

Gastonia Planning Commission
June 7, 2018

Chairperson Pamela Goode declared a quorum and the Gastonia Planning Commission meeting opened at 5:30 pm on Thursday, June 7, 2018, in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

Present: Commissioners Rodney Armstrong, Jerry Fleeman, Kristie Ferguson, Pamela Goode, Jim Stewart, and Bob Cinq-Mars

Absent: Commissioners Mark Epstein and Bob Biggerstaff

Staff Members Present: Charles Graham, Assistant City Attorney; Jason Thompson, AICP, Planning Director; Jana McMakin, AICP, Senior Planner; Chrystal Howard, Secretary; Tucker Johnson, PE, Assistant City Engineer; and Keith Lineberger, Land Development Project Manager

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

Commissioners stated there were no contacts.

Item 1c: Approval of May 3, 2018 Amended Minutes

Commissioner Stewart made the motion to approve the May amended minutes as written and Commissioner Ferguson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Item 2: Major Subdivision Preliminary Plat - John & Joshua Davis - Wren Road (File #8981)

Request involves a Major Subdivision Preliminary Plat for three (3) lots located off of Wren Road.

Chairperson Goode opened the public hearing and recognized Keith Lineberger, Land Development Project Manager for the purpose of staff presentation.

Mr. Lineberger stated the Mr. Steve Davis submitted subdivision plat on Wren Road north of the existing Rosegate Subdivision. The development will contain a maximum of 3 single-family homes in the Gastonia city limits and is zoned RS-12. Public water is on the north side of the Wren Road that will serve the property and sewer service may be provided by an extension from the existing outfall sewer line coming from the Rosegate Subdivision. The development is currently not reasonably serviced by accessible sewer, so the developer may extend sewer or use drain fields. The section of Wren Road along the proposed development is currently not constructed to City Standards. Any improvements such as curb and gutter, and sidewalks are required. The developer originally requested a modification to this requirement so the improvements would not be required. After the agenda was mailed, the developer withdrew his request and agreed to make payment in lieu of the required improvements as allowed per Section 13.43 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). Being that the "Preliminary Plat" is in conformance with the City of Gastonia's Subdivision Ordinance, it is therefore recommended by staff for approval. Mr. Lineberger acknowledged Mr. Davis was present to also answer any questions.

Commissioner Stewart asked if this was a private road and who maintained it. Mr. Lineberger answered that this was a 60 ft. right-of-way public road with no curb and gutter or sidewalk and it is a city maintained road.

Commissioner Fleeman made the motion to approve the request as presented and Commissioner Stewart seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Chairperson Goode declared a recess to transition the meeting to the Council Conference Room. The meeting recessed at 5:36 p.m. and reconvened at 5:43 p.m.

Item 3: Other Business

Mr. Thompson introduced Richard Flowe, AICP, Metrocology, Inc. and stated that he will briefly talk about national and regional trends in residential growth and development. Mr. Thompson referenced the maps of residential development in Gastonia, existing Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) Standards for residential development, and the existing street standards for residential development included in the agenda packet. Mr. Thompson stated that the goal is to answer two questions:

- What does it mean to you to promote residential growth and development of lasting value?

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- What development regulations are helpful in ensuring this and what regulations may be problematic when it comes to achieving this goal?

Mr. Thompson explained that the information provided in the agenda is for information to consider, to understand what the current standards are, and what has been happening in Gastonia the past 20 years. Answers and discussion on the two questions will allow staff to understand perceptions and opinions of the Commission, as well as, what the Commission needs from staff to really dive into this discussion.

Mr. Richard Flowe, AICP, Metrocology, Inc. introduced himself and provided his work history and background. Mr. Flowe explained that the Planning Commission's first role is to be the visionaries for City Council. Mr. Flowe began his presentation with imagining being ten years old and remembering what it was like to function in the community and he shared his past memories.

Mr. Flowe shared comments on the foundation:

- An importance in a planning role is to think about what created the characteristics of neighborhoods.
- Place is really what you are doing in this role. When planning in a community, you're creating to contributing places that people live and work in.
- Beginning in the 1970's – started to see a slight change that became a rampant change in a number of patterns that brought about more mass production of housing and the way neighborhoods were built. A change was seen in the fabric of the neighborhood as well as the components that made up the neighborhood.

