

Gastonia Planning Commission
July 19, 2018

Chairperson Pamela Goode declared a quorum and the Gastonia Planning Commission Special Workshop meeting opened at 5:31 pm on Thursday, July 19, 2018, in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

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

Absent: Commissioner 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; and Rusty Bost, Director of Development Services

City Council Member Present: Councilman Gallagher

Guest Present: Demetri Baches, Metrocology, Inc.

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

Commissioners stated there were no contacts.

Item 1c: Approval of June 7, 2018 Minutes

Commissioner Cinq-Mars made the motion to approve the June minutes as written and Commissioner Fleeman seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Item 2: Residential Development Standards Discussion Continued

Chairperson Goode opened the public hearing and recognized Jason Thompson, AICP, Planning Director for the purpose of staff presentation.

Mr. Thompson thanked the Commission for being present and introduced Mr. Baches.

Mr. Thompson reviewed and summarized the Residential Development Standards Question and Answer (Q&A) responses. He stated walkability, connectivity, focus on a variety of housing types, fiscally responsible, development that stands the test of time, and communities that offer amenities and open space were brought up multiple times in the first question. Flexibility in regulation, understanding the formulated nature of tract builders, simplifying regulation, and awareness of the importance of housing affordability were recognized in the second question. Mr. Thompson asked if anyone had further questions or discussion. Commissioner Ferguson stated to anticipate more calls from tract builders and commented on Fort Mill's raised impact fees. Commissioner Fleeman reemphasized on Charlotte's flexible standards as a good example and requested a copy of their standards to circulate. Commissioner Cinq-Mars talked about the need for flexibility of retro fitting in older neighborhoods. Commissioner Stewart wants flexibility in areas such as Second Avenue to Lineberger Park and York Chester. Commissioner Epstein stated he had no objections to the merits presented. He talked about the unintended consequences of flexibility and explained the reason for lack of flexibility in the current Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). The flexibility problems mentioned are that the Planning Commission becomes the interpreter and applier of relaxed or loose rules, proposals have infinite permutations, complex decisions, risk of inconsistencies of applying rules and regulations, risk of political fallout, public criticism, however, it makes the developer's job theoretically easier and more attractive. Commissioner Epstein reiterated that there is an upside and downside to flexibility. Chairman Goode explained we will need a standard like a box with multiple choice and a person can choose from the box. With the way the City is progressing, we cannot keep the standard straight across the board.

Chairman Goode requested introductions of staff, Councilman Gallagher, and guests. Introductions ensued.

Mr. Baches thanked the Planning Commission for their service and provided his employment background. Mr. Baches began by informing the Commission that they are like a Board in a company and a fundamental component of running a place. The decisions made are more

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important because the shape of the city determines the budget and all the things you can do as a community. Planning poorly results in terrible fiscal outcomes and amenities and over a time loss of population. Planning a City is critical because land is not infinite. When outside a community, which is one of the fastest growing in the United States, you have very little time to react. Matthews which maintained its core and Pineville are examples as swallowed up by Charlotte. Huntersville, Davidson and Cornelius are towns inundated by Charlotte. The western side of Charlotte hasn't seen the growth with the river and topography playing a role, as well as, land availability and perception. Growth needs to go somewhere and it is coming here. The Planning Commission needs to know what to do when the growth actually hits. Mr. Baches explained form based code as the reintroduction of ways of building places that offers choice. It is important to comb through the ordinance and figure out what is wanted at the finish. Gastonia does not have a lot of land left to develop and is topographically challenged. Gastonia will have 5 to 10 years when the growth hits to get it right and then the land will be done. Redevelopment and teardown occurs afterwards.

Commissioner Epstein asked for a brief overview of large developers (big players) and other developers that are unable to participate and their obstacles. Mr. Baches stated they all have a challenge. In a market that promotes because of its zoning ordinances, the ease a large company can take advantage of a lot of things pushing out the smaller player. The issue is that is all they build. Ryan Homes was used as an example. Brief discussion ensued on the market finding weaknesses in zoning and the City strengthening their ability to leverage value from everybody.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars and Mr. Baches briefly talked Charlotte incorporating its property and no expansion of land mass resulting in a zoning issue.

