

The Easton Planning Commission met on Wednesday, March 5, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers, Alpha Building, One South Third Street, Easton, PA 18042. Planning Commissioners Charles Elliott, Mia Hatzis, William Heilman, Dennis Lieb, Bonnie Winfield, and Ronald Shipman were in attendance. The following Planning & Codes staff members were present: Chief Planner Carl Manges and Planner I Mike Handzo. City Solicitor Joel Scheer was also present.

Mr. Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Mr. Elliott informed the Commission of a request from the College Hill Neighborhood Association to furnish a letter of support for a Northampton County 21<sup>st</sup> Century Open Space Initiative grant application. He indicated this request would be considered as the ninth item on the agenda, prior to adjournment.

Mr. Shipman moved, with Ms. Winfield seconding, that the minutes of the February 5, 2014 meeting be approved as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

**Privilege of the Floor.** Geri Tochinni, 241 Spring Garden Street, asked how the Special Exception proposal for 243 Spring Garden Street would affect neighbors such as herself. Mr. Elliott informed her that the Special Exception request was a scheduled agenda item, and explained she could offer comment once the Commission formally took the item under consideration.

**243 Spring Garden Street – Special Exception.** Mr. Manges read that the applicants, Terry and Carol Pundiak, have proposed to establish an A3 – Single-Family Attached Dwelling use at 243 Spring Garden Street. A mixed-use building containing office space and two (2) apartments is currently at this address, and the applicant would de-convert this building into the proposed single-family home. This property is located in the Downtown Zoning District, Block Class C, where Single-Family Attached Dwelling uses are not permitted per Article XX §595-108. However, Single-Family Attached Dwelling uses are permitted by Special Exception in the Downtown Zoning District per Article XX §595-109.

A conversation with Terry and Carol Pundiak on February 18, 2014 revealed that they intend to change a mixed-use building at 243 Spring Garden Street into a single-family residence. The applicant shared that they had identified a prospective buyer with a strong interest in preserving the home's historic character.

The property is located in the Local Historic District, but the applicant does not propose any exterior alterations with this application. Therefore, the applicant does not require Historic District Commission review and approval.

Mr. Manges reported that the proposal met the criteria for Special Exceptions outlined in Article XXXVIII §595-251. Therefore, he communicated that staff advocates Planning Commission's recommendation to the Zoning Hearing Board that the request for Special Exception for the proposed A3 – Single-Family Attached Dwelling use be granted.

The applicants, Terry and Carol Pundiak, were present. Mr. Pundiak expressed that the prospective buyer, who is interested in returning the 120-year-old home to its original glory, would be an asset to the community. In response to Ms. Tochinni's concerns, Mrs. Pundiak described the buyers as an older couple without children.

Mr. Lieb indicated he was aware of several potential applicants interested in returning Downtown District homes containing underutilized commercial spaces to their original single-family use. He suggested that such proposals may not necessitate the expense and effort of a Special Exception request, as the Commission consistently recommends their approval. Mr. Manges reported that City Planning and Zoning staff were meeting with Mr. Elliott to examine such issues.

Mr. Elliott stated that potential revisions to the Zoning Ordinance were becoming apparent with its use. He indicated that the revision process would require some time, but represented a high planning priority on which he and staff had begun consideration. Mr. Elliott characterized the establishment of Downtown Zoning District residential uses outside the Street Corridor Enhancement Overlay District as the primary issue requiring reexamination. Mr. Scheer mentioned that the City generally sought to change Special Exception uses requiring minimal review and producing minimal impact to permitted-by-right uses.

Mr. Elliott asked the applicant when the property was converted to mixed-use, with Mr. Pundiak responding that the conversion occurred prior to 1950. Mr. Elliott inquired about the scope of interior renovations. Mr. and Mrs.

Pundiak shared their prospective buyer's plans. In response to a question by Ms. Tochinni, Mrs. Pundiak characterized construction disturbances to neighbors as minimal. Jeff Martinson, 204 Bushkill Street, expressed his support of the proposal and indicated it would complement an established base of owner-occupants on the block.

