

MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION

January 8, 2014

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held its regular meeting on Wednesday, January 8, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 409 South Main Street.

Members present: Richard Baugh, Gil Colman, MuAwia Da'Mes, Judith Dilts, Deb Fitzgerald, Jefferson Heatwole, and Henry Way.

Members absent: None

Also present: Stacy Turner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Adam Fletcher, City Planner; Alison Banks, Senior Planner and Secretary.

City Planner Adam Fletcher opened the regular meeting of the Planning Commission and called for nominations for Chair of the Planning Commission for 2014.

Mr. Way said because of the great job she has done this past year, he nominates Deb Fitzgerald for Chair. Mr. Da'Mes seconded the nomination and Dr. Dilts moved to close the nominations for Chair.

All voted in favor of Deb Fitzgerald as Chair of the 2014 Planning Commission.

Chair Fitzgerald then opened nominations for 2014 Vice Chair.

Mr. Way nominated MuAwia Da'Mes for Vice Chair.

Mr. Heatwole seconded the nomination and Dr. Dilts moved to close the nominations for Vice Chair.

All voted in favor of MuAwia Da'Mes as Vice Chair.

Mr. Da'Mes nominated Alison Banks for the office of secretary, which was seconded by Dr. Dilts.

All voted in favor of Mrs. Banks as secretary.

Chair Fitzgerald called the meeting to order and determined there was a quorum with all members in attendance. She then noted there were two sets of minutes for approval and asked if there were any corrections, comments or a motion regarding the minutes from the November 13, 2013 Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Heatwole moved to approve the minutes as presented from the November 13, 2013 regular Planning Commission meeting.

Dr. Dilts seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of approving the November 13, 2013 minutes (7-0).

Chair Fitzgerald then asked for corrections, comments or a motion regarding the minutes from the December 11, 2013 Planning Commission work session.

Mr. Way moved to approve the minutes as presented for the December 11, 2013 meeting.

Mr. Colman seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of approving the December 11, 2013 Planning Commission work session minutes (7-0).

New Business

Capital Improvement Program

Chair Fitzgerald read the agenda item and said Planning Commission spent last month discussing this item. We have received from staff a very thorough response regarding all of our questions, comments, and concerns. Does anyone have any additional issues to bring up regarding the Capital Improvement Program?

Mr. Way said I questioned the start date of 2017 for the Reservoir Street sidewalk project and Public Works' response was they were open to changing this date. Is there other support for making this a higher priority?

Mr. Fletcher said you can recommend to City Council consideration of giving it a higher priority.

Mrs. Turner said Planning Commission could also recommend to City Council that the date be moved up.

Chair Fitzgerald thanked staff for getting the responses back in a timely manner and noted that she felt it was a more effective method of reviewing the CIP than previous measures. We literally did a page by page review and found several items we had questions or concerns with.

Mr. Way agreed and said procedurally we have the potential for next year of having the CIP connected to the Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives.

Chair Fitzgerald said we are looking for a motion to move this forward to City Council, along with the additional recommended change.

Dr. Dilts stated so moved.

Mr. Colman seconded.

Mrs. Turner questioned what the recommended change for the Reservoir Street sidewalk was.

Mr. Baugh said it is recommended to move the project up one year to 2016.

Mr. Da'Mes asked if it needed to be made a priority one.

Planning Commission agreed they would like the sidewalk to be moved to 2016 and kept on the radar for a higher priority.

All voted in favor of the motion (7-0) to recommend approval of the CIP, with the one recommended change regarding the Reservoir Street sidewalk, to City Council.

Special Use Permit & Off-Street Parking Approval – Woodland Montessori School Child Daycare Center (Michael Property)

Chair Fitzgerald read the request and asked staff to review.

Commissioner Baugh recused himself from the meeting at this time and exited the room.

Mrs. Banks said the Comprehensive Plan designates this area as Low Density Mixed Residential. This designation states that these large undeveloped areas located at the edge of the City are planned for residential development containing a mix of large and small-lot single family detached dwellings and attractive green spaces. Planned "open space" (also known as "cluster") developments are encouraged. The intent is to allow innovative residential building types and permit creative subdivision design solutions that promote neighborhood cohesiveness, walkability, connected street grids, community green spaces, and protection of environmental resources. Such innovative residential building types as zero lot-line development and patio homes will be

considered as well as other new single family residential forms. The gross density of development in these areas should be in the range of 1 to 6 dwelling units per acre.

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

- Site: Undeveloped property; zoned R-1
- North: Undeveloped property; zoned R-1
- East: Undeveloped property; zoned R-1 and R-2 Conditional
- South: Single family dwellings; zoned R-1
- West: Single family dwellings; zoned R-1

Woodland Montessori School is requesting approval of a special use permit (SUP) to allow a child daycare operation on a three acre parcel located off of Running Springs Road. Along with the special use permit request, the school is seeking review and approval of the off-street parking for the proposed new site. The school currently primarily operates from 1350 Peach Grove Avenue offering a learning environment for children ages 2.5 to 8 years. Their program runs on a school calendar year, with summer vacation and a two week winter holiday.

In 2015, the school is hoping to open the doors of a new facility located at the subject property. The school's current enrollment is 70 students with the intent to reach a total enrollment of 150 students at their new location. Section 10-3-33 (5) of the Zoning Ordinance allows public schools, or a private school having a function substantially the same as a public school, as a use permitted by right within the R-1, Single Family Residential District. Staff has discussed the function of the private school with the applicant and agrees that it operates substantially the same as a public elementary school; however, the services offered to pre-school aged children (ages 2.5 to 4 years) is considered a child daycare center, which requires a SUP per Section 10-3-34 (1) of the Zoning Ordinance. The applicant notes that currently there are 45 students in the pre-school program; therefore, a majority of the school functions as a child daycare center.

The proposed school would be located within the Whispering Springs Subdivision at the terminus of Running Springs Road. Exclusive of their parking lot, the school plans to erect a fence around their entire facility to separate it from the neighboring subdivision. The immediate building plans would include constructing four classrooms, where each classroom is an individual, hexagonal shaped pod, connected by an enclosed walkway. There would also be a two-story administrative pod, one multi-use pod, and an outdoor covered pavilion, with parking located to the front or side of the building. At present the school has 12 full-time employees, which would increase with future expansion.

A preliminary plat must be submitted when the applicant is prepared to subdivide the proposed three acres from the larger tract. As shown on the provided sketch of the site, the school desires to install a cul-de-sac at the end of Running Springs Road. Staff has concerns regarding the impact of traffic, to and from the site, on the intersection of Stone Spring Road and Ramblewood Road with this design. Staff has discussed with them and suggests building an extension of Running Springs Road through the school's property to where it could ultimately be extended to intersect with a potential extension of Mineral Springs Road. Although staff prefers this street construction and alignment, it is not required. Staff has informed the applicant that the cul-de-sac design must be dedicated as a public street, with technical compliance as required by the Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM). In addition, the applicant has been made aware that a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) may be required prior to preliminary plat approval. The applicant should work with their

architect/engineer to find out if their development would require a TIA review. If a TIA is needed, it must be submitted and reviewed by the City before submitting the preliminary plat application.

