

The Easton Planning Commission met on Wednesday, December 4, 2013, at 6:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers, Alpha Building, One South Third Street, Easton, PA 18042. Planning Commissioners Charles Elliott, Ronald Shipman, Dennis Lieb, Robert Sun, and Mia Hatzis were in were in attendance. The following Planning & Codes staff members were in attendance: Chief Planner Carl Manges and Planning Executive Secretary Mike Handzo. City Solicitor Joel Scheer was also present.

Mr. Elliott called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

The agenda was approved as presented.

Mr. Sun moved, with Mr. Lieb seconding, that the minutes of the November 6 meeting be approved as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Privilege of the Floor. No members of the public wished to address the Commission.

635 Northampton Street – Special Exception. Mr. Manges read that the applicant, Elvia Mora, has proposed to establish D2 & D6 – Professional Service and Insurance (Tax Preparation & Notary) uses on the first floor section of a mixed-use building located at 635 Northampton Street. The applicant currently operates a check cashing and bill collecting service from this location, which will continue. The building where this use is being proposed is addressed as 633-639 Northampton Street. Marymar Travel and Flow Factory Barbershop are currently operating from the other first floor sections of this building. This property is located in the West Ward Zoning District, Block Class C, where the proposed Professional Services and Insurance are not permitted uses per Article XV §595-75. However, this property is also located in the Street Corridor Enhancement Overlay District where Professional Services and Insurance uses are permitted by Special Exception per Article XXIII §595-126.

A conversation with the applicant on November 20, 2013, revealed she is going to expand her business at 635 Northampton Street for starting a Tax Preparation & Notary business. The applicant stated she currently provides check cashing, bill collecting, and auto tag services at 635 Northampton Street. The applicant will continue to be the only employee and the hours of operation are remaining the same.

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 requests for Special Exceptions for the proposed D2 & D6 – Professional Service and Insurance uses be granted.

The applicant's daughter, also by the name of Elvia Mora, was in attendance as a representative. Mr. Lieb asked her who would be operating the business, with Ms. Mora indicating it would be run by her and her mother.

Mr. Lieb moved, with Mr. Shipman seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission recommend to the Easton Zoning Hearing Board that the request for Special Exception for the proposed D2 & D6 – Professional Service and Insurance use be granted. The motion passed unanimously.

Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Third-Party Consultant. Mr. Manges reported that a selection committee held two rounds of interviews with consulting firms that responded to the Comprehensive Plan RFP. He indicated the committee narrowed the field to two firms and ultimately selected their preferred firm, Urban Matrix of Brooklyn, NY. Mr. Manges continued to explain that, although Urban Matrix's initial proposed cost was above budget, staff successfully negotiated the scope and cost to a figure \$20,000 below budget. He stated that the City Solicitor was currently reviewing a contract for Urban Matrix, and that the Planning Commission was being presented with a draft resolution recommending entry into contract with Urban Matrix to Easton City Council.

Mr. Elliott characterized the final decision between the two preferred firms as close, as both offered excellent planning credentials and communication capabilities. He stated that Urban Matrix was selected

as they displayed the best understanding of Easton of any of the firms, and offered a commendable depth of experience in completing challenging planning projects.

Mr. Lieb requested more information on the selection process. Mr. Manges explained that over 50 firms requested the RFP documents, with 13 firms submitting proposals; the selection committee had shortlisted 5 firms for interviews. In response to a follow-up question by Mr. Lieb, Mr. Manges named the shortlisted firms: Urban Matrix, RETTEW Associates, The RBA Group, KSK Architects Historians Planners, and Group Melvin Design.

Mr. Shipman and Mr. Sun inquired about the cost and scope of work. Mr. Manges reported that, for \$160,000, Urban Matrix would produce a completed Comprehensive Plan, an executive summary document, an interactive Comprehensive Plan website, and 13th Street Corridor urban design drawings.

The Planning Commission engaged in an informal discussion of topics it wished to address in the new Comprehensive Plan. Commissioners' comments primarily addressed the engagement of West Ward residents in the rewrite process and the condition of the City's transportation facilities. Mr. Lieb suggested that National Charrette Institute certification would be a desirable credential for the consultants to hold. In response to a question by Mr. Shipman, Mr. Manges indicated staff would provide Urban Matrix with the notes from their 2013 public outreach meetings.

Mr. Sun moved, with Mr. Shipman seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission recommend to Easton City Council that it approves entry into contract with Urban Matrix at a cost of \$160,000. The motion passed unanimously.

Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) Update. Mr. Elliott reported that the EAC was planning a tree planting event, likely around Cottingham Stadium, for Arbor Day 2014. He also indicated the EAC was exploring participation in an urban farming project at the Easton Area Neighborhood Center.

Signage Concerns. Mr. Sun, Mr. Lieb, and Mr. Shipman discussed a proliferation of temporary signage, such as sandwich boards and handwritten lawn signs, within City sidewalks and public rights-of-way. Mr. Manges indicated that the Zoning Administrator had noticed the same conditions, and was currently examining the City's signage regulation and enforcement. Mr. Elliott summarized the Zoning Ordinance provisions addressing sandwich boards and temporary signs.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.