

Planning Commission Notes – September 7, 2021 – Submitted by Judd Vickers

The meeting of the Planning Commission was conducted via WebEx.

Support materials related to the meeting can be viewed at:

[Choosecambridge.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_09072021-1009?packet=true](https://choosecambridge.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_09072021-1009?packet=true)

Old Business

PZ 2019 – 003 – Planning Commission approved the preliminary expansion of the Cultra Facility (Medical Cannabis), located at 10 Washington Street. Cultra currently operates in 40,000 square feet of enclosed space and employs 100 individuals. After this phase of expansion (\$35 million investment), Cultra will operate in 160,000 enclosed square feet and estimates employing 300 individuals. The expansion will include the renovation and adaptive reuse of several unused buildings from the Phillips Packing House era. Future expansion plans include the addition of businesses that use infused cannabis products, such as breweries, restaurants etc., following similar models of development that exist in several western US States.

PZ 2021 – 009 – Planning Commission approved a Preliminary Plan for a Solar Energy System on Hudson Road/MD343, and simultaneously referred it to the Board of Appeals for a Special Exception. Hudson Road is designated as a scenic byway and the UDC would typically not permit a solar array along a byway. However, substantial landscaping buffers along the road will screen the solar array and it is adjacent to an existing electrical substation, which already compromises the natural aesthetic value of this area of the byway.

From the 4/6/2021 Planning Commission Meeting: PZ 2021-009 Review and discussion of a proposed solar field on ten acres on MD343, adjacent to the power substation. MD343 is a Chesapeake Country scenic byway, and the UDC does not permit solar fields along scenic byways. The solar energy system would generate 2 megawatts and potentially support 400 homes, allowing residential users to subscribe to the energy generated from this system, which may result in a lower energy bill. Applicant advocates that positioning next to an existing power substation, as well as providing vegetative screening, will not result in any additional deterioration of the viewshed along the byway. Potential solutions could be a new site plan locating the solar array further back on the property, away from the road and out of the viewshed.

PZ 2022 – 003 – Planning Commission approved a Findings of Fact related to the Master Plan Amendment to the Residences at River Marsh, sending it to the City Council with a recommendation for approval. The Findings of Fact summarizes the discussion and points made at the 8/3/2021 meeting. Additionally, the PC approved an amendment that consideration be given in the future to creating a secondary point of egress.

PZ 2022 – 001 – Mill Street School Preliminary Plan – deferred by the applicant.

No New Business or Public Hearings

Discussion Items

TA – 2022 – 003 – Discussion related to a draft text amendment to sunset older developments and set time limits for new developments to be completed. Planning Commission supports the concept and feels additional time is needed to define terms carefully and address the issue of the expungement of approved Plats recorded in Land Records.

From the 8/3/2021 meeting: Sunsetting older subdivisions and development approvals – discussion related to allowing older subdivision approvals that have never built out and are languishing to expire after a certain period of time, as opposed to having an entitlement without end. This is common in other communities. A five-year sunsetting provision might be considered. Issues to consider: Does the City want to sunset previously approved subdivisions that have never been built out, as well as placing sunset provisions on newer subdivisions that have yet to be approved?

TA – 2022 – 004 – Discussion related to a draft text amendment allowing dining in Industrial Zone with conditions. Suggestions included refining language to clarify that dining would only be allowed as an ancillary use to a qualifying type facility. By way of example, an oyster production facility could perhaps have dining that complemented the existing production.

From the 8/3/2021 meeting: Dining in Industrial Zone (Chesapeake Drive) – Oyster processing facility in the industrial zone and would like to have a restaurant attached to/accompanying the facility. Dining is currently not permitted in the Industrial Zone. Options could be to permit a restaurant outright in the Industrial Zone, or perhaps allow a restaurant when it is ancillary or appurtenant to a facility. Planning Commission appeared to support the concept that a restaurant could be permitted when appurtenant.

Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. (CWDI) - Planning Commission and Zoning Officer expressed concern that the City Council approved a Transfer Agreement with an associated Master Plan that had not been reviewed by the PC. Planning Commission and Zoning Officer plans to draft a letter with concerns that it was not presented for review.