The school has a staggered drop-off schedule usually between 7:30 to 8:45 a.m. with afternoon pick-up times at 1:00 p.m., 3:30 p.m., and 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. While staff is appreciative of the staggered schedules, we are concerned with increased traffic through the existing residential subdivision at early and late hours of the day. As noted in the conclusion of this report, staff is suggesting a condition to limit the hours of the child daycare center to prevent early and late hour childcare services from causing undue interruptions in the middle of the existing residential neighborhood.

The applicant has informed staff they would like to provide off-street parking within the front or side area of the school property. The applicant must understand that it is not permitted to use the public cul-de-sac for student pick-up/drop-off. The design of the site should prevent the stacking of vehicles into the public street as they wait to pick-up/drop-off students. The parking lot area of the school would most likely be adjacent to single-family dwellings, which causes staff to have concerns of headlights shining into yards and homes. There is also the general concern of parking lot lighting escaping into the neighborhood. Staff suggests the school be as sensitive as possible when choosing parking lot lighting. Staff also suggests the applicant provide opaque screening, whether by installing a thick, landscaped buffer or erecting a fence between the parking lot and any adjacent single family homes.

Off-street parking requirements for the proposed Woodland Montessori School are two-fold. Per Section 10-3-25 (12), parking for elementary, junior, or senior high schools, or equivalent facilities, such as the Montessori School, are programmed by the applicable school authorities as necessary to meet State standards for use and consideration of site location, then submitted to Planning Commission for review and approval. The parking requirement for a child daycare center is different than those specified above, and is calculated at one space for every 200 square feet of gross floor area. This requirement must be met regardless of any additional spaces necessary to serve the school.

The applicant was hoping to provide, and has proposed, a total of 22 off-street parking spaces; one for each of the current 12 employees and 10 additional spaces for parent drop-off/pick-up. Although staff appreciates the desire to limit the size of the parking lot, we are concerned that 22 parking spaces for a school having an enrollment of 70-150 is not enough and that many times parking could bleed onto the public street and into the surrounding neighborhood.

Staff contacted Hunter Barnes, a Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Architectural Consultant regarding parking guidelines for new school facilities and he confirmed that the VDOE has no regulations but rather a recommendation for schools to provide "Adequate parking for the staff and an additional 10 to 20 percent parking for visitors should be provided. Student parking to accommodate one-third of the student enrollment should also be provided." This requirement comes from the "Guidelines for School Facilities In Virginia's Public Schools" as revised September, 2013. Under this recommendation, with an enrollment of 150 students, about 75 parking spaces should be provided. Mr. Barnes noted, however, he believed that number to be excessive for this type of school and further thought that even 50 spaces could also be considered excessive.

Since Woodland Montessori School and their daycare operations are intertwined, and taking into consideration the thoughts of the VDOE, staff believes an appropriate parking requirement would be to provide 1 parking space per 200 square feet of gross floor area for the entire facility and for this requirement to cover both uses. This means, if the school builds the plans as submitted with the

gross square footage of the building totaling 8,130 square feet, then they must supply 41 parking spaces. If the building is larger than that or is enlarged in the future as they have indicated they plan to do, then the number of parking spaces must be increased per the same requirement. Staff recommends Planning Commission require the school to meet this off-street parking requirement with the following condition:

- If in the opinion of Planning Commission, the off-street parking becomes a nuisance, the site may be subject to further review, which could lead to the need for additional conditions, restrictions, or a change to the number of required off-street parking spaces.

The applicant must understand in order to build the school; they must consent to the number of parking spaces that Planning Commission is willing to approve.

With regard to the special use permit, staff recommends in favor of the request to allow a child daycare center as a function of the school with the following condition:

- The child daycare center cannot operate before 6:00 a.m. and may not routinely operate after 7:00 p.m. (This condition would allow occasional extra-curricular activities, awards ceremonies, conference days, concerts, etc. for the child daycare center operation.)

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were any questions for staff.

Mr. Way asked about the status of the alternative road to the north.

Mr. Fletcher replied the Mineral Springs connection is shown on our Master Transportation Plan as an extension that cuts through the larger portion of this entire parcel, over to Stone Spring Road. The Comprehensive Plan never envisioned a connection through this section of the subject property; although, just as long term planning, we did see it as a good connection. There is no real status of these roads; it is all conceptual, there are no regulations that require them to do the extension.

Mr. Way asked if there was any access to the southeast from this area.

Mrs. Banks said not from this portion of the subdivision; access is only from Ramblewood Road.

Hearing no further questions, Chair Fitzgerald opened the public hearing and asked the applicant, or the applicant's representative to come forward and speak.

Mrs. Jackie Morales-Shifflett, 1130 King Edwards Way, said this is something we have envisioned for a long time for our school. I want to speak about the building; it is a building that is planned to be very eco-friendly. We plan to have lots of garden space, with rain barrels, and sun tunnels. The school will have lots of windows and we want part of the school to be powered by solar panels. Part of the Montessori philosophy is the environment; and we are trying to teach our children to take care of their environment. Along with playground equipment outside, we hope to incorporate walking paths, natural boulders, gardens and as much nature as possible.

We do take into consideration that we are in a neighborhood and we have no issues with putting up protective barriers or trees to buffer the single-family homes. I do have a concern regarding a connecting street; this would not be something we build, so when would it happen? The cul-de-sac seems to be a better option for us. We did suggest the 22 parking spaces and we are not opposed to more, we were just trying to make it as little asphalt as possible. We cannot construct the school underneath the power lines, so that is where we are proposing to put parking.

We do not have buses and we do have a staggered drop-off and pick-up schedule, which works out very well. If you have any questions for me I would be happy to answer them.

Mr. Way asked how many parking spaces are at your current facility.

Mrs. Morales-Shifflett said our current location is next to Eagle Carpet and right in front of our building we have ten spaces; but we are allowed to use the Eagle Carpet parking. Most of our staff uses the Eagle Carpet parking or parks along the side of the building.

Mr. Way asked if that was adequate for the current size at that location.

Mrs. Morales-Shifflett replied no, we could use some more parking. There is about a 15 minute window where things tend to get very crowded.

Mr. Colman asked the applicant if they had been in contact with the neighbors.

Mrs. Morales-Shifflett said I went door-to-door and gave to neighbors or left packets of information explaining what Montessori is. I also invited the neighbors to an open house on Sunday (Jan 5th) at our current location; unfortunately, no one came. I have not heard anything from the neighbors. But we have attempted to make ourselves available to answer questions from the neighborhood.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were any further questions for the applicant. Hearing none, she asked if there was anyone wishing to speak in favor of the request. Hearing none, she asked if there was anyone wishing to speak against the request.

