

Planning Commission Notes – May 2, 2023 – Submitted by Judd Vickers

The meeting of the Planning Commission was conducted in person and via WebEx.

Back up materials can be found at:

https://www.choosecambridge.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_05022023-1202

Holly Baldwin was introduced as a new City Planner.

June meeting will be held on June 13 to avoid coinciding with the Special Election a week earlier.

CWDI related discussion and presentation have been deferred to a future meeting.

New Business:

PZ 2023-013 – The Planning Commission approved, without enthusiasm, the concept/preliminary site plan for the Grocery Outlet Bargain Market at Cambridge Marketplace (Fairchild development). The new store will be built on the vacant lot between Goodwill and the Partners First Credit Union. The Board of Appeals has already approved a variance which was required related to setbacks. Grocery Outlet Bargain Market is a California based deep discount grocery store. There is currently a location in Salisbury. Commissioners questioned the demand for a 4th grocery store along the US50 corridor (existing grocery stores are Walmart, Food Lion and Aldi's) and noted that Save-a-Lot, another deep discount grocer, was not able to remain in business (they were located where Aldi's now is located). Concerns also cited with regard as to how it might affect Center Market, a small family-owned grocery located downtown. The Planning Officer pointed out that it is a permitted use, despite the concerns.

Presentation:

Hearn Building Update – David Wilk, a consultant and Professor at Temple University was hired by the City to look at the Hearn building and possible uses, with the intention of residential being the primary use, with commercial at street level. Green Street Housing (Salisbury) proposes a 44-unit market rate/lower income apartment complex. The building requires \$20 million investment, much of which would be provided by State funds, as the income flow of the apartments would only support debt service in the range of \$1.2 million. Therefore, David Wilk does not believe the Hearn building could support a market rate apartment complex. Mr. Wilk indicated the investment of \$20 million could be a big help to the community, in the way of jobs, etc. It was less clear what advantage it would provide in the longer term as far as financial benefits. Mr. Wilk cited there were not enough apartments in Cambridge that were available for rent. Condominiums and other options were not part of the scope of work. The structure would need to remain as a market/lower income rental complex for 30 years. The developer would receive a \$2.2 million fee, 1/3 of which is at risk if there are cost overruns or delays. It was

unclear what retail, if any, might be located at ground level. The Planning Officer stated that apartments can be located on the ground level, toward the back, and provide for a smaller retail/commercial space. Commissioners raised many questions, including: 1) the logic of investing 475k per unit to create a rental complex; 2) the need to evaluate housing needs for individuals, vs how it impacts downtown businesses; and 3) will the units help existing low-income residents, or simply bring low-income residents from other areas. It could possibly violate the Fair Housing Act to restrict the complex to local residents, Green Street will research.

While this was not raised as part of the discussion, the current City budget identifies our homeownership rate at only 45.2%. Easton and Annapolis have homeownership rates in the 58-60% range. I would highly encourage anyone concerned about this matter to listen to the very well-articulated discussion among the City Council at its 3/13 meeting, which you can watch on Town Hall Streams. The discussion occurs approximately 1 hour into the meeting.

Public Hearing:

PZ 2023-010 REZ – Planning Commission approved the rezoning of has been determined to be a zoning error on Leonard’s Lane. Approximately 6.2 acres on the east side of Leonard’s Lane was zoned Industrial in error, when it should have been Residential, which is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. The Residential Zoning will provide for a community park as a Permitted Use, which is planned for this property. Next step is City Council review/approval.

Discussion:

TA 2023-004 – Discussion continued from April related to building heights related to new accessory structures; change would provide for slightly greater height as it would measure to the midpoint of a pitched roof; neighborhoods with somewhat more narrow lots might retain greater restrictions related to height.

TA 2023-005 – Discussion continued from April related to various types of health care facilities not currently addressed in the UDC. UDC needs to better define congregate housing, that can include Boarding Houses, Group Homes, Recovery Homes, Assisted Living, Intermediate Care Institution, etc., while also making sure the City is in compliance with the Fair Housing Act with regard to protected groups. Counsel does not believe the congregate housing that has been previously discussed in Blackwater Cove are Group homes, and they rather are Assisted Living facilities licensed by the State. It was mentioned that perhaps the State agency responsible for licensing might have some obligation to enforce rules or violations. The Planning Commission was provided with the police calls to the neighborhood for analysis. Need discussed to balance rights of protected groups, as well as those of neighbors.

Continued discussion regarding Recreational Marijuana, which will be discussed in more detail at a future meeting. Counsel clarified that the two existing medical providers could be licensed for recreational as of July 1, but any new applicants would be delayed until January 1, 2024.