Mr. Heilman moved, with Mr. Lieb seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission recommend to the Zoning Hearing Board that it grants a Special Exception request with conditions to Terry and Carol Pundiak for a Single-Family Attached Dwelling use at 243 Spring Garden Street. The motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of 2013 Annual Report.** Mr. Manges stated that the Planning Bureau and Planning Commission review progress toward the 1997 Comprehensive Plan yearly, and reported that Mr. Handzo assembled the 2013 Annual Report. Mr. Handzo indicated that the 2013 report was in keeping with prior years' format as a fluid narrative celebrating the City's successes, and that the Mayor would use the report to prepare his State of the City address. He thanked Mr. Manges and the City for the opportunity to prepare the report.

Mr. Elliott described the report as enlightening. Mr. Shipman expressed that the report provides a useful overall view of City government operation, and suggested it could be circulated to residents, businesses, and institutions in the name of public relations. The Commission generally affirmed Mr. Shipman's suggestion regarding public distribution. Mr. Manges indicated that potential circulation would become the City Clerk's responsibility once City Council approved the report. Mr. Elliott requested that the report be highlighted on the City website, with Mr. Manges offering to provide a copy to Information Technology staff.

Mr. Lieb stated that "Walter Bright" should be spelled "Waltar Bright." Mr. Elliott identified a typographical error in the Bureau of Codes section, and requested clarifications regarding the implementation of the Dutchtown Market Green plan and the phrasing "subject to fires." Mr. Handzo replied that he would make these edits prior to the report's submission to City Council.

Mr. Elliott discussed the balance involved in producing a document with a positive editorial voice reflecting the City's optimism, while simultaneously highlighting the City's challenges in a matter facilitating action by decision-makers. He questioned if future reports could potentially benefit from a more detailed and explicit discussion of the City's outstanding issues to promote their resolution. Mr. Handzo replied that the "recommendations" section of the 2013 report was brief by design, as the 1997 Comprehensive Plan is in its final year of use. He suggested that the City's most persistent challenges could be more forcefully addressed by discussion in the new Comprehensive Plan, rather than in the final set of implementation recommendations for the 1997 plan. Mr. Scheer echoed Mr. Handzo's comments, identifying the Comprehensive Plan as an ideal vehicle to address long-term issues and potential solutions.

Mr. Shipman moved, with Ms. Winfield seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission adopt the 2013 Annual Report and forward it to Easton City Council. The motion passed unanimously.

**Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Update.** Mr. Manges reported on a recent conference call with Urban Matrix, at which website development and data analysis were discussed. He indicated that the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Task Force was providing feedback on a draft website design, and briefly summarized the input offered to date. Mr. Elliott inquired about the date of the next physical meeting with Urban Matrix, with Mr. Manges replying that they would attend a City Council session shortly.

**Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) Update.** Mr. Elliott summarized the following EAC business:

- The EAC will plant maple trees between 12<sup>th</sup> and Elder Streets, in the vicinity of Cottingham Stadium, on April 26. Mr. Elliott expressed a need for community volunteers for this event.
- The City received a \$17,000 grant to plant 40 trees along Butler, Lehigh, and Washington Streets in conjunction with Arbor Day.
- The EAC supported discussions by interested citizens with Easton Farmers' Market staff about strategies to hold a zero-waste Farmers' Market. Mr. Elliott suggested that this effort could serve as a pilot for general zero-waste City events.
- The EAC held a general discussion of its advisory role in the plan review process.

**College Hill Neighborhood Association (CHNA) Grant Application.** Mr. Elliott reported interest by the City and CHNA to submit a grant application to Northampton County Council under the Northampton County 21<sup>st</sup> Century Open Space Initiative. He indicated grant funds would be used to furnish infrastructure for a replacement

fountain at Nevin Park. Mr. Elliott reminded the Commission of its previous endorsement of this specific project, as well as a general connection between the Karl Stirner Arts Trail and Nevin Park. He stated CHNA had requested a letter of support from the Planning Commission for its grant application, and provided the Commission with a draft letter. In response to Mr. Lieb's inquiry, Mr. Elliott confirmed the proposed project meets grant eligibility requirements under the category of rehabilitation of existing municipal park and recreation facilities.

Mr. Shipman asked if a motion was necessary to send a letter of support, with Mr. Elliott replying affirmatively. Mr. Shipman moved, with Lieb seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission adopt the draft letter of support and authorize its Chairman to send it to Easton City Council and Northampton County Council. The motion passed unanimously.

**Staffing Update.** Mr. Manges reported that the newly-hired Director of Planning & Codes, George Kinney, would begin on March 17.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m.