Kristi Lewis, 2160 Whispering Springs Road, said she is the house at the corner of Running Springs and Whispering Springs Roads and has several concerns she would like noted. The idea that a minimum of 150 cars could be going through the neighborhood, twice a day, is a concern and then you have to consider the potential growth. Currently, the school is closed during the summer months; will this always be the case. I have concerns with the parking, the lighting of the parking lot, headlights shining into neighbor's yards, the cul-de-sac and cars stacking up there at drop-off/pick-up times; especially because my house and driveway are right there. I was not at home when the applicant came through the neighborhood to discuss the request. I have concerns about evening hours; how frequent will it be throughout the year. With a school in the neighborhood, there is an increased potential for emergency vehicles going through the neighborhood any time of the day.

My understanding from talking with staff is that the City only mailed letters out to those property owners that own property directly adjacent to the property. Personally, I think many other people in the neighborhood would have issues with the request, even if they are not directly beside it. If I had known this was going to happen six years ago when I purchased my home, I would not have bought it; especially being a college professor and having summers off.

Bill Kuykendall, 2140 Whispering Springs Road, said I have issues with the request. I have lived in this subdivision since 2001 and it has been a quiet and nice neighborhood. I understand wanting to put a school in this area. I question about requiring a fence for separation, because our current regulations say you cannot have a fence in the front, or over a certain height, and they cannot be metal, only wood or vinyl. I have a lot of concern regarding the heavy traffic that will now be going through the neighborhood. I have already called downtown about school buses that go through the neighborhood over the speed limit. Also, when I purchased my home, I recall the developer showing me a plan where Mineral Springs Road did come up and intersect with Running Springs Road, making a through connection, not a cul-de-sac.

Diana Lowe-DiSalvo, 2150 Whispering Springs Road, said she lives at the opposite corner of Running Springs and Whispering Springs Roads. We have lived here going on three months and

honestly we would have never bought this house if we knew any of this would be going on. Tonight you are discussing a parking lot for 41 vehicles that will be right in my back yard. Has anyone given thought to this environmentally good school and what it will do to the neighborhoods trees, wildlife, and overall environment? Would you want to live on this corner with all the school traffic coming in and out? I have always lived in large areas in and around Baltimore, I came here to retire. To have this school come to my back yard and garden is not the best for my retirement. It is very personal and very upsetting for me.

Brandon Pyles, 2151 Whispering Springs Road, said his house is directly across from the Running Springs Road entry into the cul-de-sac. Every morning my family backs right into that intersection from our driveway; so we will be going into the traffic. I have lived here since 2001, and have always been under the assumption that this would eventually be built out as a single-family home subdivision; so this is a bit of a disappointment. Another concern is all this traffic will be going to the Stone Spring Road/Ramblewood Road intersection, which in my opinion already needs a stop light with the increased traffic from the Overlook apartment complex. Also, I agree with the earlier comment that other people within the neighborhood should be advised of this, not just those directly adjoining.

Darryl Church, 710 Mineral Springs Road, said I do not have any concerns for or against the school and day care locating there. My big concern is the possibility of extending Mineral Springs Road; originally it would have connected into the subdivision, not out to Stone Spring Road. If the road is extended out to Stone Spring Road you are inviting traffic to cut through the neighborhood now as a shortcut; not just people dropping off children for the school.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was anyone else wishing to speak regarding the request.

Christian Perritt, 1351 Crawford Avenue, said I am a parent of two children that currently attend the school. I understand some of the concerns of a school moving to a neighborhood and I can testify to the fact that the current school is immaculately kept, it is run efficiently, noise levels are kept to a minimum, and considerations are top priority to homes and businesses around the school. It is an extremely considerate atmosphere not only for the people within it, but for those around it as well.

Chance McDermott, 720 Stone Spring Road, said one of the confusing things I have heard tonight is the school is allowed by right and I do not know if that is debatable or not; but the issues of parking and traffic sound like something that does need to be worked out. As a parent of a child that attends a Montessori school I can say that these are the best kids and parents. The school is mindful of the environment, mindful of others, they teach compassion and caring. I too like my space and area; but if it has to happen, then Woodland Montessori School is something that I would be pleased to have next to me.

Mrs. Morales-Shifflett asked if she could address some of the traffic concerns. There will not be 150 cars going in and out of the school each day. Our total enrollment would be 150 students, we want to keep it small and many of our families have more than one child attending the school. One car coming to the school may carry five children; it would not be 150 vehicle trips in and out daily. I have heard concerns of the neighbors who garden and enjoy the wildlife in the area; we welcome the neighborhood to come in and garden with the children.

Kristi Lewis, 2160 Whispering Springs Road, said she also has concerns about home values going down.

Essa Paterson, 1985 Willow Hill Drive, said she has a daughter who currently attends this school and I would really like to see it grow. I understand that it is possible for any school to go there by-right, so having a small school go there would not be as bad. Is there any possibility to put the school on the other side of the property, away from the homes? As for traffic, could another road be constructed to bring cars into the other side of the property?

Diana Kuykendall, 2140 Whispering Springs Road, asked what brought the school to this location and why can they not build further down towards Stone Spring Road. I do not want this in my back yard and I feel the developer has cheated us.

Charity Boyles, 120 David Circle, said I have a son who attends the Montessori school. I came tonight to support the applicant and the school. When I hear the words day care I do not think it classifies what the Montessori school is; unfortunately, we have to classify it as such because the public system does not have a school system for ages 2 to 5. I do not consider this a day care. I can only help to clear up the misconceptions of what the school is about and clearly that has nothing to do with the impact of the traffic or parking. I can put myself in your position and tell you that I understand your feelings; but the Montessori school is nothing like a public school as far as traffic. Also, I have only been to the school twice after hours and that was for parent teacher conferences which ended at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Fitzgerald said we have heard from a lot of people and if you have something new to add please do.

Crystal Yoder said she is a teacher with Woodland Montessori School and has been with them for eight years. Where we are currently located, there are times when we have water in our classroom or the temperature is not functioning; the building is an old barn. For eight years we have talked about a beautiful new facility and we are proposing just that in a beautiful community. Our goal is to bring the neighborhood into our community and not to be a hindrance.

Diana Lowe-DiSalvo, 2150 Whispering Springs Road, said we are not against the school's curriculum, it is the traffic, lighting, parking, and so forth.

Brandon Pyles, 2151 Whispering Springs Road, asked what happens when we are done speaking tonight, and we as residents do not like the outcome of tonight's meeting; what can we do as a neighborhood.

Chair Fitzgerald replied after Planning Commission makes a recommendation tonight it will move forward to City Council. Planning Commission is an advisory body only. This will be heard again before City Council on February 11th, no matter what the outcome here tonight, and everyone will get the same opportunity to speak. City Council would make the final decision.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was anyone else wanting to speak. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and asked Planning Commission for discussion or a motion.

Mr. Way asked what does the traffic impact analysis involve and would it need to be done prior to the preliminary plat.

