

City of Columbus
Joint Planning Commission – City Council Meeting
March 15, 2017

The March 15, 2017 joint meeting of the City of Columbus Planning commission and City Council was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Garth Sternberg at the City Hall. Present were Commission members: Pam Wolowski, Jesse Preiner, Jody Krebs and James Watson; Mayor Dave Povolny, City Council Members Bill Krebs, Jeff Duraine, Denny Peterson, and Mark Daly; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, City Planner Dean Johnson and Public Communications Coordinator Jessica Hughes.

Also in attendance were: Dan Mike, Kris King, Paul Peskar, Emmy Robinson, Rick Robinson, John Young, and Joe & Sarah Bazey.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Motion by Krebs to approve the agenda. Seconded by Watson. Preiner – aye; Sternberg – aye; Krebs – aye; Watson – aye; Wolowski – aye. Motion carried.

APPROVAL – PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES OF MARCH 1, 2017

Motion by Preiner to approve the Planning Commission Minutes of March 1, 2017. Seconded by Wolowski. Preiner – aye; Sternberg – aye; Krebs – aye; Watson – abstain; Wolowski – aye. Motion carried.

NON-BINDING CONCEPT APPLICATION – CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY INC. 13405 LAKE DRIVE NE.

Mr. Joe Bazey is presenting a non-binding concept review for his business located at 13405 Lake Drive NE. Bazey recently purchased 2 additional lots of land; one to the south and one to the southeast of his current property. For the first lot, he plans to expand the current operations and add two additional garages. The second lot is going to be saved for future development. Currently this lot is only accessible through Humber Street NE, which would have to be paved and updated with a cul-de-sac when the lot is developed. Bazey said he is aware of the updates that would have to be done, and is willing to pay for the necessary work.

There were questions raised about putting multiple commercial driveways off the cul-de-sac. City Administrator Mursko said that if this does ever happen there would have be a variance granted, or the road would have to be designed differently. Beyond this concern the Commission and Council saw no issues with the concept plan.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DISCUSSION POINTS

City Planner Dean Johnson took this time to speak about Columbus' Comprehensive Plan with the Met Council. There were four primary policy questions that he requested direction on.

The first is the re-designation of Met Council's "Rural Diversified" classification to "Rural Residential". Currently the maximum residential density for a Rural Diversified classification is one home for every 10 acres. Columbus is inconsistent with this standard at one home for every 5 acres. Johnson is wondering what kind of density the Commission and Council envision for Columbus. Overall there was agreement that Columbus should move to the Rural Residential

classification, by considering a shift in density to one home for every 2.5 acres. The question becomes then whether the higher density would be city-wide, or if it would only be in certain areas (thus creating a new residential zoning district).

The second consideration point is for the establishment of Suburban Residential land use designations. Currently Columbus has a Suburban Residential Overlay designation, and Johnson is wondering if it is time for the City to commit to a Suburban Residential district rather than the overlay. If the City does want to consider a Suburban Residential district, the Council should determine what areas would be suitable for urban housing and what housing types are ideal for those areas.

The third question is whether the Commercial and Light Industrial land use designation boundaries should be adjusted. This could entail expanding or reducing these boundaries, or establishing an entirely new zoning district such as a Campus, Special Use, or other concepts.

Lastly, in considering Commercial areas in Columbus; there may be room for expansion on Lake Drive NE, or for the addition of a Commercially zoned area on Broadway Avenue NE. This is another topic that the City will have to consider.

Overall the consensus was that there does need to be an increase in density in Columbus, to one home for every 2.5 acres. There was disagreement however as to whether this should be an across the board change or not. Johnson drew attention to the fact that Columbus is at the end of the Met Council's sewer and water system, and there are no other places to get the services from. This is important to consider because increasing the density of the City will also require additional sewer and water services. Some Council Members and Commissioners felt like it was important to consider urban housing to increase the tax base and number of eligible employees for Columbus businesses. Others felt an apprehension toward urban housing, and expressed concerns over increased criminal activity and noise pollution. Overall there was not a consensus as to whether the one home for every 2.5 acres' density should be increased across the board or only in specific locations. The Council Members requested some numbers from the City Planner reflecting how much developable land is left in Columbus, to guide the Council Members toward a well-informed decision. Johnson agreed to put together some numbers for the Council, bring this discussion back to another meeting, and answer the remaining questions. He closed by saying that these decisions will need to be made by the time summer arrives.