Mr. Flowe quoted a statement from Richard Pryor, "...This is a neighborhood --This is not a residential district". Mr. Flowe continued his comments on the foundation:

- City Halls managing land development has gone too far - trying to paint by numbers.
- There's no human perceptive relationship between a 75 ft. lot, 30 ft. front setback, and 10 ft. side yard setbacks. He explained where these numbers were generated from and in his opinion the lack of sense of the numbers.
- The ordinance is the standard and shared an example of building a dream home. Standards and specifications should give you good feelings and a win-win scenario and make sense. The plan is not a good plan if there are winners and losers. The specifications need to be well thought out if you want the resulting community that your vision or plan calls for. Mr. Flowe provided a couple of examples including Stallings, NC UDO numbers.

Mr. Flowe began comments on the trends:

- Older communities and neighborhoods were developed during the previous huge growth before the recession post WWII explosion that lasted from the late 1940's into very early 1970's. Since then it has repeatedly cycled down and up. There is an imperfect storm that has brewed and started in 2007 - the great recession. We may be out of the recession but we are not out of the influences of it.
- We need to incentivize those by providing them with the tools needed resulting in winners and winners.
- Economic influence on development & development industry:
 - Dodd-Frank Act: Discussed the tightening on financial institutions and its effect on land development.
 - Non-Millennial: Housing as an investment
 - Millennial & Recession: Housing as an expense, rentals, social media
 - Future: Move to smaller towns – walking distance to work, dinner, etc. – downtown area
 - Boomer Generation: Wanting to live maintenance free, enjoying life and/or retirement, sell home, downsize to condominiums and/or smaller houses
- Trend to smaller ring communities outside the big urban area

Mr. Flowe asked the Commission to ponder this question, "What is it that we are going to try to accommodate in the future?" Mr. Flowe stated that comments made earlier are trends effecting quality and location of the development. Mr. Flowe finished his presentation by stating that the role of the Planning Commission needs to come up with the right set of specifications and to figure out what it is that they are going to do with the standards over time to try and achieve whatever they want to achieve in the planning initiatives.

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Mr. Thompson read the two questions for the Planning Commissioners to answer:

1. What does it mean to you to promote residential growth and development of lasting value?
2. What development regulations are helpful in ensuring this and what regulations may be problematic when it comes to achieving this goal?

Mr. Thompson briefly explained the three maps in the agenda packet, agenda pages 3-2 to 3-4.

Commissioner Fleeman stated that he was not being disrespectful in any way and that he did not want to see this exercise turned into a good feel feeling, the City needs a TND neighborhood, we need this and that, and that the City is at a more serious point. When talking about the water and sewer project, Commissioner Fleeman explained that to have the homes, it cannot be regulated or tax it into existence, the Planning Commission needs to work with the UDO and figure out how to make become attractive than the mathematics of the finance. Commissioner Fleeman provided an example and asked how, with the UDO, can we incentivize the larger lot.

Mr. Thompson stated that the output is updates, the potential of rewriting the residential standards, and that staff needs to hear from everyone to know how to proceed.

Commissioner Fleeman stated that the existing UDO was inflexible, Charlotte's UDO was infinitely more flexible than Gastonia's UDO and Gastonia hasn't continued to evolve. Commissioner Fleeman briefly compared street standards with Charlotte, and that with larger lots sidewalks may not be on both sides. He continued that when building in density sidewalks are needed. Pack more requirements in order to achieve the smaller lot density and lessen requirements on larger lots. Consider ditches versus curb and gutter similar. Commissioner Fleeman briefly talked about soil and erosion. He reiterated that the City needs to be more flexible. If the City wants something then maybe make it less expensive to do it.

At this time, Commissioner Cinq-Mars arrived to the meeting.

Commissioner Stewart added to the comments of Commissioner Fleeman and reminded the group that older people have lived through a lot of changes over a period of time and shared his earlier experiences of what he could do and where he could go while feeling safe. Commissioner Stewart briefly explained communities that consist mainly of elderly. After sharing his experiences, he stated that today parents are afraid to let their children go out and do anything because they may get hurt, kidnapped, or something else.