Mr. Fletcher said it would need to be completed prior to the preliminary plat. There are specific thresholds regarding the development size and type of use that may trigger an analysis. This development with the total number of students and staff could trigger the need for a traffic impact analysis. The applicant's architect or engineer needs to work closely with Public Works staff to

determine what the peak hour of traffic is on this street. In the City if a development generates 100 vehicle trips in the peak hour, then a TIA must be completed.

Mrs. Turner said the traffic impact analysis would then help to determine if turn lanes, perhaps sidewalks for pedestrians are necessary for this development. It does not mean it would say that the school could not locate at this site; I want to be clear about that.

Mr. Colman asked if the impact could go beyond the school itself.

Mrs. Turner replied it can, it would be difficult for something like this to be looked at and say that it generates the need for a traffic signal somewhere that would be caused solely by the addition of this school. I do not want to hold out a lot expectation that a traffic impact analysis is going to solve, or resolve, the traffic concerns for the neighborhood.

Mr. Colman said the property is quite large and reaches all the way to Stone Spring Road. Was there any consideration in placing the school along Stone Spring Road instead of here?

Mr. Fletcher replied staff is not the deciding factor of where this school goes; it is a private proposal. They come to us with the request and we work them on the site they have chosen. Whether or not they can locate along Stone Spring Road is something they need to work out with the property owner, if they are interested in locating there. A special use permit would be required for that location as well.

Mr. Heatwole said at the time of preliminary plat would they be able to address the issue of the cul-de-sac not being able to be used for the loading or unloading of children? Is that correct, and is there some type of exception that can be made?

Mrs. Banks said traffic would need to come into the cul-de-sac and if children are being dropped-off the vehicle would need to turn into the parking lot, which would have an entrance off the cul-de-sac, load or unload and then exit the parking lot back into the cul-de-sac. What the City is not allowing is for cars to stack-up in the cul-de-sac, along the curb to pick-up and drop-off children. Vehicles need to pull into the parking lot or loading area for this.

Dr. Dilts moved to approve the special use permit with the one condition regarding times of operation. As well, I move to approve the parking as presented by the staff with the one condition.

Chair Fitzgerald asked staff if the two could be done as one motion.

Mr. Fletcher said the parking request does not move forward to City Council; therefore, I suggest doing two separate votes.

Chair Fitzgerald said we have a motion to approve the special use permit with the condition regarding hours of operation.

Mr. Heatwole seconded the motion.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was any further discussion.

Mr. Da'Mes said we all base our decisions on very different elements of a proposal – good planning, would we want to see this in our backyard, does it add value or merit to our community. I do not know if we are at a stage in the process where we can give it an analysis as to the location. I do not think the street proposals brought up by staff were adequately addressed and I feel with better planning they could be. I commend the school for talking to the neighbors and having the open

house, but have we gone to the lengths that are needed. I do not think I will be in favor of it because I think there is much more that could be done.

Mr. Colman said I feel the same way, especially to the extent that there is no agreement between the school and the neighbors at this point. I am disappointed that the neighbors did not come out to the open house to discuss many of their concerns; and I think their concerns are valid. To me, it can be planned a different way, there is a lot of property in this area.

Chair Fitzgerald asked for a roll call vote on the motion to approve the special use permit with the hours of operation condition.

Commissioner Colman – No

Commissioner Heatwole – Yes

Commissioner Dilts – Yes

Commissioner Da'Mes – No

Commissioner Way – Abstained for a potential non-financial conflict of interest

Chair Fitzgerald – Yes

Mrs. Banks said the motion passed with a vote of 3-2.

Chair Fitzgerald asked for a roll call vote on the motion to approve the parking as proposed by City staff.

Commissioner Colman – No

Commissioner Heatwole – Yes

Commissioner Dilts – Yes

Commissioner Da'Mes – Yes

Commissioner Way – Abstained

Chair Fitzgerald – Yes

Mrs. Banks said the motion passed with a vote of 4-1.

Chair Fitzgerald noted that the special use request for the child day care facility will move forward to City Council on February 11, 2014.

Commissioner Baugh rejoined the Planning Commission at 8:20 p.m.

Rezoning – 1049 Chicago Avenue (The Village at Chicago Park)

Chair Fitzgerald read the request and asked staff to review.

Commissioner Colman recused himself from the meeting at this time (8:21 p.m.) and exited the room.

Mr. Fletcher said the Comprehensive Plan designates this area as Neighborhood Residential. This designation states that this type of land use highlights those neighborhoods in which existing conditions dictate the need for careful consideration of the types and densities of future residential development. Infill development and redevelopment must be designed so as to be compatible with

the existing character of the neighborhood. These are older neighborhoods, which can be characterized by large housing units on small lots.

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

- Site: Detached single family home structure, zoned R-3
- North: A non-conforming duplex, zoned R-2 and other non-conforming dwellings, zoned B-2
- East: Across Chicago Avenue, Christian Light Publications, Inc., zoned B-2
- South: Multi-family units, zoned R-3
- West: Detached single family homes fronting College Avenue, zoned R-2

The applicant is requesting to rezone two parcels and a portion of a third parcel from the R-3, Medium Density Residential District to the R-7, Medium Density Mixed Residential Planned Community District. The property is located along the western side of Chicago Avenue, its northern boundary approximately 220 feet from Chicago Avenue's intersection with Mt. Clinton Pike. The subject area totals 2.0 +/- acres and would contain 15 residential dwelling units. The proposed R-7 master planned neighborhood has been named "The Village at Chicago Park." This zoning district is the same classification as the recently approved Collicello North development located at the northern end of Collicello Street.

As a reminder, the R-7 district is intended to provide opportunities for the development of planned residential communities offering a mix of single family detached units, single family attached units, and in certain circumstances, multi-family units. R-7 neighborhoods are developed under an approved master development plan that incorporates regulatory text and a master layout of the neighborhood. Aside from particular provisions of the Zoning Ordinance that must be met, the approved master plan is the "zoning" by which all development must abide. The R-7 zoning district requires a minimum of two contiguous acres at the time of application, a minimum of 15 percent open/green usable space, and at least two types of residential housing types, where no one type can exceed 70 percent of all residential units. Maximum density is limited at 12 units per acre. (Remember that any needed Subdivision Ordinance variances or other subdivision related matters should be considered when making a recommendation for master planned projects as approving the plan of development could be perceived as also providing an endorsement for the subdivision matters requested during the platting phase.)

The Village at Chicago Park has met or exceeded all of the minimum required provisions to construct an R-7 development. The development site is two acres in size and has a proposed density of 7.5 units per acre (about 63 percent of the maximum density allowed) and would supply the minimum 15 percent open space. The master plan text defines all of the area and dimensional requirements for all lots and addresses the regulatory matters of Article T. The master plan text also explains the vision and other details of the project, and therefore such information does not need to be repeated in this report. The master plan layout illustrates the general arrangement and location of the types of residential units, street information, and general landscaping plan.