Mr. Baches began his presentation of Form Based Codes stating everything is a form beginning with Conventional zoning. Cities should not be dictated by a tool such as a vehicle. Mr. Baches explained three types of Urbanism; Old/New Urbanism, Nature, and Suburbanism/Landscape Urbanism. For the single family dwelling attached, add a few things in the language that allows and crafts in a way that adds more ingredients of community into the development and projects. As time progresses and ordinances change, development will increase in the character, eminently, and value integrating all this into one actual place called Gastonia. Mr. Baches explained Community; stakeholders, special interests, citizens, and public officials, together creating culture, society, environment, and economics that reacts as our place. The zoning ordinance needs to address all these important attributes because each add value. Mr. Baches used Charlotte as an example regarding economics and briefly explained total tax value by acreage, per acre, and the traditional neighborhood. He stated add enough value to what is being built paying for things that eventually have happen by tweaking slightly the suburban standards, changing zoning ordinance, and have the political will to rezone areas.

Commissioner Epstein commented that this is really counter intuitive and everybody thinks the money is coming from Franklin Square. Mr. Baches explained that each shopping center with a Walmart anchor requires approximately \$200,000 of policeman, staff & equipment (car). The average tax value generated by a Walmart is \$180,000 in retail sales. He continued that it is probably a drain or breaking after factoring services required.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars stated sales tax was not taken into account. Mr. Baches stated most sales tax goes to Walmart Corporate and the City is receiving a percentage of a percentage.

Mr. Baches continued with explaining county property taxes per acre and Birkdale Village was briefly discussed. He explained the transfer of design value into monetary value and impact on the city using Asheville as an example regarding the redevelopment of an old site that was to become a Publix. He continued that design is a critical factor in how this works. It is important to attack the most pervasive of the components of the city which is single family suburban housing.

Commissioner Epstein mentioned mixed use and the evaporation of parking and that the ordinance is very specific about how much parking is needed per square footage. Parking decks/structures are used to accommodate the loss surface parking. With regards to maximum value, Mr. Baches used FUSE as an example for parking deck consideration. It is critical that the city work with the developer or group to joint venture parking garages. The City of Greenville and City of Asheville were used as examples. Brief discussion ensued on parking decks.

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Mr. Baches continued with his presentation with the attributes and participants in Community Development. Mr. Baches briefly explained that cities invest in area plans, design manuals and comprehensive to run and create their city.

Mr. Baches expounded on the undeveloped green space in the City of Gastonia and its handicap in terms of land area it has available to develop. Mr. Baches displayed areas Gastonia has left to alter in terms of the character of the place before redevelopment. Presley development was used as an example for size comparison.

Commissioner Epstein inquired about Robinson Road and Howe Dairy Farm. Mr. Baches stated that there are other locations to work with and referred to large area and scale to be able to affect change at a city level.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars inquired about control outside the city limits and Mr. Baches answered, "Annexation".

Mr. Baches finished his first presentation elucidating on the importance of fine amount of time to be able to create enough impactful change to allow projecting the City of Gastonia's health from its community, environment, citizens, and fiscal health in the future. The window is approximately 10 years. The cycle time frame was briefly explained coming out of Charlotte.

Mr. Baches began his presentation of Form Based Codes by stating from suburban to urban a building can sit on a lot in one of four ways; edge yard, side yard, rear yard, or a court yard. The range from the most rural with a common yard to the most urban with arcade. This is important because this is how to create character in the front yard along a street. The next layer from the building and yard is the attachment of the street from the most rural, highway, to the most urban, boulevards. Planting of trees was illustrated. The next layer is the street itself with or without curb and sidewalks. Parking was next from no parking to parking on slip street. Tree plantings in the street from tree cover that is large because it is more rural to urban trees that can survive in tighter spaces and conditions that do not block visibility. Lighting is next moving from rural or urban. Lastly is parks and the blocks, such as playgrounds, parks, squares, plaza, and green space. The cut across sectioned from the building to the outdoor world are the elements that are addressed in the form based codes. A form based code measures and makes it a part of the ordinance.

One of Charlotte's owned parks, its daily use and maintenance were briefly discussed.

Mr. Baches finished his presentation by stating when combining all the layers, you end up with transect zones; natural, rural, suburban, general urban, urban center and urban core zones. Most communities have a Community Pattern (Transect) and can use these examples to re-create the forms (with Form Based Coding) which are most cherished by their residents. The Commission informs and provides the tools. The City Council votes at the end of the day. Mr. Baches open the workshop for questions.

Commissioner Epstein inquired about tweaks and Mr. Baches stated he's writing them down and will get back to him. These tweaks/issues will be talked about. After discussion and understanding, these will be collated into a final set and then properly placed in the ordinance. These will stand as modifications required for addressing projects.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars acknowledged a development at the intersection Redbud Drive and New Hope with a core, mini town, and around the core a density, apartments, with residential neighborhoods.

