. A future Planning Commission could decide that if the use changes, sidewalks would be required. Mr. Bockmiller suggested an alternative to Mr. Brubaker’s proposal that provision of sidewalks be based on the development of the remainder of All Star Court. Staff and commission discussed various alternatives for the point in time when sidewalks will be required. Mr. Brubaker and Mr. Thomas wanted a note on the site plan for whatever option was settled upon.

The commission took the following actions:

- MOTION:** (Brubaker/Thomas) I make a motion that we approve the landscaping waiver.
- DISCUSSION:** None.
- ACTION:** APPROVED (Unanimous)

MOTION: (Brubaker/Wheeler) I make a motion that we approve the sidewalk waiver for this site plan and use only.

DISCUSSION: None.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

MOTION: (Brubaker/Thomas) I'll make a motion to approve the site plan including the waivers already approved, contingent upon Planning staff recommendations concerning vehicles and landscaping shrubs.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Brubaker asked for clarification on storage and display of for-sale motor vehicles. Mr. Bockmiller stated that the intent is not to preclude Younger from storing new vehicles for sale on the lot. There are provisions in the ordinance now that if a business is storing junk vehicles, they need to be screened. Staff wants a note to that effect placed on the plan. Mr. Younger said they opened a body shop and are running out of room. The overflow collision repair vehicles will not be stored on this lot. A use note will be added that the area is for designated employee parking and temporary storage of new and used vehicles. Mr. Brubaker amended his motion to reflect staff comments. Mr. Thomas agreed to the amendment.

ACTION: APPROVED (Unanimous)

Complete Streets Project Update – Sabra Wang & Associates.

Alex Rohrbaugh, Planner; Rodney Tissue, City Engineer; and Paul Silverman of Sabra Wang & Associates made a presentation on the Complete Streets project currently being undertaken by the City of Hagerstown. In his packet memo, Mr. Rohrbaugh (meeting file) states that Maryland is one of 610 communities across the nation that has a Complete Streets policy. Once it is drafted, Hagerstown's Complete Streets program will address policy and goals identified in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Silverman said that the guidelines will explain how to implement a Complete Streets initiative, which will make it possible to walk, bike, use transit, along public streets.

A copy of the Sabra Wang & Associates' PowerPoint presentation is in the meeting file. Commission members had the following observations and recommendations:

- Mr. Stone pointed out that there is no mention of alleys. Hagerstown has an extensive alley network that provides the primary means of people getting to and from their destinations. Alleys support the street network and functions. Mr. Brubaker added that Hagerstown's alleys may not fulfill the requirements of Complete Streets, but in Hagerstown's case, they enable. It is a policy of the City to require alleys in new developments wherever possible. They should at least be mentioned. Ms. Wheeler pointed out that Sabra Wang mentions alleys in the Functionality Map. Mr. Stone

reiterated that there is no mention of alleys and the role that they play in Hagerstown. Some parts of the city are supported by networks of alleys. Hagerstown's alley network is an important feature. Mr. Silverman said he will look at this more. Ms. Maher noted that there are alleys in the Suburban Zone.

- Mr. Stone was concerned that the City will be designing guidelines that cannot and never will be met, such as a requirement for eight-foot wide sidewalks and bike lanes. Mr. Tissue added that there most likely will not be too many radical changes to the Downtown. Mr. Silverman stated that he will work with Mr. Tissue's office to attempt to more closely mirror existing conditions. The guidelines are meant to be aspirational, but grounded in practicality. They are not striving for the "coolest design guidelines that will sit on the shelf." Mr. Tissue stated that at the very least, downtown sidewalks should be accessible and cited North Locust Street as an example.
- Mr. Brubaker asked if forest conservation funds could be used for street trees and Mr. Tissue said that would be an eligible use for forest conservation funds.
- Mr. Coleman asked if gateway projects would be included. Mr. Tissue replied that elements of the Franklin Street project will follow this program.
- On the final slide, Mr. Brubaker asked that the state of Maryland be added to the list of partners.
- Mr. Stone was concerned about the impact of the bicycle lanes that City has been installing. His observation has been that the lanes are rarely used for bicycles. The lanes are being used by wheelchair users and people pushing baby carriages. Dedicating lanes for bicycles is a strategic mistake. Mr. Coleman disagreed; the sidewalks are not in good condition and the curb lines do not agree. As future marketing for a city, it is important to promote active living, urban lifestyles, and providing options. Mr. Silverman pointed out that the City needs to take a fresh look at the right-of-way as a blank canvas. Mr. Brubaker observed that the bike lanes have improved the functionality and removed some of the one-and-a-half lane roads.