As described in the master plan, only single family detached and duplex units will be permitted. No townhomes, multi-family units, or non-residential uses will be allowed. The master plan layout demonstrates nine single family detached units and three duplex structures (six units); however, the exact number of the two permitted unit types may vary so long as no one housing type exceeds 70

percent of all residential units as is regulated by the R-7 district. All buildings, including community buildings and accessory structures, would have five feet building setbacks from all property lines. Zero setbacks will be allowed for patios, courtyards, terraces, uncovered porches, and other similar features. Note the master plan indicates the driveways/parking spaces for the units may or may not be built as shown. They are represented on the master plan layout only to demonstrate that such spaces in those configurations are possible. Among other potential designs, shared driveways to locate parking behind dwelling units may be constructed to meet off-street parking requirements.

The units would be served by a private cul-de-sac street and will require approval of certain variances from the Subdivision Ordinance during the platting phase to allow the design as shown. Since the street would be private, public snow removal and trash pick-up services will not be provided. Public school bus services would be provided as is determined necessary. The street would be located within a 50-foot private access easement with 26 feet of pavement, three feet of gutter and roll-top curb, a five foot sidewalk with no two-foot grass strip separating the sidewalk from the curb, along with allowing on-street parking on one side of the street. This design requires approval to deviate from the Subdivision Ordinance Section 10-2-41 (a), which stipulates all streets to be built per the standards of the Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM). The proposed private street does not conform to the private street standards of DCSM Section 2.7, which offers multiple ways to design a private street depending upon the desired characteristics of the road (i.e. private access width, pavement width, whether on-street parking will be permitted, etc.). The proposed design is a combination of a few of the listed offerings. As is specified in the Subdivision Ordinance, variances to Section 10-2-41 (a) may be approved by City Council on a case-by-case basis when:

- the proposed alternative would better achieve the walkable, pedestrian and bicycle-oriented environment the city desires;
- the particular conditions of the site and surrounding street network would allow the proposed alternative without causing undue inefficiencies for service vehicles, nor an excessive reduction in pedestrian safety due to pedestrian-vehicle movement conflicts; and
- the proposed alternative would better balance the needs of pedestrians and vehicles, and better achieve the goals of the comprehensive plan.

Staff believes with the intent of the proposed neighborhood vision being environmentally friendly and pedestrian oriented—both objectives of the R-7 zoning district, the proposed street layout meets the criterion above and is prepared to support the variance during the platting phase. If this variance is approved, then easement locations for utilities and drainage as required by Section 10-2-43 are waived.

As described, the street would be a cul-de-sac; however, the Subdivision Ordinance Section 10-2-41 (e) prohibits permanent dead-end streets unless approved by Planning Commission (this particular detail does not need City Council approval). Therefore, to allow the cul-de-sac portion of this design, the Commission must approve this layout during the platting phase.

Moreover, because the development includes a private street, the majority of the planned lots will not have public street frontage as required by Section 10-2-42 (c) of the Subdivision Ordinance. The applicant must also request to deviate from this section when preliminarily platting the development. Staff is prepared to support this variance as well as the cul-de-sac design matter as discussed in the previous paragraph.

With regard to the Comprehensive Plan, the subject properties and the majority of the parcels on the western side of Chicago Avenue are designated Neighborhood Residential in the Land Use Guide. Properties near the intersection with Mt. Clinton Pike and across the street from this development are designated Commercial. Given the site's location, which is among many housing types including single family detached units, duplexes, and apartments, where two adjacent property densities to the south are 14 and 24.8 units per acre, staff believes the intent of the Neighborhood Residential land use designation would be met with this project. This development also helps in the furtherance of achieving Goal 3 of the Comprehensive Plan, which among other things is to strive for neighborhoods that are walkable, enhance social interaction, and offer a balanced range of housing choices. It should also be noted that coincidentally an existing public transit bus stop is located directly across Chicago Avenue from the subject site, which helps address other efforts of the Comprehensive Plan to develop neighborhoods that offer safe and convenient transportation systems that serve multiple modes of transportation.

As the R-7 zoning district is not a multi-tenant zoning district (only permitting single families or two individuals per unit), and given the general design, philosophy, and planned unit types, staff believes the Village at Chicago Park will help promote more of this type of infill development in this area of the City.

Staff recommends approving the request to rezone tax map parcels 48-D-26 and 41 and approximately 26,549 square feet of tax map 48-D-25 from the R-3, Medium Density Residential District to the R-7 Medium Density Mixed Residential Planned Community District.

As this development proposal moves forward, among other things there are two important matters the applicant should be aware of that are not rezoning issues. First, during the preliminary platting phase, the property owners will be required to dedicate public street right-of-way and build the required street improvements along the subject properties' Chicago Avenue street frontage. The master plan indicates right-of-way and street improvements will be provided along the existing tax map parcel 48-D-26 (addressed as 1049 Chicago Avenue) but the same required dedication and improvements are not shown along tax map parcel 48-D-25 (addressed as 1041 Chicago Avenue). Although the house/property at 1041 Chicago Avenue would not be rezoned to R-7 and would remain zoned R-3, this property will be subdivided with the rest of the development and therefore subject to the dedication and improvement requirements. It appears if the needed right-of-way is dedicated, the existing house would have to be removed or demolished. If the owner of this property does not wish to dedicate or build the street improvements during the platting phase, variances to the Subdivision Ordinance Sections 10-2-45, 66, and 67 must be requested and approved. Although staff is recommending the rezoning and the other subdivision variances as described earlier and needed for the proposed development to be approved, we are not at this time consenting to the variances needed for this issue. Staff will more thoroughly evaluate this property's dedication and improvement requirements issue during the platting phase.

Secondly, staff has concerns with how stormwater management will be handled for this development. Without the benefit of downstream storm drain improvements, the piping through the property of the upstream drainage, combined with the runoff contributions of this project, will create a point impact at the property line, which does not currently exist. This situation creates the possibility of making significant impact upon the downstream property. The drainage plan for this project, as always, will be heavily scrutinized during the Comprehensive Site Plan review. Staff is emphasizing again, as has already been suggested to the applicant's engineer, to begin as early in

the design process as possible to coordinate a drainage plan with the City as downstream improvements, coupled with or in place of significant site runoff reductions, may be necessary.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were any questions for staff.

Dr. Dilts said I assume the green space shown is the minimum of fifteen percent.

Mr. Fletcher replied it is the minimum requirement. Once they subdivide the property, the open space increases, because they are losing area. But they meet the exact minimum requirement now.

One other item I need to point out is that the applicant is trying to be as eco-minded with this development as possible. They considered pervious pavement; however, there are many issues that have to be dealt with when considering this type of pavement. They were hoping the use of the pervious pavement would help with their BMPs and stormwater management. It is not completely out of the question; but, we do not know if it is going to be feasible for them. They do hope to utilize pervious sidewalks and driveways.