Commissioner Epstein stated flexibility won't be the operative term as much as choice. There will be more choice rather than flexibility. Mr. Thompson reiterated the first question on lasting value and briefly explained value. The ordinance has holes in terms of being able to get some configurations. Commissioner Epstein inquired about a timeline and Mr. Thompson stated the goal is to have a draft of proposed changes at the regular September Planning Commission meeting.

Commissioner Goode stated the last four slides displayed explained what she was trying to say.

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Commissioner Epstein inquired more about the timeline. Brief discussion ensued on the need for another workshop. The Commission favored another work session to be held later in September. Brief discussion and agreement amongst Commissioners, staff and Mr. Baches ensued on having another work session to review, discuss the draft, revise, finalize, and consider one more session if necessary before presenting to City Council. Commissioner Epstein stated the same situation may need to take place for City Council and he reiterated that Franklin Square thought of as the money generator. Mr. Baches stated Walmart brings valuable components, affordable goods and products and creates some jobs; therefore it is a need. However, around Walmart and parking, there are other things going on that can be attached to it making it profitable. Commissioner Epstein informed Mr. Baches that the objection sometimes of rezonings is the City wants the money generated, tax revenue. The money that the City makes from a particular rezoning does not come into the calculus and not part of the deliberations. Commissioner Epstein continued that now some of the calculus has to occur and Mr. Baches agreed. Brief discussion ensued on Franklin Square.

Mr. Baches reiterated Commission's role as a Board in a company and a fundamental component of running a place, the importance of their decisions, and poor planning results.

Commissioner Fleeman agreed with Commissioner Epstein on doing the calculus and used pocket parks as an example. He stated the Planning Commission is at a point where they need to begin doing this.

Mr. Thompson talked about tract builders knowing the trends and stated he is receiving calls about higher density product, development, attached product and single family detached.

Commissioner Cinq-Mars stated he has observed the need for variety, density, pocket parks, sidewalks, and duplexes.

Mr. Rusty Bost commented that the City of Gastonia does not have a form based code and provided an illustration of what the City currently has resulting in asking the Commission if this something they want continue exploring. Mr. Baches commented that this is moving into rewriting the ordinance or modifying the existing ordinance to accommodate these additional tools that includes mapping. Currently the discussion is about tweaking the text amendment for single family subdivision and not duplexes, attached product, commercial, mixed use, small area plan, mapping or rezoning. Further discussion ensued on a full progression as a revision to the current UDO. The Planning Commission makes a decision and recommendation on moving forward on adding all the additional tools required and City Council makes the decision. Mr. Baches continued that he can estimate on the cost involved in terms of time, resources and commitment and bring it before the Commission.

The reason for the City of Gastonia having a UDO was briefly explained by Commissioner Epstein. Then he inquired how a radically change made to the ordinance will affect what happens to land in the former ETJ or abutting limits that also adopted the UDO. Mr. Thompson stated all sorts of communities adopt UDOs and the unification of a UDO is the subdivision and zoning ordinance together in one land development code. The reason for nearby areas adopting a slightly common UDO was the concern of baseline regulations and definitions. Baseline standards would be fairly uniform across jurisdictions. The codes in different communities were never intended to be carbon copies of one another. The idea was commonality in the basics so the language the codes were speaking are similar. The City of Gastonia's UDO version is dramatically different from other jurisdictions. Currently Planned Residential Development (PRD) is dramatically different. Mr. Thompson stated that stepping in this direction with changing that part of the code will not affect much and he was not concerned. Gastonia tends to be the lead on ordinance adjustments and changes, and other jurisdictions often decide to do it as well.

Commissioner Armstrong inquired about making changes to bring more people to Gastonia to better the City and have more growth. Looking at the maps with the peaks, he asked if single family development homes will initially give the biggest impact moving forward and why was it chosen to go this route first. Mr. Thompson explained budget was a factor, Charlotte's growth will eventually come this way, receiving calls and meetings occurring, and addressing problems has encouraged discussion now on single family development.

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Brief discussion ensued on how funding effects zoning rewrites and it being a massive undertaking. Charlotte and Miami were used as an example. The conversation ended with talking about the current contract as a one-time allocation by the Planning Department and is a study on single family residential.

Item 3: Other Business

The next meeting is scheduled on Thursday, August 9th. For the month of September, the draft will be presented at the regular meeting scheduled on Thursday, September 6th. Discussion ensued on the September schedule. After discussion, the decision was made to have a workshop later date in September. Ms. Howard will email the Commissioners a couple dates.

No updates on council votes.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

Pam Goode, Chairperson