

The Easton Planning Commission met on Wednesday, November 5, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. in City Council Chambers, Alpha Building, One South Third Street, Easton, PA 18042. Planning Commissioners Charles Elliott, Bonnie Winfield, Dennis Lieb, William Heilman, and Mia Hatzis were in attendance. The following Planning Bureau staff members were present: Chief Planner Carl Manges and City Planner Mike Handzo. A consultant team, consisting of Christopher Stienon, Shachi Pandey, and Andy Harmon of Urban Matrix and Rebecca Gafvert of AKRF, was also in attendance to deliver a presentation on the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite.

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

The agenda was approved as presented.

Mr. Elliott noted that the date was incorrectly listed in the October 1, 2014 minutes. Mr. Shipman moved, with Mr. Lieb seconding, that these minutes be approved as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

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

927-929 Northampton Street – Special Exception. Mr. Manges read that the applicant, William P. Nemeth III, has proposed to establish a C10 – Automotive Parts and Accessories use (Motorcycle Repair Garage) in a 3,500 square foot vacant space at the rear of a commercial building at 927-929 Northampton Street. This building is shared with Holcomb Behavioral Health Systems, which occupies the front space. The rear space is accessed from N. 10th Street, and was previously used by Holcomb Behavioral Health Systems for storage. The applicant intends to relocate his existing business, Mad Brothers Cycles, from 707 Wood Avenue to this location. 927-929 Northampton Street is located in the West Ward Zoning District, Block Class B, where the proposed C10 – Automotive Parts and Accessories use is not permitted per Article XV §595-75. However, the property is also located in the Street Corridor Enhancement Overlay District, where C10 – Automotive Parts and Accessories uses are permitted by Special Exception per Article XXIII §595-126.

There are no off-street parking spaces associated with this proposal; the Zoning Administrator has determined that one (1) off-street parking space would be required. Therefore, a variance for parking is required from the Easton Zoning Hearing Board with this application.

Mr. Manges reported that the proposal was generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and City Codes. Therefore, he communicated staff's recommendation that the Easton Planning Commission grant a Special Exception request with conditions to William P. Nemeth III for a C10 – Automotive Parts and Accessories use at 927-929 Northampton Street.

The applicant, William P. Nemeth III, was present. Mr. Shipman had him confirm that there were two exits from the property. Mr. Lieb asked if there were any issues of compatibility with Holcomb Behavioral Health Systems, with Mr. Nemeth responding he was aware of none. Ms. Hatzis observed that the door was usually open at the applicant's Wood Avenue location, and asked if this would be the case at the proposed location. Mr. Nemeth replied affirmatively.

Mr. Heilman moved, with Mr. Shipman seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission recommend to the Easton Zoning Hearing Board that it grants a Special Exception request with conditions to William P. Nemeth III for a C10 – Automotive Parts and Accessories use at 927-929 Northampton Street. The motion passed unanimously.

Easton Planning Commission 2015 Meeting Schedule. Mr. Elliott stated that staff had prepared a draft 2015 meeting schedule, and proposed changing the meeting start time from 6:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for 2015. Mr. Manges explained this proposed time change would keep the Planning Commission's schedule consistent with other City Authorities, Boards, and Commissions. Mr. Lieb and Mr. Shipman raised concerns regarding the ability of the public and applicants to attend a meeting beginning at 6:00 p.m. Mr. Elliott replied that these concerns could be eased through communication with applicants and potential meeting time changes for business items expected to draw substantial public interest. He suggested the Commission change the meeting time to 6:00 p.m. as recommended by staff, and return it to 6:30 p.m. in the event of negative feedback from the public. Mr. Shipman moved, with Ms. Winfield seconding, that the Easton Planning Commission adopt a 2015 schedule of meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. in City Hall Council Chambers. The motion passed unanimously.

Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Presentation. Mr. Handzo introduced the consultant team of Urban Matrix and AKRF, and briefly discussed Comprehensive Plan Rewrite progress to date and the objective of the evening's presentation. The consultant team proceeded to deliver a detailed PowerPoint presentation to the Planning Commission. Shachi Pandey of Urban Matrix described existing conditions in Easton and draft planning strategies stemming from these existing conditions. Christopher Stienon of Urban Matrix reported on several charrette sessions held earlier that day with Easton's neighborhood groups, and reported that themes of bicycle / pedestrian infrastructure, waterfront utilization, and availability of retail had emerged from these sessions. Ms. Pandey stated Urban Matrix would have a summary of this feedback, as well as a series of potential projects and implementation strategies, within the next month.

Commissioners directed various remarks regarding Comprehensive Plan content and priorities to Urban Matrix. Mr. Shipman and Mr. Elliott discussed projected population growth in Easton and the necessity of planning for the specific demographic groups expected to fuel this growth. Ms. Pandey characterized this topic as a question of, "...who do we prepare the City for, and how?" Ms. Winfield suggested the consultant team contact the organization Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley, as they had recently completed extensive demographic research. Mr. Heilman, Ms. Winfield, Mr. Lieb, and Mr. Elliott discussed the types and nature of housing the City would require over the next twenty years, describing a shift in desirability from homeownership to rental driven by preferences of the Millennial and Baby Boomer generations. Mr. Elliott requested energy conservation and complete streets components in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Shipman highlighted the Karl Stirner Arts Trail as an ideal project to reactivate the Bushkill Creek, and suggested it could serve as a model practice for the City's other waterfronts.

Mr. Elliott requested an update on work still to occur on the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Pandey stated that the final Comprehensive Plan would include existing conditions; an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; findings from neighborhood charrettes; general recommendations; and specific projects. She explained that each section would cover the topic areas required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. Ms. Pandey reported that Urban Matrix would prepare an approximately 200-page Comprehensive Plan document and a 20-page executive summary. Mr. Elliott asked that future drafts illustrate more direct causality between observed trends and recommendations, as he described a sense by City of Easton reviewers that priority projects outlined in draft documents were disconnected from analysis of existing conditions.

Environmental Advisory Council Update. Mr. Elliott stated that the Environmental Advisory Council and Lafayette College students had collaborated to plant trees on the 1300 block of Lehigh Street.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.