Also, the driveways may not be actually built in the way they are shown on the rendering. They could utilize shared driveway space or put the driveway and parking behind units. We are just showing this to demonstrate that it is possible to put all of the driveways in the front if desired.

Mr. Da'Mes asked why the need for 26 feet in width pavement, with off street parking, if they were planning to put adequate parking in.

Mr. Fletcher said I can address some of the question; perhaps the applicant's representative can further answer it. Twenty-six feet of pavement is narrower than our public street standard; while it also allows for on-street parking. This will allow for two-way traffic and on-street parking.

Chair Fitzgerald opened the public hearing and asked if the applicant or the applicant's representative would like to speak.

Mr. Scott Sellers with Engineering Solutions at 1010 North Main Street said he would like to thank City staff for all their teamwork in getting this design together. My client does wish to make this as environmentally friendly as possible. At one time they considered multi-family for this development, but realized it was not feasible; they feel this works much better for the neighborhood.

I would like to address some of the stormwater issues at this time. We are going to have to meet the State requirements no matter what type of development we do. If we cannot get adequate channel downstream for this project, then we will detain it on site. This usually doubles your detention; we will probably do it underground because of the space issue. I have met with the City Public Works Department and I provided them with a preliminary layout of what we could do downstream with this project. We will try and work with the neighbors downstream to obtain easements and if it is feasible, that is the route we will take.

If you have any other questions regarding stormwater or the layout of this project I am here to answer them.

Dr. Dilts said I was struck by the comments in the plan where it discusses the neighborhood. Under Philosophy it reads, "it is an eco-friendly vision and neighborhood concept"; and under the Vision portion of the plan it states it is "a combination of single-family and duplex lots providing a unified neighborhood." I understand that the rendering is a preliminary design for the houses; but the front of the houses, are basically the garage and driveway. There is not a lot of neo-traditional neighborhood with this design; something where you have porches out front with cars and garages

to the side or rear. I do not know if you can do that with this development; but it is just a suggestion to present the neighborhood with a porch and not the garage door.

Mr. Sellers agreed and said it is possible on some of the single-family lots; you could do shared driveways and put parking in the back. With that idea we could utilize the lesser front setback, five feet, and have a larger back yard.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was anyone else wishing to speak in favor of the request. Hearing none, she asked if there was anyone wishing to speak against the rezoning. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and asked Planning Commission for questions, discussion, or a motion on the request.

Mr. Fletcher said just to let you know the parking was not an element that went un-noticed; we discussed it with the applicant as well. We wanted them to incorporate that this design was not the planned, proffered layout.

Dr. Dilts agreed and said to make it the type of vision they are discussing you want to see more of that design. She then made a motion to recommend approval of the rezoning to R-7 for 1049 Chicago Avenue, the Village at Chicago Park.

Mr. Way seconded the motion.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was any further discussion. Hearing none, she called for a voice vote on the motion.

All voted in favor of the motion to recommend approval (6-0).

Chair Fitzgerald said this item will go before City Council on February 11th.

Commissioner Colman rejoined the meeting at 9:50 p.m.

Downtown Streetscape Plan

Chair Fitzgerald read the request and asked staff to review.

Thanh Dang, Public Works Planner, said she was a member of the team that worked on this plan that you see before you this evening and is actually stepping in for Brad Reed, Transportation Planner, who is out ill. Here with me this evening is James Baker, Director of Public Works. I would like to point out some of the highlights within the Plan. The objective is to present a unified vision of the vibrant downtown; basically what we have now are a series of documents: the previous 2005 Streetscape Plan, two parking studies, the Comprehensive Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, and other documents, and not all adopted by City Council. With the Downtown Streetscape Plan we were looking to update the old plan and address all these other documents and ideas. What this does for the City is helps to streamline all of the improvement projects; it offers staff and other private developers the opportunity to use the Downtown Streetscape Plan to guide development of the public right-of-way downtown.

A brief timeline of where we have been and how we got to where we are today – we had an advisory committee with representation from various City staff and downtown businesses along with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance. This committee began meeting in the summer of 2010. After several meetings and drafts of the plan, we held a public input meeting in August 2013; twenty-three people attended that meeting. After that, we incorporated, where appropriate, public and staff comments into the plan. This leads us to tonight's public hearing before Planning Commission.

The plan itself is made up of several chapters – the Introduction; Transportation section which discusses the street network; a section on Services and Utilities which discusses some opportunities for Green Infrastructure in the downtown area; Land Use and Community Development describes some of the incentives available for locating in the downtown; Implementation Strategies which revisits the nine goals that were laid out in the Introduction of the plan and suggests some implementation strategies for moving forward; and lastly, the Appendices where we provide more details on items such as street cross-sections, streetscape design standards, landscaping, and some shared use path concepts through downtown.

Implementation of the Downtown Streetscape Plan would be somewhat like the Master Transportation Plan, which is part of the Comprehensive Plan. We would use the Downtown Streetscape Plan as the guideline as funding and opportunities become available. Within this plan we do not have project completion dates or cost estimates provided; this is a visioning document. As public and private projects occur downtown we will reference this plan and hope that there is a good opportunity for some private/public partnerships.

Study Areas and Streetscape Features is a rather significant portion of the plan that defines things like where brick sidewalks will be used versus decorative concrete; designs for traffic signals and light poles; what crosswalks would look like and more. This really helps staff when we are working with developers and businesses downtown. There are some street specific recommendations that we also provided in the plan that illustrates use of the streetscape design standards.

Assuming this all gets adopted, we will then make amendments and updates to the Design and Construction Standards Manual, the Comprehensive Plan, and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were any questions for Ms. Dang.

Mr. Way asked if the Downtown Streetscape Plan was just about the public right-of-way, or is it something broader.

Ms. Dang replied it is primarily focused on the public right-of-way.

With no further questions Chair Fitzgerald opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone wishing to speak.

David Ehrenpreis, 282 Franklin Street, stated he has been quite amazed by the Downtown Streetscape Plan. I think it is an amazing document and is another reason why I feel really proud to be part of this community. What I think is really impressive about the plan, is the process that the plan was the result of. This plan took three years to complete because it is extraordinarily inclusive and it was a collaborative process; as a result when it was presented last August for public input, it sailed through that process.

I wanted to call attention to a couple of differences between the plan that now exists and the plan that I read in August 2013. There were some changes that were made that I am not sure about as to why they were made. I believe the changes make it a less progressive document; they are weak, ill-conceived and would be a very bad idea. The first change is within Goal 7, item b, where there was a mention of green space, which has now disappeared. Throughout Goal 8 in the original document it said expand and create recreation and open space opportunities, now everything says consider. Also deleted was “Encourage the incorporation of green spaces;” was that a bad idea? Do we not want green space? In Goal 9 there was something that discussed considering removing billboards; it has been removed, but where were those billboards? Do we not want them removed? Also

removed was Goal 7, item g, which discussed the Harrisonburg Municipal Center Area having a formal plan; this is becoming our “center” and it needs a plan. Soon we will have all these empty buildings that will be haphazardly watched over; the most important section of this City and we are leaving it to the invisible hand.

