

The Easton Planning Commission met on Wednesday, April 4 2012 in the 6th Floor Council Chambers, Easton City Hall. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Charles Elliott. Present: Charles Elliott, Robert Sun, James Bloom, Dennis Lieb, William Heilman, Bonnie Winfield and Ronald Shipman. Also in attendance were staff members Brian Gish, Chief Planner; Carl Manges, City Planner; and Tina Woolverton, Secretary. Solicitor Joel Scheer was present.

The agenda was approved.

A motion to approve the minutes of the March 7, 2012 meeting was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Ms. Winfield, approved by all.

Privilege of the Floor. None

LERTA Presentation. Ms. Longenbach, the City's Director of Community and Economic Development explained the City would like to create LERTA (Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act), and KOZ (Keystone Opportunity Zones). LERTA, known as Act 76 of 1977, authorizes local taxing authorities to exempt real estate taxation, for specified periods of time, on improvements to certain deteriorated industrial, commercial and residential properties. The purpose of the presentation before the Planning Commission was to hold the first public meeting on the proposed LERTA District. She said there were six main priority properties for the LERTA and KOZ districts, including the Simon Silk Mill, the commercial component of the S. Third Street Intermodal project, the Black Diamond industrial site on the south side, the 100 block of Northampton Street, the Governor Wolf building, per request of Northampton County, and the Armory building, which is currently under a sales contract.

She added under LERTA, the properties' taxes never decrease, but instead the payment of the additional assessment of the improvements increases incrementally over 10 years. Mr. Lieb asked if there were changes in the KOZ laws. Ms. Longenbach said the main changes are the requirements for a certificate of occupancy and tax and code compliance. Mr. Sun questioned why such a large portion of the downtown was included in the proposed district. Ms. Longenbach explained there is no way to forecast which properties will have interested investors and this adds incentive, without negative cash flow for the taxing bodies. Mr. Sun questioned the addition of people and required services without an equal increase in revenue. Mayor Panto reiterated the program does not result in a decrease of revenue, but rather an incremental increase only for substantial investment in a property. He added, in the case of the home ownership portion of Neston Heights, there is an income cap for the buyers. While some individuals have qualified for the mortgage, they are not able to qualify if the taxes are immediately based on the fully assessed property value.

Mr. Elliott questioned the criteria used to determine the boundaries of the district. Ms. Longenbach said it is based on census tract data.

Lafayette College Parking Plan Presentation. Mr. Mitch Wein, Vice-President of Business Affairs and Ms. Mary Wilford-Hunt, Director of Facilities Planning and Construction of Lafayette College presented a power-point presentation of the parking overview plan for the College at the request of the Planning Commission. Ms. Wilford-Hunt said the goals in keeping with the master plan are to minimize vehicular traffic through the center of the campus. Mr. Wein said over 1500 parking spaces exist on campus, and total parking registrations total 1537, with 940 of that number including all staff, working all shifts. Ms. Wilford-Hunt said prior to the Quad Projects, there was a total of 1518 parking spaces. After the projects, there will be 1544, not including the 3rd Street lots. Mr. Lieb questioned how many on-street parking spots had been lost due to the projects. Ms. Wilford-Hunt said the net loss was 9 spaces. Mr. Sun questioned not

the number of spaces, but the proximity of the spaces to the buildings they provide parking for. He added that instead of parking in a lot quite a distance from the building they work in, employees would seek on-street parking closer to their offices. Mr. Bloom asked if the Hummel Lumber site was included in the parking plan. Mr. Wein said it is part of the master plan, but not included in the parking study.

Mr. Elliott commented that, per the request of the Commission at the previous meeting, the college had provided a holistic view of the parking situation. He added he is inclined to accept the determination that the available parking exceeds the need. Mr. Philip Hart, President of the College Hill Neighborhood Association complimented the college for the presentation. Mr. Josh Rea, Vice-president of the College Hill Neighborhood Association said the association has no objection to the presentation and added the college has been working with and engaging the neighborhoods in the discussions. Mr. Sun said he feels the Commission needs to look at the plan from all angles.

Lafayette College Quad Project Development Plan. Mr. Manges said the applicant, Lafayette College, has proposed to close Quad Drive (which runs along the perimeter of the Quad) to vehicular access, converting it to a pedestrian-oriented space. This proposed project seeks to redefine open space connections to create a network of pedestrian pathways. Additionally, new pathways are proposed for the interior of The Quad, including the area in front of the Skillman Library. The project also includes the creation of a reception point immediately east of Pardee Hall, including seven new parking spaces. Finally, the plans include minor improvements along Clinton Terrace, west of McCartney Street, a segment vacated by the city in July, 1971. Improvements to the Quad are intended to dovetail with those previously approved for Watson Hall Courtyard and Pardee Drive. The project is slated to begin following 2012 Commencement (May 21, 2012), with completion anticipated by October, 2012. A motion to approve the resolution granting conditional final approval of the plan was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Mr. Shipman, approved by all with the exception of Ms. Winfield, who abstained from voting as she is on the staff of the college.

Special Exception - 91 Larry Holmes Drive. Mr. Manges said the applicant, Misty Dorsey, in conjunction with Revival Fire Ministries, Inc., has proposed to establish a Religious Worship Service and Retail Specialty establishment in a 4,500 square foot first floor area of a two-story commercial building, located at 91 Larry Holmes Drive, Suite 100. There are three commercial spaces on the 1st Floor, and a commercial space on the 2nd Floor. The previous use in Suite 100 was the Ringside Restaurant. The facility is proposed to be run by the Ministry as a non-profit, and no one will be residing at this location. It is anticipated there will be 50-60 individuals in the building during services. It is also anticipated that the congregation will grow to 140 in the future. A Retail Specialty establishment (Book Store) is also being proposed as a component of the religious use.