Mr. Thompson stated that Commissioners Fleeman and Stewart made good points. Mr. Thompson stated that the part of about lot size and perception have been a big issue in Gastonia from discussion and observation and referred to the tax value map. He briefly discussed lot size and value and that it was a complex conversation in comparison to small lots and big lots. Mr. Thompson stated that having the right development regulations and standards in place are pivotal to the end result.

Commissioner Ferguson liked everything that was discussed so far and that it was hitting home to her. Commissioner Ferguson shared her background and spoke about a community cocoon. She stated that finding a happy medium between people wanting to move back to the center city is creating a new center. Commissioner Ferguson also stated that there were very successful neighborhoods and studies of top plan developments in the country and provided a development in Charleston as an example. These lots are small in exchange for communal space in exchange for green space. People want walkability, neighborhoods, dining, shopping, and biking within a unit and she thought this may be a happy medium.

In reference to Commissioner Ferguson's comments, Commissioner Cinq-Mars acknowledged Ayrley community in Charlotte with structures surrounding a center with dynamics. Commissioner Cinq-Mars would like communal, walkability, access to business, while sacrificing large lots. The City of Gastonia is a diverse town with strips but little centers.

Commissioner Stewart stated Gastonia looks like Sumter, SC.

Mr. Thompson stated that these examples do not have what Gastonia has, the gigantic economic engine that is about to start pumping development across the river into Gastonia. Mr. Thompson

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provided two questions to think about. What does it look like when that wave starts coming this way? What is it that people coming want?

Commissioner Fleeman referred to an earlier long range plan that Gastonia is not an apple anymore, and there is no core, but that it was and is a cluster of grapes. As a result, we are not recreating, but are creating something new. Commissioner Fleeman referred to Commissioner Cinq-Mars comments and stated that if we demand a communal space, we have to do away with the idea of somebody giving us a floodplain, put a path on it and it becomes the open space. We need to change the dynamic and up a lot of the standards to get what we want in return for small lots. That would be how we get better development.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars also stated topography is also a problem.

Mr. Flowe stated that land is not all created equal and explained expectations established for the yield of the property after factoring such things as wetland or floodplain areas, as well as, the mathematical equation converting to a problem at the staff level. The development policy has to identify certain things that are not eligible in building lots, lots sold to the general public for homes. Mr. Flowe briefly explained two types of open space, open space set aside for floodplain and open space in the neighborhood. Mr. Flowe agreed that to get the price up, you have to affect the developer cost and provided an example. Mr. Flowe explained placing density where density works concentrating on density in hubs or core areas.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars stated that Gastonia has a grocery store desert and apartment house congregations to the point of detriment to schools.

Mr. Flowe briefly explained carrying capacity within an area with factors for certain products. He stated that when designing a zoning district structure, it may include a core area - downtown, transition area – townhouses and apartments, and then the neighborhood areas with detached housing. These lines need to be relatively ridged and it is about moderation and scale.

Chairperson Goode asked how we include this into the ordinance and Mr. Thompson answered that it will take a deep dive from the Planning Commission to get to that point to formulate standards. Mr. Thompson shared that he is receiving calls about residential development in every form and provided examples. He explained the importance of having these conversations will provide confidence in establishing proper standards for the future.

Commissioner Stewart provided an example detention pond issue, as well as, referencing the subdivision plat discussed earlier in the meeting Wren Road's ditches and no curb and gutter.

Commissioner Armstrong is in agreement with Commissioner Fleeman with flexibility. If the city is not flexible to accept the growth coming in and start bending, they'll go somewhere else. He continued that the city needs to be flexible not with just the new, but with the old established areas. This area within a half mile radius is more prime than any area surrounding Gaston County. Commissioner Armstrong used the Loray Mill as an example, as well as the FUSE. The city needs to figure out how to be flexible enough to get them into the spot.

Mr. Thompson stated the key from a development regulation perspective in flexibility is often times perceived to be no regulation and complete deregulation means maximum flexibility. Mr. Thompson stated that his belief is that the best flexibility is having the right flexibility in the right location.

Commissioner Stewart reminded the group that people used to live above the buildings in downtown and the building codes make it almost impossible for someone to do that now. Therefore, it is a combination of building codes that dictate a lot of downtown. Mr. Flowe stated that it is partly building codes, as well as zoning codes, and shared a behavioral change example for standards and specifications.