ACCESSORY BUILDINGS DISCUSSION (CONEX BOX/SHIPPING CONTAINER)

The Planning Commission and City Council decided to have a joint meeting to discuss the future of shipping containers (or PODS, MODS, Conex Boxes, etc) in Columbus. The first thing that the Council and Commission did was to define the type of containers that would be discussed. The clarification was made that the conversation will be focused on shipping containers – the type that are meant to for travel across the ocean and storage in ocean ports. In the past few months, the Planning Commission has brought forward two different drafts of the accessory building ordinance with a section for storage containers, however the City Council sent the ordinance back both times without approval.

This discussion is stemming from a complaint about a neighbor placing a shipping container in their front yard for storage. Commissioners and Council all agreed that it is unacceptable for someone to permanently place a shipping container in their front yard without any proper screening. There was also agreement that a resident should be able to place a shipping container in the front yard temporarily - if a project is in progress or someone is moving in or out. The big question to be answered is if Columbus should allow shipping containers on a permanent basis, and if so what should be the parameters.

The point was made that these shipping containers are a cheap, reliable, alternative to an accessory building. Arguments were made that people come to Columbus to live because of limited government overreach and the freedom that comes with that – thus shipping containers should be allowed if they are harmoniously painted and have proper screening. There was a brief discussion had about the potential for limiting the number of shipping containers allowed based on the number of acres one owns. There was some agreement that if a person has significantly more acreage than most residents in Columbus (say 40-60 acres), a shipping container would be easy to screen and perhaps shouldn't be regulated. That discussion led to the question of what to allow on smaller sized lots (say 2.5-10 acres). No consensus was reached, but there were suggestions that if a shipping container is stored on a smaller lot it should be painted a harmonious color with the home and stored in the back yard with proper screening. Mayor Povolny expressed his concern with the inconsistency of Columbus' Ordinances if shipping containers are regulated – that if accessory structures like run down barns and hoop buildings are not regulated, why should shipping containers be? However, there were also arguments made against allowing shipping containers at all.

Commissioner Sternberg brought up the fact that Columbus recently increased the maximum size of accessory buildings allowed. He made the point that if the City has already increased the amount of storage space allowable in accessory buildings, why should shipping containers also be allowed. There was agreement among some Commissioners and Council Members that if a resident needs outdoor storage, there are already several options for them (not including shipping containers). Planner Johnson pointed out that costs associated with painting a shipping container and/or creating screening are considerable. It could be argued that the cost to adequately paint and/or screen a shipping container would be equivalent to the cost of erecting an accessory building. Lastly, Council Member Daly reported that he called several of his constituents to ask how they felt about shipping containers being allowed for storage in Columbus. He found that roughly 80% of responders felt like they should not be allowed at all, and only 2 individual responders said they would not have a problem with them if they were put in the back yard.

The Council was split on this issue. Povolny and Peterson agreed that if a person has adequate screening and a harmonious color scheme, they should be allowed to keep a limited number of shipping containers in their back yard. Daly and Krebs agreed that these containers should only be allowed on a temporary basis; as they are difficult to screen and difficult to place in the back yard.

Final discussion was had on exactly what size lot would be required to store a shipping container in a screened location. There were concerns that there is no way someone with a 2.5 or 5-acre lot would be able to adequately screen a shipping container. At this point, Council Member Duraine expressed his position against allowing shipping containers on a permanent basis, because if they

were only going to be allowed on large lots (say 40-60 acres), the work involved with regulating them would outweigh the benefit – as there are very few lots large enough to accommodate a screened shipping container. This put the Council at a 3-2 vote, in favor of not allowing shipping containers permanently on a person’s property.

With that, the Planning Commission agreed that they have all the information they need to draft an ordinance reflecting the final consensus. This ordinance will be submitted to the Council with recommendation for approval at a later City Council meeting date.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

No report

CITY ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT

City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko reported that Centennial Evangelical Free Church, located at 14854 Lake Drive NE is currently trying to expand, and is running into some issues. Because the church is at legal non-conforming status in the Commercial district, they cannot expand their operations. In order to expand their church, they will be applying to rezone their parcel of land to become Residential.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS’ REPORT

No report.

ATTENDANCE – NEXT CC MEETING

No one is scheduled to attend the City Council meeting on March 8, 2017, because the City Council attended this Planning Commission meeting.

Motion by Sternberg to adjourn. Seconded by Wolowski. Watson – aye; Preiner – aye; Krebs – aye; Wolowski – aye; Sternberg – aye. Motion carried.
Meeting adjourned at 9:43 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jessica Hughes, Public Communications Coordinator