Mr. Silverman stated that Sabra Wang still needs input from the Bike Committee. There may be locations where the bike lanes will not fit.

Urban Partners Project Update.

Ms. Maher made a presentation on Urban Partners proposal for eight catalytic projects and programs for further study for the Implementation Plan portion of Hagerstown's Sustainable Communities Plan (see copy of PowerPoint in meeting file and the draft "Downtown Hagerstown Catalytic Project Candidates for the Economic Analysis and Implementation Plan"). The Mayor and Council provided consensus on April 8, 2014, to move forward with Urban Partners' recommended eight projects and programs. Urban Partners next will begin a detailed development analysis of the proposed capital projects and explore the programmatic recommendations.

- 1. Strategy for New Office Development and Recruitment.** Mr. Stone questioned why all the properties are concentrated on the east side of Potomac Street. There are some large properties west of Potomac, such as the former Susquehanna Bank building. Ms. Maher explained this is viewed as a pilot program. The Central Lot is City-owned which makes the land available, without having to go through private owners. Mr. Brubaker added that this is designed to be a “jump start” to show that people are investing in Downtown. Parking lots are being proposed for development since parking decks are better suited for parking in downtowns.
- 2. Maryland Theatre Expansion Project.** All the focus groups agreed that the Maryland Theatre is a key activity generator. Officials must figure out a way to maximize this resource, such as regular weekend schedules.
- 3. USMH Expansion Support Strategy.** The nursing program at USMH is attracting students into the area for classes. USMH has plans for expansion which could draw more students into our community. As a result, there is a need for creating student housing (not dormitories).
- 4. Hotel/Conference Center/Heritage Center/Commemorative Park.** This element is proposed for the former hospital area at East Antietam and King Streets. There is a growing tourism industry in Washington County and an increase in room-night demand. The idea would include creation of a battlefield park, tied to the Battle of Hagerstown. Because of its elevation and size, Mr. Stone believed a convention center would be more appropriate at this site. The Urban Partners proposal might not be the highest and best use of the property. Staff noted that Jim Hartling of Urban Partners will look at that. Mr. Coleman said he would be more in favor of a hotel closer to Downtown and to redevelop Antietam Street. Mr. Bockmiller pointed out that the elevation of the former site of Pangborn Hall is the same as the hospital site. Ms. Maher noted that much of the construction/deconstruction debris was buried on the hospital site when it was torn down. Any major redevelopment of that site may involve removing much of what was buried.
- 5. Linking City Park and A&E District with Trail and New Housing.** The report states that the southeast portion of City Center has a relatively vibrant housing market. This proposal would that area with downtown. Ms. Wheeler concurred with the report that adding housing where indicated would strengthen the area.
- 6. Expanded Downtown Arts/Events Programming Strategy.** The report recommends researching how to attract more regular events to strengthen the downtown as a destination for entertainment.
- 7. Expanded Operations of the City Farmers Market.** The report recommends expanding the hours of the City Market to at least 35 hours per week and increasing the number of vendors. The goal being to create a grocery market for City Center residents and provide local products to area restaurants.

- 8. Expanded and Targeted Home Ownership Support Strategies.** Strategies to increase home ownership should involve a combination of concentrated nuisance property enforcement techniques along with existing and new incentives to encourage the purchase and rehabilitation of homes for owner occupancy in these targeted areas.

Urban Partners will be presenting their final report to the Mayor and Council during a public meeting on June 17.

Board of Zoning Appeals Agenda – April Hearing

The commission had no comments to pass on to the BZA.

Adjourn.

It was moved and seconded that the meeting adjourn at 6:08 p.m.

6/11/2014

Approved



Debra C. Calhoun - Secretary