It is our responsibility to create a process that is as inclusive, as meaningful, as transformative, as the plan that you had in September. It is the responsibility of Planning Commission and City Council; it is every single citizen’s responsibility. Do not take the whole downtown district and leave it to chance. It is my suggestion to take the municipal center area and create a plan as the previous document suggested. Have an inclusive process that takes two or three years, so that every person in Harrisonburg can have a chance to comment.

One last thing I need to add – Eliza Hoover was here earlier, but was called away. Before she left she asked that I tell you this, “we are at a critical point in our development and we should not move forward until we have a good clear vision of where we want our City to go.”

Tom Domonoske, 461 Lee Avenue, said in the 2011 Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted by City Council, and states in (Chapter 15) Goal 17 is to “engage all citizens to work collaboratively in planning, developing, and promoting the City as a great place.” Objective 17.2 under this goal is “to establish procedures for including citizens in planning and plan implementation.” Objective 15.1 says to “make downtown revitalization a major, high priority public/private initiative, the cornerstone of the City’s economic development, tourism, historic preservation, and civic pride enhancement efforts.” Strategy 15.1.2 “to develop with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance a downtown revitalization plan to guide the rehabilitation and development of the area;” it then lists items to be addressed in that strategy. Chapter 5, Objective 1.2 “ensure the design of streets, public facilities, and other public investments reinforces the City’s unique character and sense of place.” The Comprehensive Plan goes on and on with one thing in common—let’s have a plan for the downtown area. That is what the City said in 2011 when it adopted the Comprehensive Plan. For three years this Downtown Streetscape Plan has been conducting extensive public meetings, with lots of public involvement. The earlier draft, until this December, said it is recommended that a master plan be developed for this property (Municipal Center Area). That seemed to very clearly implement the Comprehensive Plan’s ideas, strategies, goals from 2011. Now that statement has been removed from the plan; it was removed without a lot of public input.

When I looked this weekend for the Planning Commission agenda online, it was not there. This is the agenda for this meeting. How would all the people who were involved in the Downtown Streetscape Plan for the last three years know that tonight that this plan, which has a core idea removed, was coming before this Commission for a vote to City Council. Therefore, the first thing I asked you to do is not make a decision on this tonight. Wait and ensure that the people who were involved in this process know the changes that were made, so that they can voice their ideas. The agenda that was finally made available this week says that the plan’s overall goal is “to present an easily communicable, comprehensive vision for public spaces in Downtown Harrisonburg that can be utilized by public and private agencies to further develop and sustain a vibrant downtown.” You are being asked to come up with an easily communicable, public vision for downtown spaces in Harrisonburg; however, sometime last month, the idea of having an actual plan for those public spaces was removed from that Streetscape Plan. I simply ask that Planning Commission put this back in the plan; whether you vote it back in tonight or carry this meeting over, just recommend that it be put back in the Streetscape Plan. People spent a lot of time coming up with the idea of

recommending for a formal plan for the Municipal Center Area. There is no way that piecemeal development can express a vision or a plan as proposed.

Eddie Bumbaugh with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance said I want to echo the process for this plan; it has been a very worthwhile, inclusive process and up through the time of the public input I felt very connected to the process. I am not sure what happened after that; I was aware that changes had been made, but never given reasons for the changes. These are substantive changes and I have concerns about them.

I do want to point to Goal 3 and acknowledge that parking has been an issue for cities all across the Country. A James Madison University Public Administration class did a recent study for Harrisonburg and the results were that we do not have a parking crisis. There are steps underway to improve the existing parking resources with improved signage and other steps that are efficient use of the spaces we have. I can assure you that as we look towards the future with increased growth of businesses and residences downtown, at some point we will have parking needs. My suggestion that Goal 3, for whatever reasons the Water Street Parking Deck was removed, it should be put back into the plan. If you like the word “consider,” it is okay with me to say “consider removing,” but to eliminate the item, with no reason given, is not consistent with all the discussion that took place up until this point.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was anyone else wishing to speak regarding the Downtown Streetscape Plan. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and asked if there were questions of Planning Commission.

Mr. Way said certainly there will be questions regarding how and why certain things were removed; but, could you indulge me in hearing an idea that might be relevant. It seems like there is so much attention given to the downtown area nowadays, I wonder if, as we look forward to the next Comprehensive Plan review, should there be a chapter in the Comprehensive Plan specifically about downtown. This is a thought I just wanted to put out there.

Chair Fitzgerald asked Planning Commission how to proceed with this evening’s public hearing on the Downtown Streetscape Plan. Would you like to have Ms. Dang and Mr. Baker of Public Works come forward and to answer the questions put forth tonight. The basic question being that between the August public input session and now multiple things have been removed with no explanation.

Mr. Baker replied City staff agrees with everything we heard tonight. That is the exact reason we started many years ago a streetscape plan for the public right-of-way; because we as staff wanted direction of how to put in sidewalks, how to put in curbing, trees and plantings. That is the basis of what this is all about – public right-of-way and pedestrians. The amenities that support all of this, parking and open space, are equally as important and we feel that there should be plans for that as well. But the basis of this document was to facilitate how we design and build those mechanisms into the downtown area. The idea of having a plan for the Municipal Complex, the parks, parking decks, and so forth, we agree with; we felt we were over stepping our bounds with some of these things that are being discussed. We felt these things needed to be recommendations that would come forth from citizens, Planning Commission, and from City Council and then we would incorporate them into the plan. That is why we backed off on some of the things.

Although the wording is a bit different, where it used to say “thou shall” it now says “consider,” we as staff, do not mind changing those words back. We did not want to overstep our bounds. We

would like to see plans for those things that have been discussed tonight; maybe not included within this document, but perhaps a document related to those issues.

Chair Fitzgerald said I believe that answers the question of can these be put back in the plan; the answer is if Planning Commission asks you to they can be put back in.

Mr. Baker said we will do what this body and City Council directs us to do.

Mr. Way said the plan's overall goal is very straight forward: "to present an easily communicable, comprehensive vision for public spaces in Downtown Harrisonburg that can be utilized by public and private agencies to further develop and sustain a vibrant downtown." The critical point here is public spaces and clearly the Municipal Center is public space that is important to the City. If it is the case you may be looking for guidance for street right-of-way and those types of things, I can understand where perhaps you could see where the Municipal Center is not so relevant to that. Is your thinking that the Municipal Area is on the margin, so to say, as to what counts as a streetscape issue.

Mr. Baker replied that some of the concepts that are in the plan about streetscape plans and how they should appear (i.e. benches, planters, sidewalks, etc.) should all be considered for any park or Municipal Complex. This document gives you the guidelines on how to do the nuts and bolts; whether it is done or not is not part of what this document says. Whenever the City Council says yes to a project, then this is the guideline we should try to use as the basis to start from.