The property is located in the Downtown Zoning District; Block Class A, where the proposed Religious Worship Services is a permitted by Special Exception. The Retail Specialty establishment is a permitted use in the Downtown Zoning District. The property is also located in the Federal Emergency Management Agency defined 100-year flood, requiring Special Exception approval for use in the floodplain.

A site plan has been provided to staff, and the applicant has provided information regarding measures to be taken in the event of a Flood Warning and/or Emergency. The site plan indicates that the 1st floor of 91 Larry Holmes Drive is at an elevation of 193.8 feet, and according to the FEMA flood map, the base flood elevation is 195 feet. The applicant has indicated there is no basement in this building, and no hazardous materials of any kind will be stored at this site. In the event of a Flood Warning, all operations in the building will cease, and the premises will be evacuated until the flood waters have subsided. The applicant also indicated all computer equipment on the 1st

Floor will be moved to the 2nd Floor or transported from the building and out of the floodplain during a flood event. The applicant indicated that no flood waters have reached the building during the last four flood events that have occurred in the City.

A conversation with the applicant on March 27, 2012, revealed that the Revival Fire Ministries desires to create a place for religious worship at 91 Larry Holmes Drive. Office hours will be Monday-Friday 10am – 3pm, with evening healing and prayer services on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Bible School (9am) and Church service (11am) will be held on Sundays. The applicant indicated that they currently conduct these services from 137 Northampton Street. The bookstore component will be open to the public during worship service and office hours.

The applicant was present. Mr. Shipman questioned the book store component. Ms. Dorsey said they would be selling new and used books. Mr. Sun asked if the use would occupy all of the first floor. Ms. Dorsey said it would. Mr. Sun asked if there was an occupancy maximum. Mr. Gish said the Fire Inspector would have made that determination. Mr. Lieb asked if it would be loose seating. Ms. Dorsey said it would. A motion to approve the resolution recommending approval to the Zoning Hearing Board was made by Mr. Heilman, seconded by Mr. Lieb, approved by all.

Special Exception – 501B W. Berwick Street. Mr. Manges said the applicant, Pedro Labron, proposes to establish a Food Establishment (Grocery) use in the vacant first floor of an existing mixed-use two-story building at 501 W. Berwick Street. Previous uses at this location consisted of a karate studio and a grocery. The property is located in the South Side Zoning District, Block Class C, where the proposed Food Establishment use is not permitted. However, the property is also located in the Street Corridor Enhancement Overlay District, where the use is permitted by Special Exception. A hair salon was approved for this location in 2009, but was never opened.

A conversation with Mr. Labron on March 16, 2012, revealed that he wants to establish a small grocery store and he and a part-time employee will operate the business. There is a possibility of hiring additional employees in the future if necessary. The hours of operation will be Monday to Saturday 7am – 9pm, and Sunday 8am - 5pm. The applicant also, indicated that there are no off-street parking spaces provided at this location. The applicant believes most of the customers will be walk-ins from the neighborhood. According to Mr. Labron, deliveries will be made in small trucks and delivery vans. There will be no tractor-trailer deliveries for this business. The applicant indicated that he previously ran the corner grocery store at 698 Northampton Street.

The applicant was not present. A motion to approve the resolution recommending approval to the Zoning Hearing Board was made by Mr. Heilman, seconded by Mr. Bloom, approved by all.

Shad Hatchery Tank at Hugh Moore Park Update. Mr. Gish said this will be the second season for the tank, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Northeast Fisheries Center, is looking to transition the site into a permanent operation. He added a viewing platform will be included, along with some educational signage. At the moment, grant funding is being sought for the project.

Certifications of Blight. Mr. Elliott noted these properties had been previously determined blighted by the Planning Commission, and after proper notification and an appeal period to the property owners, they were now before the Commission for certification of blight. He noted none of the property owners were in attendance.

A motion to accept the resolution certifying 373 W. Nesquehoning Street as blighted was made by Mr. Shipman, seconded by Mr. Lieb, approved by all.

A motion to accept the resolution certifying 51 S. Warren Street as blighted was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Mr. Sun , approved by all.

A motion to accept the resolution certifying 675 Pine Street as blighted was made by Mr. Sun, seconded by Mr. Lieb, approved by all.

A motion to accept the resolution certifying 501 Northampton Street as blighted was made by Mr. Heilman, seconded by Mr. Lieb.

A motion to accept the resolution certifying 687 Northampton Street as blighted was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Mr. Heilman, approved by all.

A motion to accept the resolution certifying 430 W. Lincoln Street as blighted was made by Mr. Lieb, seconded by Mr. Heilman, approved by all.

Staff Updates.

- **Comprehensive Plan re-write.** Mr. Gish said staff is working on a meeting schedule. He said the Planning Commission will serve as the steering committee and an advisory committee will be comprised of stakeholders and community groups. Mr. Elliott asked if Main Street would be one of the stakeholders. Mr. Gish said they would.
- **KSAT signage.** Mr. Gish informed the Commission that the signage for the Karl Stirner Arts Trail had arrived earlier in the day.

EAC Update. Mr. Elliott said there was no update as he did not attend the previous evening's meeting.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:38 PM.