Commissioner Stewart referred to a previous rezoning request to rezone approximately 0.33 acre from C-3 (General Commercial District) to UMU (Urban Mixed Use District) on E. Third Avenue and after thorough discussion the Planning Commission approved the request to rezone from C-3 (General Commercial District) to O-1 (Office District). Mr. Flowe stated that this was the transition he was talking about. Mr. Thompson requested the Commission to remember the

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different style and types of residential that are coming and what people are interested in. Commissioner Stewart referred to multi-family houses in the larger neighborhoods on the south side and York Chester Historic District having existed for a long time and stated that these areas are a good mix.

Commissioner Fleeman suggested Charlotte's flexible concept basically taking core standards and also standards with flexibility. The process begins with a committee to review the design and determine if it meets all the core and parts or all of the flexible standards. The committee then acts like an advocate before the Planning Commission and he feels that this will be critical to all the new product. Commissioner Fleeman briefly talked about PRDs, pocket parks or recreation areas, and creating density without quality out of the density.

Mr. Flowe stated that the tradeoff is important and briefly explained private and public improved and unimproved open space. He shared his neighborhood open space. Mr. Flowe continued that he looks at things from a safety standpoint which is tied to the public health, safety and welfare. Sometimes quality design is communicated through comfort and this is how to attract people. If comfortable places are built and neighborhoods, you have to use zoning to manage density.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars asked how to change things such as downtown and used Second Avenue as an example for a four-story apartment. Mr. Flowe briefly explained creating opportunity, incentivize investment and planting the seed. Mr. Thompson agreed with planting the seed and stated that Second Avenue was a great example and is exactly what we are currently trying to do. We are trying to improve this corridor and make it become the primary bicycle and pedestrian friendly corridor in the center city. People want to feel comfortable to ride their bike to local restaurants. This conversion and sidewalk fill-in project will continue to the west of Loray from Marietta Street to Chestnut to Lineberger Park. Commissioner Cinq-Mars asked about the east side and encouraged walkable restaurants and wine stores to develop the business sector downtown. Mr. Flowe stated that these are ideal examples of the types of public investment that can leverage a huge payback to private investment. Commissioner Stewart stated this particular connector is important because a lot of kids go to Lineberger Park who have to walk in the streets. Mr. Thompson stated that this is a key connector and link in the overall greenway system. Brief discussion ensued on the greenway system and multiple loop options.

Commissioner Stewart referenced the Third Street area and the restoration of some homes improving the neighborhood making it more desirable. Commissioner Cinq-Mars stated a street sweeper down the sidewalks after a storm can make an improvement. Mr. Thompson agreed that maintenance is certainly important.

Mr. Thompson asked the Planning Commission if they would like to keep these meetings to two hours because it is very easy to jump into all the details without getting to what it is from a broad scale perspective that we feel we need to see and where we need to develop.

Mr. Thompson proposed a couple options. The Planning Commission discussed and decided to email answers to two questions within the next week:

1. What does it mean to you to promote residential growth and development of lasting value?
2. What development regulations are helpful in ensuring this and what regulations may be problematic when it comes to achieving this goal?

Commissioner Fleeman requested the major points such as the written list on the board to be emailed to the Commissioners. Commissioner Goode would like to know the development headings for certain areas to help with discussion.

The Planning Commission agreed to send their calendars to Ms. Howard for arranging a special meeting later in July.

Mr. Thompson briefly updated the Commission on items that will be presented in the upcoming months.

Commissioner Fleeman made the motion to cancel the Thursday, July 5, 2018 Gastonia Planning Commission and Commissioner Cinq-Mars seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

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Ms. Howard will email a reminder to the Planning Commission to turn in their answers by next Thursday and to send their calendars for scheduling the special meeting in July.

Mr. Flowe stated that he thinks the Commission is headed down the right path and closed by stating to the Commission that if they want to succeed they have to create opportunities for success. The standards and specifications should lead them toward it.

Board Post-It Notes:

Residential Trends

- Standards & Specifications
- “Plans & Specs”
 - ...to build our dream town
- Creating large lot homes with UDO
 - Lot width affects development costs
- Incentive for design quality where density
- Well-designed neighborhoods raise value
- Quality open space in neighborhoods
- Flexibility
- Various types of housing
- Walkable core & links to res.

There being no further business, Commissioner Goode adjourned the meeting at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

Pam Goode, Chairperson