

Meeting Minutes
Joint Meeting of the State College Borough Planning Commission
Zoning Revision Advisory Committee and Borough Council
August 5, 2020
Virtual Meeting

The State College Borough (SCB) Planning Commission (PC) and Borough Council (BC) and the Zoning Revision Advisory Committee (ZRAC) met on Wednesday, August 5, 2020 for a virtual Zoom meeting. Zoe Boniface, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m.

Planning Commission Members Present

Zoe Boniface, Chair; Jon Eich; Anita Genger, Vice-Chair; and Ron Madrid

Planning Commission Members Absent

Scott Dutt and Mallory Meehan

Other's Present

Ed LeClear, Planning Director; Greg Garthe, Senior Planner/Zoning Officer; John Wilson, Zoning Officer; Isabel Storey, Senior Planner; Denise L. Rhoads, Administrative Assistant; Jasmine Fields, SCB Sustainability Assistant and other interested parties

Borough Council Members Present

Ron Filippelli, Mayor; Jesse Barlow, President; Deanna Behring, Janet Engeman, Theresa Lafer, Peter Marshall, Dan Murphy, and Evan Myers

Zoning Revision Advisory Committee Members Present

Catherine Dauler, Chair; Amy Frank; Jonathan Friedman; Sally Lenker; Alex Sahakian; John Sepp; Mick Trombley; Susan Venegoni; and Scott Woods

Zoning Revision Advisory Committee Members Absent

Charles Diebel; Duke Gastiger; Blake Harper; Tom Kennington; and Neil Sullivan

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Madrid and seconded by Ms. Genger to approve the July 23, 2020 meeting minutes as submitted. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Chair Report

Zoe Boniface, Chair, had nothing to report.

Public Hour

No comments or concerns were heard during the public hour.

Community Planning

Zoning Revision Orientation & Critical Issue Discussion

Mr. LeClear stated the objectives of this meeting were to review the zoning process in general. He stated the original zoning document was adopted in 1959 and had been amended 219 times. He stated the upcoming revision would be the most significant comprehensive revision and was started in 2016.

The Interregnum: 1) due to significant staff turnover in both the Engineering and Planning departments in 2019, revision work was paused in order to prioritize required services; 2) a reboot was planned in March 2020 but was disrupted due to COVID 19; and 3) as development permitting was beginning to pause due to market conditions, staff was prioritizing the zoning revision process in Fall 2020, within the constraints of the current emergency.

The Path Forward: 1) this meeting would be a first in a series of joint meetings to build consensus and obtain direction for a significant draft revision; 2) staff would need to confirm policy directions before working with the consulting team to revise the initial draft; 3) today's topics would include: a) downtown uses, density, height and use of incentives to obtain public benefits; b) edge uses, height and character; 4) future topics would include: a) fine tuning today's discussion; b) use parking requirements to realize today's direction; c) "missing middle housing" and West End development; d) inclusionary housing; and e) fraternity conversions and uses.

He shared what zoning regulated: 1) use of land; 2) size, height and location of structures; 3) areas on lots to be occupied/left open; 4) density and intensity of use; and 5) natural, historic and agricultural uses and activities.

Mr. LeClear discussed, briefly: 1) SCB's relationship with student housing; 2) signature project development overlay; 3) collegiate housing overlay; and 4) totally new development in downtown delivered between 2017 and August 2022. He noted the Downtown Master Plan (DMP) identified a lot of properties to look at redevelopment.

He next discussed progress to date and issues that still needed to be resolved/areas of consensus: 1) downtown zoning district boundaries should remain, with consolidation of CID and C districts. Base height of seven stories/~76 feet.; 2) new College Avenue and Allen Street district to be created between Burrowes and Hiester/Garner along West College and South Allen maintaining lower density and height; 3) willingness to use incentives but downtown district to require significant public benefit incentives if greater density/height was allowed; and 4) explore ways to obtain mixed-income, mixed-use and mixed tenancy in downtown; 5) goals for LEED certification; 6) encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings through decoupling parking requirements and other techniques; 7) significantly increase use of fee in lieu payments to meet parking requirements and better use public system spaces for meeting minimums (Fraser Centre); 8) require one parking space per resident unit but, in general, update the SCB's antiquated parking rules; 9) revise the Urban Village zone and create an "innovation zone" (from West College to Pennsylvania State University) with a mix of

uses building off the College of Engineering campus; 10) maintain suburban retail corridor on South Atherton; and 11) look at the University Planned District/multi-municipal zoning immediately after completion of comprehensive zoning reform.

Mr. LeClear discussed areas requiring additional analysis and policy direction: 1) determine the range and mix of incentives that would maximize public benefit while creating market incentives to redevelop with a mix of uses. Incentives should be economically realistic to achieve desired objectives; 2) better understand what was, and was not, working with the Inclusionary Housing ordinance and revise to encourage affordable housing outside of traditional student housing buildings. Look at increasing income qualification to “middle” (150%?) for specific districts/types of housing; and 3) considering the outcome of the fraternity zoning case and the current crisis, how could SCB create real opportunities to convert fraternities that the market will accept?

Other areas of discussion included: 1) mixed use areas between downtown and low-density residential districts need additional study – how to encourage a mix of uses, and create economic vitality, but not significantly alter current structures and maintain similar scale; 2) adapt to changing technology (sharing economy uses, ride-share zones, electric charge stations, scooters, electronic signage, etc...); and 3) adapt to the changing production economy: permit “makers” while protecting against nuisances, especially in light of COVID-related market changes.

Mr. LeClear discussed, very briefly, the current Downtown zoning height limits and existing conditions.

At 12:52 p.m. members, staff and public separated, virtually, into different groups for discussions on the five items listed: 1) downtown Signature Development Gateway requirements; 2) general incentives; 3) residential incentives; 4) commercial incentive; and 5) edge properties.

At 1:47 p.m. the breakout discussions were concluded, and the meeting was adjourned by Mr. LeClear.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise L. Rhoads
Administrative Assistant