That was the problem years ago in the downtown area. When I was working with private developers I could not tell them what type of sidewalks they needed to build in front of their buildings; brick, concrete, decorative. That is why we feel this is an important document for the City; it is a guidance tool for staff to work with development and redevelopment downtown. I think this document has pointed out to us that we need more plans and specifics on other things other than just streetscape.

Mr. Colman said I wanted to mention that on page 12 of the plan it states "the Comprehensive Plan should also reference the Downtown Streetscape Plan to identify it as the City's official vision and guide for public facilities downtown." Interestingly, this is sprinkled throughout this plan; why do we say that if it is not so.

Mr. Baker said from a staff's perspective we are fine with it in there; if you want it in there, put it in there.

Dr. Dilts said it appears from the conversations of those who spoke, that there was an implicit expectation that there would be more in this plan than what you have said. It is almost like the people who were involved in this had a different set of expectations than what staff needed or wanted. Maybe it would be worth Planning Commission not doing anything with it at this time and getting some conversations going about the expectations and the reality.

There was a consensus among Planning Commission that this would be a good idea.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there was a motion to table this item at this time.

Mr. Da'Mes asked if it should be tabled or just sent back to the committee to be re-looked at. Perhaps a worksession is in order.

Mr. Colman said this is a plan that is identified within the Comprehensive Plan. Planning Commission needs to vet this thoroughly and make certain it meets the goals and strategies of the

Comprehensive Plan. Otherwise we are endorsing something without full knowledge of the document.

Mr. Fletcher said just to make it clear, this document is not part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Colman agreed and said the statement in the streetscape plan states that it be acknowledged within the Comprehensive Plan as the official guide. Therefore, Planning Commission needs to look more into it; it needs to be thoroughly vetted by us. The document is fine in its content; we just need to make sure that Planning Commission, as the “holders of the Comprehensive Plan,” are okay with saying yes to this document.

Chair Fitzgerald said I believe there are a set of questions that are associated with this. Is there an idea that we want to schedule amongst ourselves as Planning Commission; perhaps a worksession?

Mr. Heatwole said what I am hearing is that staff is open to Planning Commission recommending certain things be implemented into the streetscape plan, even if they are just suggestions or a change in the wording of consider this or that. I would like to get other input on this; not from just us as Planning Commission.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if perhaps an advertised worksession that is open to the public, like we did with the CIP, would be most appropriate.

There was a consensus among Planning Commission that would be a good idea.

Mr. Colman said I think this is a great document; it is more of the question within the public process of what is going on, and what are the differences? We need to resolve these issues.

Chair Fitzgerald said it is actually more about what is not in the plan, than what is in it.

Mr. Way asked Mr. Baker if there was a timeframe as far as getting this to City Council.

Mr. Baker replied no, there is not a timeframe. We have been working hard on this for a long time and if we need to take more time to get it the way everyone is comfortable with, that is fine. The only timeframe would be when the next downtown project comes up and we need to be looking at it.

Mr. Colman said I suggest we send it back to the committee that worked on this project.

Dr. Dilts said this document was reviewed in a public forum in August and then the document was worked on to get to this point where we are tonight; but, it never went back to the original committee, it came directly to us. Has the committee seen this document?

Mrs. Dang said I do not believe they have seen this version.

Dr. Dilts said would it not be helpful for this version to go to the committee, get their comments, and bring that back to Planning Commission for our meeting.

Mr. Da'Mes asked if it would be a public hearing when it came back to Planning Commission.

Mr. Fletcher said this item was advertised twice in the newspaper as a public hearing. Unfortunately on Friday, the day when we typically post the agenda on-line, it was late and the IT Department was already gone, therefore I could not get approval to post the agenda until Monday morning. If you want this to be advertised as a public hearing once again, when it returns to Planning Commission, we can do so.

Just so I understand Planning Commission's wishes, do you want the HDR Landscape Committee Members, and the Advisory Committee Members to review this again. Is that the only group you want to review this again? Perhaps you can provide us with a bit more direction as to what you want done.

Chair Fitzgerald said this document went to public input and then it got significantly changed. Therefore, the other group of folks, the earlier committees, should see this version of the document before it comes to Planning Commission for review again.

Mr. Baker said we can just re-convene the committee again.

Mrs. Dang said I do not think it is something we can have ready by the Planning Commission's next monthly meeting.

Mr. Fletcher said that is fine, whenever it is ready, I will advertise it for our monthly meeting.

Mr. Baker said to summarize what I am hearing is that Planning Commission, after tonight's public meeting, is asking staff to take the public comments we heard tonight and the concerns that Planning Commission has back to the committee and re-discuss. From there we will see if the document needs to be adjusted, changed or amended.

Dr. Dilts asked would both the Advisory Committee and the HDR Landscape Committee meet with staff.

Mrs. Dang replied we could do both.

Dr. Dilts said it does sound as if there was some difference in understanding about the intent of the document. That might be worth having a conversation about.

Unfinished Business

None.

Public Input

None.

Report of secretary and committees

Mrs. Banks said we have two areas of proactive zoning to catch up on this month. Inspectors visited the Stone Spring/JMU student housing area of the City for proactive zoning where they found two violations of inoperable vehicles. Last month they were in the Sunset Heights area where again, two violations, consisting of inoperable vehicles were found. This month the inspectors will be in the Reherd Acres area of the City for inspections.

Mr. Baugh said there is nothing new from City Council, because we have not met since Planning Commission's last meeting.

Mrs. Turner said I believe that on City Council's next agenda there is an amendment to City Code Section 10-1-6. Probably what that text will say is that things will be referred to Planning Commission per the section of the VA State Code. I asked the City Attorney about it today, and he said that it will be a very basic amendment saying that it is going to follow State Code and that as he works on the process to make that happen is when he will want to come back to Planning Commission for more information on it.

Other Matters

Mr. Fletcher said before you are the 2013 Annual Reports, only the Planning Commission Annual Report needs action by the Commission to move forward to City Council. I did notice upon review of the report that every one of Planning Commission's recommendations was followed by City Council. Also of note is Planning Commission only held nine meetings for the year; usually there are twelve or more. The Planning & Community Development Annual Report is an internal report that very much is associated with some of Planning Commission's recommendations. You do not always get to see the final plat information from approved preliminary plats; and the information on minor subdivisions, which do not come before this body. It gives you an idea of the subdivisions that take place throughout the year. Some of the most interesting things in the report are the zoning activities that take place as far as inquiries, complaints, and so forth.

Mr. Heatwole moved to accept the Planning Commission Annual Report and move it forward to City Council as presented.

Dr. Dilts seconded.

All voted in favor of the motion (7-0).

Dr. Dilts said I just want to add, after reading through all of this, what an amazing job our staff does in summarizing all of this and making their points. Thank you for a job well done.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Chair Deb Fitzgerald

Secretary, Alison Banks